EFL Teaching Methodological Practices in Cali

Prácticas metodológicas en la enseñanza de inglés como lengua extranjera en la ciudad de Cali

Orlando Chaves*
Fanny Hernández**
Universidad del Valle, Colombia

In this article we aim at showing partial results of a study about the profiles of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in both public and private primary and secondary strata 1-4 schools in Cali, Colombia. Teachers' methodological approaches and practices are described and analyzed from a sample of 220 teachers. Information was gathered from surveys, interviews and institutional documents. The quantitative information was processed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and Excel while the qualitative information (from a survey and focal interviews) was analyzed hermeneutically. An analysis grid was used for the examination of institutional documents (area planning, syllabi, and didactic materials). Teachers' methodology (approaches/methods), lessons, activities, objectives, curricula, syllabi and evaluation are analyzed in the light of literature in the field. Finally, we discuss the implications of methodological approaches.

Key words: English as a foreign language (EFL), teaching methods, teacher profile, teaching practices.

En este artículo se presentan los resultados parciales de una investigación sobre los perfiles de los profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera que enseñan en colegios de educación básica primaria y secundaria, públicos y privados, de estratos 1 a 4 en Cali, Colombia. Se describen y analizan sus enfoques y prácticas metodológicas a partir de una muestra de 220 docentes. Se obtuvo información cualitativa y cuantitativa por medio de encuestas, entrevistas y documentos institucionales. La información cuantitativa se procesó con el *software* Statistical Package for Social Sciences y Excel, mientras que la información cualitativa se analizó hermenéuticamente. Se usó una rejilla de análisis para el examen de los documentos institucionales (planes de área, programas, y materiales didácticos). La metodología (enfoques/métodos), clases, actividades, objetivos, currículo, programas y evaluación se analizan a partir de la literatura especializada en el campo. Finalmente, se discuten las implicaciones de estos enfoques metodológicos.

Palabras clave: inglés como lengua extranjera, métodos de enseñanza, perfil docente, prácticas de enseñanza.

* E-mail: orlando.chavez@correounivalle.edu.co
** E-mail: fanny.hernandez@correounivalle.edu.co

This article was received on April 30, 2012, and accepted on July 3, 2012.

Introduction

It is a fact that English has evolved as an international language with great importance in economic, political, and cultural contexts. In the educational field, this importance is reflected in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) language policies seeking global integration. In Colombia, the *National Bilingual Program* (NBP) represents the official policy which aims at enabling all citizens to communicate in English with internationally comparable standards (Ministerio de Educación Nacional [MEN], 2006a, p. 3). The document *Estándares básicos de competencias en lenguas extranjeras: inglés* (MEN, 2006) is the most noticeable component of this program. It states that, by 2019, all students and teachers will reach predetermined levels of English, according to the Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference* [CEFR] (Council of Europe, 2001) scale[1]: C1 for teachers of foreign languages; B2 for professionals in other areas; B2 for English teachers at the elementary level, B1 for students who finish the secondary level, and A2 for teachers of other areas at the elementary level.

However, the official announcement of this bilingualism policy is not enough to guarantee its enactment. More knowledge about the context in which the policy is to be applied is still required. In regard to this need, a group of researchers from Universidad del Valle and Universidad San Buenaventura carried out a macro-project which intended to describe and analyze critically the conditions of implementation of the NBP in Santiago de Cali, Colombia. This project comprised ten subprojects addressing school infrastructure, EFL teachers, students and parents, respectively. One of the subprojects intended to establish the English teachers' demographic, socio-economic and academic profiles. The academic profile considered initial teachers' education, updating, language proficiency, and methodology. This latter is the focus of the present paper.

The importance of a study in this field lies in that it shows, on the one hand, teachers' conceptions about foreign language, its learning and its teaching; on the other hand, it allows assessing teachers' practices in the light of current tendencies of EFL teaching while it also allows evaluating the conditions for the implementation of the PNB. This means that this study casts light not only on the teachers' practices but also on their conceptions.

Theoretical Perspectives

Understanding language teachers' methodological conceptions and practices requires reviewing conceptual grounds mainly in relation to methodology, method, approach, curriculum, and syllabus.

English Teachers' Methodological Orientations

Since the notion of "method" was established from the direct method (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 14), almost a century of methodological controversy took place. That discussion has currently faded, after its peak between the 1950s and 1990s. Originally, *methodology* is knowledge about methods, the theory about teaching practice. For Brown (1994a, p. 51), "methodology is the study of pedagogical practices in general. Whatever considerations are involved in 'how to teach' are methodological." According to Rodgers (2001, p. 1), "a more or less classical formulation suggests that methodology links theory and practice." In turn, *method* is a more or less prescriptive set of ways of doing things: procedures in terms of teaching strategies, techniques and activities, altogether with stipulations about contents and the functions of teachers, learners, and materials. *Method* refers to the practical side of teaching while *methodology* is concerned with the comprehension of methods.

1 The CEFR scale is the following: A (Basic User), B (Independent User), and C (Proficient User). Each is subdivided like this: A1 (Breakthrough), A2 (Waystage), B1 (Threshold), B2 (Vantage), C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency), and C2 (Mastery) (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 23).

Taking Anthony's ideas, Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 20) refer to *approach* as "theories about the nature of language and language learning that serve as the source of practices and principles in language teaching." Thus, approaches are on the theoretical side of the continuum, while methods are on the practical end. However, it is necessary to tell methods apart from approaches, which are general in nature and do not refer to specific ways of doing things in the classroom (Anthony and Mackey, as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Pennycook, 1989; Richards, 1990; Holliday, 1994; Brown, 1994a, 1994b; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Approaches contribute to the theoretical support for methods, which are more or less their realization.

