# Understanding Teacher's Agency in the Implementation of a Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) program.

# Comprender la Agencia Docente en la implementación de un programa de enseñanza de idiomas basado en competencias (CBLT)

# Dynamics from a Top-Down Policy Implementation in Higher Education

# Dinámica de una implementación de políticas de arriba hacia abajo en la educación superior

*Gloria C. Pallanez-Dávila[a]*

**Abstract:**

This qualitative case study aims to analyze teacher agency within the context of the Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) model. Given the persistent demand for schools to adapt to policies and educational reforms, this study aims to explore how this ecological influence interacts with educators' ideologies, identities, needs, and concrete actions. The primary objective is to shed light on how teachers deal with this model within their classrooms and the ensuing dynamics stemming from a top-down policy implementation. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and the compilation of student's learning outcomes that were conducted to explore how teachers exercise agency within classrooms to influence student learning. The findings seem to suggest that teachers include specific components of the CBLT education model, blending certain aspects into their lessons. However, the majority of the classes continue to be primarily centered around the teacher's instruction due to externally imposed systems, shedding light on the university's difficulties in adjusting and adhering to educational standards.

*Keywords:*

*agency, competence, constructivism, assessment.*

**Resumen:**

Este estudio de caso cualitativo tiene como objetivo analizar la agencia docente en el contexto del modelo de Enseñanza de Lenguaje Basado en Competencias (ELBC). Dada la demanda continua que tienen las escuelas para adaptar reformas educativas, este estudio propone explorar cómo esta influencia ecológica interactúa con las ideologías, identidades, necesidades y acciones concretas de los profesores. El objetivo principal es mostrar cómo los docentes negocian este modelo dentro de sus aulas y las dinámicas resultantes que surgen de la implementación de políticas de arriba hacia abajo. La recopilación de datos involucró entrevistas semiestructuradas, observaciones en el aula y la compilación de evidencias de aprendizaje de los estudiantes que se realizaron con el fin de explorar cómo los maestros ejercitan la agencialidad dentro de los salones para influenciar el aprendizaje de los estudiantes. Los hallazgos parecen sugerir que los docentes incorporan componentes específicos del modelo educativo ELBC, mezclando ciertos aspectos en sus lecciones. Sin embargo, la mayoría de las clases siguen siendo principalmente centradas en la instrucción del profesor.

.

*Palabras Clave:*

*agencia, competencia, constructivismo, evaluación*

a Gloria Carolina Pallanez Dávila, Universidad de Sonora, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4703-4879, Email: carolina.pallanez@unison.mx

## Introducción

As a result of the widespread implementation of neoliberal policies globally