As our main purpose in this article is to present the findings of our research regarding the methodological orientations and practices of teachers of English in Cali, we will not dwell on the historical account of the most important methods and approaches to language teaching, which constitutes a good deal of the modern history of language teaching and has occupied a significant part of applied linguistics literature (Kelly, as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Stevick, 1980, 1998; Howatt, as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Brown, 1994a, 1994b; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Celce-Murcia, 1991; Germain, 1993; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Kumaravadivelu, 1994, 2001, 2003). We will only list and situate methods and approaches briefly:

- The *grammar-translation* or *classic method*: The teaching was carried out through the translation of classic literary excerpts and the explanation of structures of the target language in contrast with the ones from the mother tongue. This pre-scientific methodological orientation prevailed between the 1840s and the 1940s but has still had a widespread survival to date.
- *The series method*: This method advocated that it is more important to learn sentences to speak than words; that verbs are the key elements in sentences, and that sentences are more easily learned when they form a narration. The idea was to have students memorize sentences in sequence, related to the same 'theme', teaching students directly–without translation–and conceptually–without grammatical rules and explanations, a series of connected sentences that are easy to understand.
- *The direct or Berlitz method*: The first method as such, developed at the end of the 19th century. Its basic principle was that meaning must be conveyed directly in the target language by means of demonstration and visual aids, which means avoiding translation.
- *Oral approach* or *situational language teaching*: Originating in the United Kingdom, in the 1920s, it was popular up to the 1960s. This approach to methodology was based on the orderly principles of selection, gradation and presentation of vocabulary and grammar items.
- *The Audio-Lingual Method (ALM)*, or *Army method*, or *oral approach*, or *aural-oral approach* or *structural approach*: This was a linguistics-based teaching method that focused on pronunciation and thorough oral drilling of sentence models of the target language. It started in the 1930s and was in vogue in the 1950s in the United States.
- *Total Physical Response (TPR)*: Developed by a professor of psychology at San Jose State University, California, this teaching perspective associated speech and physical action, taking into account that children first respond physically to commands even before being able to speak.
- *The silent way*: A method resulting from the emphasis on human cognition and the cognitive approach. It was based on learners' capacity for discovery and awareness, already learnt with their mother tongue. By means of Cuisenaire rods, word charts, and game-like activities, teachers provide feedback to the students about vocabulary, grammar and spelling without modeling or repetition

or even speaking. This latter feature expressed the principle of subordination of teaching to learning, minimizing the teacher's role and maximizing learners' capacities for learning.

- *Suggestopedia* or *desuggestopedia*: Another method developed from psychology in the early 1960s. It based teaching on the power of affection and suggestion by creating a comfortable and suggestive environment that helped eliminate (de-suggest) fear and negative feelings or "psychological barriers" that hinder learning. That environment was accompanied by a positive and authoritative role of the teacher, who should be specially trained in acting and psychology as well.
- *Community Language Learning (CLL)*: A 1970s method to teach languages based on psychological counseling techniques to learning. In this scheme, the relationship between the teacher and the student is that of counselor-client: The role of the teacher is not to tell the student what to do but to help and guide her/him to explore; the role of the learner is then to decide what to explore and to what extent, thus determining content.
- *Whole language*: This 1960s and 1970s perspective rose as opposed to teaching languages by focusing on the separate components of language, considering it as a complete meaning-making system whose parts are closely related and work as an integrated whole. Thus, they should be taught in an integrated way, not isolated for direct instruction and reinforcement, by using the learners' own experience and naturally occurring situations that require listening, reading, writing, and communicating with others.
- *Multiple Intelligences (MI)*: This early 1980s learner-based perspective viewed education as aimed at developing the multiple types of intelligence. The implication for teaching is that teaching must accommodate the various ways the learners learn.
- *Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP)*: It consists of a set of training techniques from psychology applied to many learning fields, not only language education. Its origin, in the mid 1970s, blends linguistics, mathematics and psychology. Its bottom line is the close relationship between brain, language and body. The first principle is that we do not perceive reality directly. It is our 'neuro-linguistic' maps of reality that determine how we behave, not reality itself. It is generally not reality but our perception of reality that limits or empowers us. The second principle is that life and mind are systemic processes. Our bodies, our societies, and our universe form an ecology of complex systems and sub-systems all of which interact with and mutually influence each other. It is not possible to completely isolate any part of the system from the rest of the system. The people who are most effective are those who have a map of the world that allows them to perceive the greatest number of available choices and perspectives.
- *Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)*: In the 1980s, interactive views of language teaching prevailed over the rest of the methods and approaches. CLT originated in the British rejection of situational language teaching and the American refutation of audiolingualism.
- *The natural approach*: A view in the tradition of language teaching methods based on observation and interpretation of how first and second languages are learnt in informal settings in a grammatically unordered sequence.
- *Cooperative Language Learning* (part of Collaborative Learning - CL): This approach to teaching is based on pair and small-group activities working together exchanging information in order to learn.
- *Content-Based Instruction (CBI)*: This approach to second language teaching builds its syllabus around contents and not on linguistic items, lan-

guage being not an end itself but a means to learn a subject.

- *Learning strategy training*: This learner-centered teaching method rose from research on what successful (and non successful) learners do.
- *The lexical approach*: This point of view is based on the belief that what is central to the language is vocabulary.
- *Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT)* or *Competency-based Education (CBE)*: Unlike most methods and approaches emphasizing the importance of input for language learning[2], CBE focuses on the outcomes or products of learning, regardless of the way of learning.
- *Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)* or *Task-Based Instruction (TBI)*: This approach centers language learning on the development of natural or real interactive or communicative tasks.[3]

When analyzed, methods and approaches to language teaching can be classified in a variety of ways:

1. According to the *discipline(s)* they originate/draw from: linguistics-based (oral approach, audio-lingual, whole language, CLT, etc.), psychology-based (NLP, MI, suggestopedia, TPR, etc.), philosophy-based[4] (CL, learning strategy training, etc.).
2. According to their *direction*: input-, process-, or output-oriented.
3. According to their *focal point*: learner-, teacher-, content- or learning-centered.
4. According to the *pedagogical background* involved in them: hetero-, auto-, inter-structuring (Not, 2000).
5. According to the *epistemological moment* they belong to:

- Pre-scientific –before the XIX century– and scientific orientations.
- Methods era (1930s-1990s)
- Post-methods era (eclecticism[5]).

Despite classifications, each method or approach can be seen simultaneously from different perspectives, and they can share traits belonging to different taxonomies. Table 1 summarizes the three major methodical stages and their corresponding theoretical views about language and language learning.

Throughout the long record of methodical or methodological discussions each method proved to have its own advantages and disadvantages. Nevertheless, the disapproval to approaches and methods grew (Prabhu, 1990; Kumaravadivelu, 1994; Brown, 1997; Richards, 1998) mainly in regard to their prescriptive nature that treated teachers as passive appliers, and their lack of sufficiency to the ever-changing particular educational settings teachers face in their everyday practice. A consensus about the impossibility and inadequacy of finding the panacea method, one that can be applied universally, was reached. The use of the term "methodology" spread to refer to teaching practices, as the concept of "method" was no longer central in teachers' philosophy (Brown, 1994a, p. 49). A post methods era was advocated (Kumaravadivelu, 1994; Richards & Rodgers, 2001), an era of informed or enlightened eclecticism that requires language teachers to know not only methods (in plural) but also *about* methods and to teach according to their particular setting.

As a wrapping up, regardless of the methodological orientation, methodology, approach or method, language teaching implies theoretical foundations (regarding the nature of language, language learning and language teaching), knowledge about methods, design (curricular or instructional system), and practical

2 The standards movement that has dominated educational discussions since the 1990s is a realization of this perspective (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 142).

3 Project-based learning (PBL) is closely associated with TBL; here, we consider the former as part of the latter.

4 The most influential sciences have been linguistics and psychology; however, a few methods have been heavily influenced by social, political or cultural (philosophical) schools of thought.

5 Eclecticism can be seen either as an approach or as a coherent blend of two or more methods.

Table 1. The Theoretical Views about Language and Language Learning in the Major Methodical Stages

Historical moment	Language focus	Theory of language	Theory of learning	Learning activity focus
"**Traditional**" *Port Royal, Saussure, Skinner*	Written literature, translation	Descriptivism, structuralism	Behaviorism	Imitation, rote memory drills, repetition, translation
Methods era *Chomsky, Halliday, Van Dijk, Piaget, Vigotsky*	Initially: speaking, pronunciation, accent; later: all skills	Generative-transformational grammar, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, text and discourse analysis, …	Innatism, developmentalism, cognitivism, pragmatism (social-cultural perspectives)	PPP (presentation, practice, production)
Post-methods *Kumaravadivelu*	Discourse functions, skills, abilities, competences	Eclecticism	Eclecticism	Input-intake-output, comprehension + production

classroom procedures (strategies, techniques, activities). It is the methodology (methodical integration and curricular design) that mediates between the theory/approach and the practice/method.

Curricular Design

In pedagogic literature, *curriculum* has been defined in a number of ways: as a product (Tyler, 1949), as a practice (Stenhouse, 1975), as praxis (Grundy, 1987), and as context impact (Cornbleth, 1990). In language teaching literature, Brown (1994a, p. 51) affirms that the terms *curriculum* and *syllabus* are American and British terms for the same concept, designs for carrying out a particular language program. However, these two concepts are often conceived as different: For White (1988), *syllabus* denotes the content or subject matter of an individual subject, while curriculum designates the totality of content to be taught and the aims to be realized within one school or educational program. For Graves (1996, 2000), *curriculum* stands in the broadest sense as the philosophy, purposes, design, and implementation of a whole program, whereas a *syllabus* refers narrowly to the specification and ordering in content of a course or courses.

It is in this wide-scope sense that we understand *curriculum* in consonance with the Colombian Ministry of Education (MEN) definition:

> Curriculum is the set of criteria, area plans[6], syllabi[7], methodologies[8], and processes that contribute to the integral education and to the building of the national, regional, and local cultural identity. It also includes the necessary human, academic, and material resources necessary to carry out the institutional educational project. (MEN - Law 115, 1994, Art. 76)

We also agree with Fandiño's (2010) idea of the 21st century curriculum being understood as

> A sociocultural process consisting of a series of pedagogical actions activated when planning, developing, and assessing a critical and transformative educational program aimed at integrating contextually shaped teaching and learning realities, practices, and experiences.

6 Planes de estudio.
7 Programas de estudio (course programmes).
8 Understood as teaching procedures that can cover various methods.

And whose characteristics are:

- open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective application
- based on informed action and critical reflection
- in favor of a dynamic interaction of students, teachers, knowledge, and contexts.

On the other hand, the *syllabus* has been defined by different authors as follows:

According to Candlin (1984, p. 30), the *syllabus* is

> concerned with the specification and planning of what is to be learned, frequently set down in some written form as prescriptions for action by teachers and learners. They have, traditionally, the mark of authority. They are concerned with the achievement of ends, often, though not always, associated with the pursuance of particular means.

Nunan (1988, p. 159) conceptualizes it as:

> a specification of what is to be taught in a language program and the order in which it is to be taught. A syllabus may contain all or any of the following: phonology, grammar, functions, notions, topics, themes, tasks.

In turn, Dubin and Olshtain (1986, p. 28) see it as "a more detailed and operational statement of teaching and learning elements which translates the philosophy of the curriculum into a series of planned steps leading towards more narrowly defined objectives at each level."

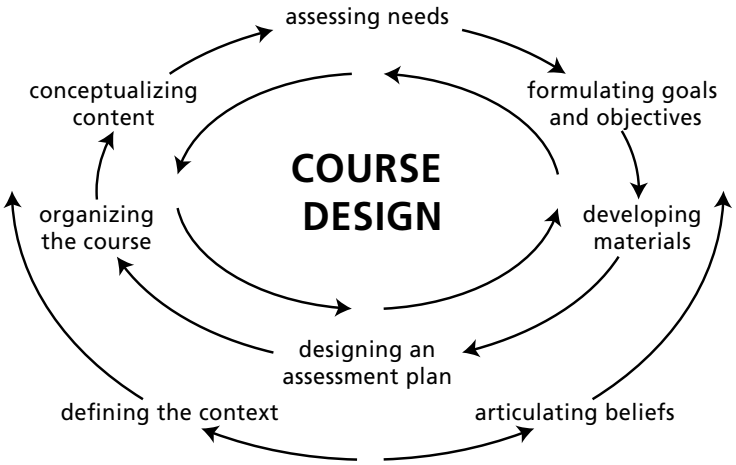
Then, the difference between *syllabus* and *curriculum* is that the latter is a wider term when compared with the former: *Curriculum* covers all the activities and arrangements made by the institution throughout the academic year to facilitate the learners and the instructors, whereas *syllabus* is limited to a particular subject of a particular class. Beyond the mere definition, and from a more critical point of view, Hadley (1998, p. 51) considers a *syllabus* "represents and endorses the adherence to some sociolinguistic and philosophical beliefs regarding power, education, and cognition (…) that guide a teacher to structure his or her class in a particular way."

In this article, we see the *syllabus* as the course program, which is a small part of the wider setting covered by the curriculum. Concordant with this conception, a *syllabus* (Ur, 1991; Dubin & Olshtain, 1986; Nunan, 1988) is a public comprehensive document that specifies the orderly components of a course or series of courses in terms of contents (vocabulary, grammar/structures, functions, topics) and process (explicit aims/goals/objectives, teaching and learning tasks, materials/resources associated with those tasks, evaluation/assessment, and–sometimes–approach/method, time schedule or pacing guidelines).

At this point, it should be clear for the reader that we are following a "top-down" theoretical sequence, from the widest concept of curriculum, linked to educational principles, to the increasingly narrower ones of syllabus, course, lesson and task/activity. Between the wide concept of "curriculum", concerning the general principles, that guide the whole educational action, and the particular one of "syllabus" or course program, there is the concept of "area plan" or "area curriculum", the one referring to a particular subject, e.g. the foreign language, social sciences, mathematics, etc. Foreign language area plans contain the theoretical principles about language, language learning, and language teaching, as well as the pedagogical and methodological guidelines for the area, which may vary according to the subject.

Although *course* and *lesson* are everyday terms for language teachers and learners, let's see some authoritative definitions about them. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1996, p. 65), a *course* is an integrated series of learning and teaching experiences whose ultimate aim is to lead the learners to a particular state of knowledge. It is a common place

Figure 1. Graves' Model of Curriculum Development (From: Graves, 2000, p. 4)



to think of a course as formal education conveyed through a series of lessons or class meetings.

For Ur (1991),

> the lesson is a type of organized social event that occurs in virtually all cultures. Lessons in different places may vary in topic, time, place, atmosphere, methodology and materials, but they all, essentially are concerned with learning as their main objective, involve the participation of learner(s) and teacher(s), and are limited and pre-scheduled as regards time, place and membership. (p. 213)

Ur (1991, p. 214) highlights aspects of the lesson that may be less obvious, but which are significant: (a) its transactional character; a lesson is a transaction or series of transactions with the aim of mental or physical changes in the participants, (i.e. learning); (b) its interactive nature; here what is important are the social relationships between learners, or between learners and teacher (see also Prabhu, 1992), and (c) goal-oriented effort, involving hard work. This implies awareness of a clear, worthwhile objective, the necessity of effort to attain it and a resulting sense of satisfaction and triumph if it is achieved, or of failure and disappointment if it is not. (d) A role-based culture, where teacher roles involve responsibility and activity, the learners' responsiveness and receptivity. (e) A conventional construct, with elements of ritual. Certain set behaviors occur every time (for example, a certain kind of introduction or ending), and the other components of the overall event are selected by an authority from a limited set of possibilities.

To conclude, the *design* (methodology) involves, from the macro level to the micro level (i.e. from school curriculum to area plans to a course or series of courses to a lesson or a series of lessons to an activity or group of activities), the situated definition of the objectives, the syllabus (the contents and their organization), the type of learning tasks and teaching activities, the roles of learners, teachers and the instructional materials, as well as the assessment/evaluation plan. Figure 1 shows Graves' model of curriculum development, which contains the aforementioned curriculum design components.

Research Method

Context of the Study

The exploration of the EFL teaching methodological practices in Cali was part of a macro study aimed at describing and analyzing the conditions of the implementation of the Colombian National Bilingualism Project (NBP) in public and private

schools in Cali, Colombia. This macro research project comprised ten sub-projects covering crucial conditions that might hinder or foster the accomplishment of the NBP policy: school infrastructure and the profiles, attitudes and expectations of the administrative staff, EFL teachers, students, and parents. The research group gathered seven professors from two universities, Universidad del Valle and Universidad San Buenaventura, ten undergraduate students and four graduate students. The information was collected in 56 strata one-to-four institutions, 23 private and 33 public, in the 22 city political districts or *comunas*.

Research Questions

The sub-project that studied the teachers' profiles covered their socio economic, demographic, and academic features. These latter traits included pre-service qualifications, in-service updating studies, experience, self-perceived and tested proficiency, as well as methodological conceptions and practices, among other aspects. This particular aspect of the research asked about the methodological views and practices of the English teachers. The specific questions about the methodological orientations of the EFL teachers in Cali were these:

- Which are the EFL teaching approaches and methods English teachers usually adopt?
- Do they consider their teaching to be traditional or conservative?
- Are they eclectic or do they adopt any particular method(s)?
- If they are eclectic, which are the components of their eclecticism?
- If they adopt any particular method(s), which method(s) do they adopt?

The questions about their methodological practices were the following:

- What is a usual EFL lesson like?
- What elements are used in evaluation?
- Which are their goals?

Participants

A total of 220 English teachers participated in the study: 131 from the public sector and 89 from private schools. However, not all teachers provided information gathered with the different instruments; only 188 of them sent the survey back to us; 56 of them were interviewed (focal groups plus some individual interviews).

Data Collection and Analysis Instruments

The information was gathered through surveys, interviews and institutional documents like curriculum/area planning, syllabi and class materials. The survey was the instrument providing most of the information; the teachers submitted few plans, syllabi and class materials.

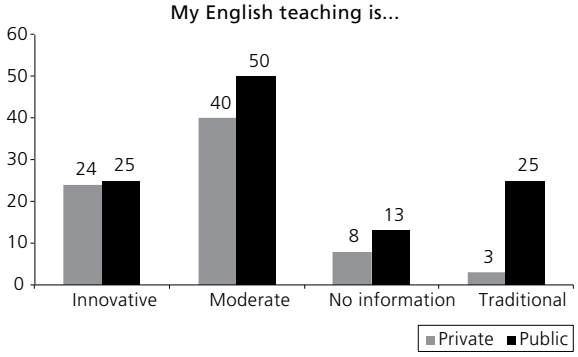
The quantitative information from the survey was processed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Excel while the qualitative information, from the survey, the focal interviews, and the documentary analysis, were analyzed hermeneutically in the light of the literature about approaches and methods, curriculum, course design, evaluation, and other pertinent topics. An analysis grid was used for the examination of institutional documents (area planning, syllabi, and didactic materials).

Findings and Discussion

Teachers' Methodological Orientations

Regarding *approaches* and *methods* teachers were asked whether they considered their teaching to be traditional, moderate or innovative (see Figure 2). We used this conceptual reference based on literature about language trends (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Kumaradivelu, 2001, 2003, 2006, 2012, and other authors like Mackey, Howatt, and Kelly, as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Figure 2. Teachers' View of Their Own Teaching



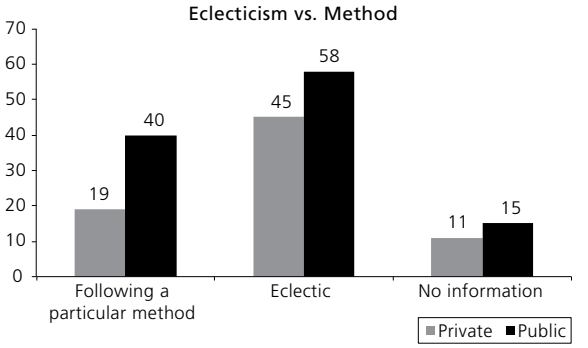
Most teachers consider themselves to be moderate, as their teaching oscillates between innovative and traditional practices. They support their choice saying that on the one hand, they can be innovative due to context possibilities like available tools, new technologies, interactive software, and engaging activities. On the other hand, they cannot be innovative due to context restrictions such as students' low level of motivation, students' low level of knowledge, lack of resources, large classes, and low number of teaching or class hours for the area.

What is more interesting is not that the teachers consider themselves moderate in their practices as a consequence of the tension between context constraints and opportunities, but their perception about innovative and traditional practices. According to them, traditional practices are associated with teacher-centered lessons, work on isolated vocabulary and repetition, grammar teaching, etc. In turn, innovative practices are associated with the use of new methodologies (PBL), new technologies (TIC), written production, games, dynamic activities, working with complete texts and student-centeredness (flexibility regarding learning rhythms and styles). From this, it can be inferred that their conception of innovation is rather weak; aspects such as autonomy, collaborative learning, meta-cognition, and post-method approaches are not mentioned by them.

The relationship that teachers establish between traditional teaching, their low English proficiency level and their deficiency in the use of new technologies (due to lack of knowledge) is also noteworthy. Teachers feel that their language level or the students' level is too low to be innovative; in one teacher's words: "As my English level is too low, I can only work on easy activities with my students" (T108[9]). This reflection points at teachers' awareness. This is consistent with the findings reported by González and Sierra (2011) regarding teachers' commitment and motivation despite a lack of teaching resources.

When asked if they are eclectic or adopt any particular method(s), most teachers ascribe to eclecticism (see Figure 3). They relate it to the combined use of repetition, conversation, explanation, grammar exercises and translation. These components are in fact more activities than methods, and in that sense they are not true or actual components of an eclectic orientation.

Figure 3. Teachers' Ascription to Methods/Eclecticism



Teachers support their choice on reasons such as influence from the environment, knowledge gained through experience, need to get adjusted to institutional requirements (program, school book, ICFES state exam, etc.), demands of national policies for primary teachers who are not professional in foreign languages, lack of the appropriate conditions (resources, time, institutional support, course size,

9 Teacher 108. Teachers in the sample were given numbers for their identification in the treatment of the information.

etc.). "I have groups of 45 – 50 students; with that number of students and the lack of resources you can do little" (T121). These reasons put the weight of responsibility mainly on aspects external to the teachers themselves. This might be interpreted as weakness in teachers' autonomy.

Furthermore, a large number of teachers who affirm to be working with a specific methodological orientation were unable to specify their components. This indicates that teachers are not clear about what eclecticism implies; nor are they clear about other possible methodological approaches to be adopted, or about the particularities of the methods they ascribe to. This finding is consistent with what Kumaravadivelu (2003, pp. 29-30) summarized from other authors like Swafer, Arens and Morgan; Nunan; Legutke and Thomas; and Kumaravadivelu:

- Teachers who are trained in and even swear by a particular method do not conform to its theoretical principles and classroom procedures,
- teachers who claim to follow the same method often use different classroom procedures that are not consistent with the adopted method,
- teachers who claim to follow different methods often use same classroom procedures,
- and over time, teachers develop and follow a carefully delineated task-hierarchy, a weighted sequence of activities not necessarily associated with any established method.

Up to here, while a lack of methodological clarity is linked with the need of theoretical support of teaching practice, moderateness refers to situational constraints. This strain between weak theoretical support and situational tension constitutes the background for the EFL teachers' methodological practices.

Teachers' Methodological Practices

Teachers' practices were inferred from what they say about what they do in the survey (Appendix A), interviews, and from documentary analysis (area and course planning, samples of class and evaluation materials) (Appendix B). This construction is approached here on the basis of the design elements: *objectives*, *activities* and learning tasks, *contents* and their organization, *evaluation*, *roles of teachers*, *learners*, and *materials*.

In order to achieve their goals, teachers were prompted to tell what they usually do in a lesson. Table 2 shows the resulting general structure of a typical lesson in terms of the usual activities sequence in it.

The usual *class organization* is made around activities moving from introduction and development of the topic (first theory, then practice), evaluation, and–sometimes–homework. We also found that despite the activity-centered lesson structure being the most common, a lesson can also be organized according to axes other than activities. We found

Table 2. General Lesson Structure

Introduction	Theory	Practice	Evaluation	(Homework)
Greeting	Presentation of the new topic	Exercises	Revision	
Warm up	**Primary**	Repetition	Feedback	
	Vocabulary		Questions	
	Pronunciation			
	Secondary			
	Grammar			
	Reading			

lessons structured from class arrangement (individual, pairs or whole class work), contents (grammar, vocabulary, skills), and materials (textbooks, written or audio texts, images).

When contrasting the class organization between primary and secondary schools, some differences were identified. In primary, the emphasis is placed on vocabulary, speaking (largely in terms of pronunciation) and writing in terms of copying from the board. In secondary schools, the emphasis is placed on grammar, listening and reading. This difference can be explained on the basis of primary teachers' reflections regarding their low level of English, which leads them to work chiefly on vocabulary. Unlike primary teachers, secondary teachers are subject teachers; it means they have a better knowledge of the area so as to be able to work with grammar, skills and complete texts.

It is interesting to see that the primary level is considered as "easy", associated with vocabulary (lists of isolated words) and pronunciation (often understood as "speaking"), something that can be taught without much preparation. The secondary level is in turn seen as "difficult", linked to work around grammar and skills, an area that requires skilled teachers.

Regarding *goals*, it came out that teachers center their interest in the development of oral communication, reading and writing skills (see Table 3).

Table 3. Main Goals of English as a Foreign Language Lessons

Primary Level	Secondary Level
• Oral communication • Reading • Writing • Pronunciation • Grammar • Translation	• Reading comprehension • Oral communication • Writing • Grammar • Pronunciation • Translation

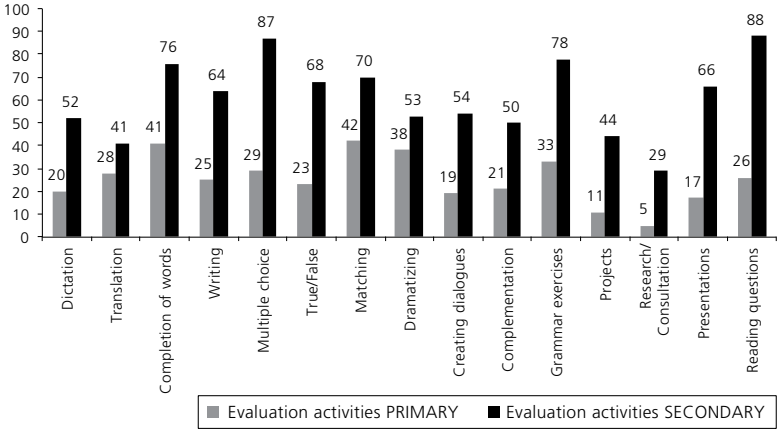
In the analysis of the importance teachers give to goals, it was found that for secondary teachers these goals do not correspond with what they express about their class organization. Teachers accepted their focusing mainly on grammatical topics (see Table 2); however, when talking about goals, they do not give grammar a leading position. Likewise, there is a mismatch between goals and class organization in primary level teachers: Pronunciation does not have a remarkable position as a goal despite playing a central role in the class organization. Oral production is focused on pronunciation of words, as vocabulary is the central content.

A possible explanation of this mismatch might be, on the one hand, the type of question used in the survey questionnaire. The options given to the teachers in this question could have influenced their answer, in opposition to the question about class organization, which was an open question. On the other hand, it might be that teachers recognize the importance of changing their practices, but these changes have not materialized yet. This gap between theory and practice is an area to be worked with teachers.

The *most common lesson activities* were explored on the basis of the elements that are present in teachers' answers, as well as the elements not considered when regarding activities. In primary schools, the results showed vocabulary again as the center of the work in class. In secondary, what can be seen is that the "evaluative paradigm" might be influencing the methodological practices, responding to the improvement of test taking strategies like multiple-choice, completion with words, matching, etc. Composition, dialogues, research, projects and presentations were not mentioned by teachers. This confirms what was mentioned above about a limited perspective of foreign language learning and teaching (see Table 4).

Contents were deduced from information provided in relation to objectives and activities for evaluation; also, from course plans and material provided by some institutions. Three types of contents were identified: those related to communicative functions

Figure 4. English as a Foreign Language Evaluation Activities



and skills, those built in terms of topics, and grammar items, which take the lion's share of contents. As mentioned before, emphasis on vocabulary and pronunciation is made at the primary level while at the secondary level the main focus is on grammar and the development of skills needed for accomplishing evaluative tasks.

These results point at the still prevailing presence of "grammar-translation" and at a negative effect of the accountability paradigm underlying current foreign language national policies.

In regard to *evaluation activities*, the most common evaluation activities in primary schools are matching and completion with words. The most common evaluation activities in secondary schools are reading comprehension questions and multiple choice questions.

These most common evaluation activities correspond to the activities teachers highlighted when talking about common activities in their classes. This confirms the outcomes about lesson organization, goals and most common class activities. It also confirms the differences between primary and secondary schools. Besides their consistency, the results show–again–the effect of "evaluationism" in foreign language teaching: ICFES-like exams, exercises, and questions have become trendy among EFL teachers, both at the primary and the secondary level. It seems more important to prepare students for passing tests (and show good achievement indicators for institutions and teachers) than really enabling them to use the language for communicative purposes (see Figure 4).

Table 4. Most and Least Common Lesson Activities

Primary level	Secondary level
Matching	Multiple choice
Completion with words	Reading questions
Grammar exercises	Grammar exercises
Multiple choice	Complementation with words
Translation	Matching
Least used: Research and projects	

The institutional documents collected for the study were *area plan* or *area curriculum* (*plan de area*), *syllabi*, and *class and evaluation materials*. The idea was to build knowledge about the teachers' methodological practices as they are usually reflected on these types of documents. Besides, this was an indirect way of approaching what teachers do in their classes as direct observation was not possible

due to the number of teachers participating in the study. Though not many documents were provided, some important methodological features were identified. *Area plan* or *area curriculum* is usually a collection of syllabi, not supported by any theoretical or methodological considerations regarding language, its learning and teaching, or pedagogical perspectives that should guide the subject. *Syllabi* are characterized by their lack of explicit objectives, their focus on standards, grammar-centered content and activities emphasizing reading, vocabulary and structures; evaluation is stated in terms of topics and activities, but not in terms of standards. Not many *class materials* were provided by teachers; most of them were evaluation materials; they reflect the emphasis placed on grammar and the predominant types of questions are completion with words, multiple choice, and writing. It is noteworthy that no objectives are formulated with these materials. The absence of objectives–in contrast to the presence of standards, which are not taken into account for evaluation–shows the need of working more deeply on the understanding of current foreign languages methodological perspectives.

Conclusions

We have presented the findings about the methodological orientations and practices adopted by primary and secondary English teachers in public and private schools in Cali, Colombia. The information was analyzed with the understanding that what is usually known as "methodology" involves considering approach/method awareness and instructional design whose main components are objectives, syllabus (contents and their organization), learning tasks and evaluation activities, among other aspects.

Under this perspective, it became apparent that teachers' choices concerning the methodological orientation for their English classes have more to do with institutional and class conditions than with their conceptual grounds, which are rather weak and associated, for instance, with grammar-translation, pre-communicative views and empiricist actions. This means that the practice overrules the theoretical principles. EFL teaching in the context studied seems to be shaped mainly by situational conditions. The immediate implication is that the implementation of the NBP requires not only teachers' theoretical-methodological updating but also provision of appropriate conditions for teaching and educational innovation.

Teachers are conscious of the existence of different theoretical methodological options, which could be the support for their practices, but they lack sound knowledge about them. They are also aware of their own limitations and those generated by the working conditions in the institution or in the classroom. A good deal of governmental and policy-enforcing actions addressed to bridge those gaps must accompany teachers' efforts in order to fulfill, on their own, the task they were forcibly assigned and are trying to carry out.

Teachers' methodological options are determined–from their perspective–by the possibilities and constraints they find in their school context. In this respect, teachers show a great coincidence, evidenced in their conception of what being innovative, moderate and traditional implies. Teachers' view of innovation and tradition reflects gaps dealing, first, with generational characteristics: while TICs are new for them and they have difficulties with their use, it is not so for their students, who feel at ease with modern gadgets and are well ahead of most teachers regarding that area. Second, there is a deep gap between theory and practice: ludic activities and work with whole texts and skills in a communicative way are still new/innovative to many of our EFL teachers in secondary schools, despite having been described in literature decades ago.

Teachers' work on language–mainly around vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar–reflects

not only an outdated conception, but an incomplete one for secondary teachers (prepared in the EFL teaching field). There is an urgent need of a deeper comprehension of recent perspectives about language. For primary school teachers, the situation is worse. Forced by law to play a role they are not prepared for and in absence of sound support for that burden, they have resorted to interim measures to teach the foreign language such as crash courses of language or didactics. However, this is not enough; teaching EFL requires real proficiency and sound methodological preparation that cannot be achieved overnight.

The teachers recognize the importance of changing their practices, but these changes need to be made real. For these changes to be fulfilled, the gap between theory and practice must be overcome. It is necessary for teachers to be able to tell methods (e.g. *TBL, PBL, CBLT,* etc.) apart from activities (*composition, dialogues, research, projects* and *presentations*) and that they are able to recognize the fundamental principles of methods and methodological approaches. This need might be relatively easy to fulfill as teachers from primary and secondary level feel the need for Teacher Development Programs (TDP) and are clear about what they need in order to do a better job. A steadfast TDP national, regional, local and institutional effort seems a necessary practical counterpart to our foreign language policies. The Ministry of Education and the departmental and city *Secretarías de Educación*, as well as the universities with foreign/modern language *licenciaturas* (B.A. or B.Ed. Programs) must coordinate their role in the fulfillment of the NBP, bearing in mind that focus on language mastery is just half of the issue, for the methodological preparation is the other sine qua non condition to teach any foreign language, altogether with the pro-vision of appropriate conditions to carry out the kind of foreign language teaching this challenging era requires.

Awareness should be raised in those who lead the educational processes to provide the *conditions* necessary (regarding resources) for the goals of education policies like the NBP to be met. Miranda and Echeverry (2010) studied this particular issue and found an evident urgency for considering real needs in relation to resources for teaching a foreign language in our Colombian context. Without adequate conditions to turn policy into actual practices, the challenge represented by the NBP becomes a burden the EFL teachers cannot carry. The responsibility for the success of the NBP cannot be put only on teachers' shoulders. They do need to improve their proficiency level and to update their methodological views and practice, but that will not be enough; supportive actions towards the NBP among policy makers, education authorities, and school administrators must address educators' needs regarding conditions to adopt effective methodological orientations and practices to meet the new goals in the area.

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About the Authors

Orlando Chaves BA in Philology and Languages (Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá). Diplomas (especializaciones): Pedagogy (UniAmazonia, Colombia), Tertiary Education (Universidad El Bosque, Colombia), Creativity and Communication, and ELT (Universidad Surcolombiana, Colombia). MA in Linguistics, (Universidad del Valle, Colombia). EFL, applied linguistics, methodology and TDP teacher at Universidad del Valle and member of EILA research group.

Fanny Hernández BA in Modern Languages, Universidad del Valle (Colombia). MA in Linguistics from the same university. Associate professor and member of EILA research group. Teaches English and classroom research at Universidad del Valle, in Cali, and is the director of the Licenciatura Program. Participated in the research project on the conditions of implementation of the PNB in Cali (Colombia).

Appendix A: Survey Regarding Methodological Knowledge and Practice[10]

4.5. Methodological knowledge and practice

4.5.1. My teaching of English is:

4.5.1.1. Innovative ___ 4.5.1.2. Moderate ___ 4.5.1.3. Traditional ___

4.5.1.4. Why? _____

4.5.2. My teaching is:

4.5.2.1. Adjusted to a specific method ___

4.5.2.2. Eclectic ___

4.5.2.3. If ascribed to a specific method, to which one?

4.5.2.3.1. Audio-oral / audio lingual ___

4.5.2.3.2. Cognitive ___

4.5.2.3.3. Communicative ___

4.5.2.3.4. Natural ___

4.5.2.3.5. Total Physical Response ___

4.5.2.4. Eclecticism components:

4.5.2.4.1. Repetition, conversation, explanation and grammar exercises ___

4.5.2.4.2. Translation, grammar exercises and pronunciation ___

4.5.2.4.3. Reading aloud, translation and conversation in pairs ___

4.5.2.4.4. Translation, writing and grammar explanation ___

4.5.2.4.5. Other ___

4.5.2.4.5.1. Which ones? _____

4.5.3. My usual lesson in five steps:

4.5.3.1. step 1 _____

4.5.3.2. step 2 _____

4.5.3.3. step 3 _____

4.5.3.4. step 4 _____

4.5.3.5. step 5 _____

10 The original survey was carried out in Spanish. The section here corresponds only to the methodological knowledge and practice.

4.5.4. Elements I use for evaluation:

4.5.4.1. Dictation ___
4.5.4.2. Translation ___
4.5.4.3. Cloze with words ___
4.5.4.4. Text writing ___
4.5.4.5. Multiple choice ___
4.5.4.6. True-False ___
4.5.4.7. Matching ___
4.5.4.8. Dramatization ___
4.5.4.9. Dialogues ___
4.5.4.10. Completing dialogues ___
4.5.4.11. Grammar exercises ___
4.5.4.12. Projects ___
4.5.4.13. Searches ___
4.5.4.14. Presentations ___
4.5.4.15. Reading comprehension ___

4.5.5. Other evaluation activities:

4.5.5.1. Other 1 _____
4.5.5.2. Other 2 _____
4.5.5.3. Other 3 _____
4.5.5.4. Other 4 _____

4.5.6. Main objectives:

4.5.6.1. Oral communication development ___
4.5.6.2. Writing skills development ___
4.5.6.3. Reading comprehension skills development ___
4.5.6.4. Pronunciation development ___
4.5.6.5. Grammar development ___
4.5.6.6. Translation skills development ___

Appendix B: Elements Resulting from Documentary Analysis (Area Planning, Syllabi, and Didactic Materials)

Area planning	Syllabi	Didactic materials
I. Contextual Information • Institution • Section • Area • Academic Period II. Body of the document • Justification • General Objectives • Competences • Methodology – Strategies – Resources – Evaluation • General Axes - Levels – Thematic Contents – Achievements Indicators – Other NOTICE: There are two kinds of 'planes de área' (area plans): 1. Compilation of syllabi 2. Independent plan with theoretical support and diversity in the terminology used.	I. Contextual Information • Objectives • Time • Units II. Body of the Document • Fundaments – Competences – Standards • Achievements • Achievements Indicators • Thematic Axes/Contents (Grammatical/Functional/ topics) • Methodology – Type: Projects, tasks, activities, evaluation, etc. – Resources • Evaluation III. Appendices - Bibliography	I. Contextual Information • Topical title • Course • Date • Objectives II. Type of material and contents • Workshop • Theoretical Presentation • Evaluation: Type of question • Other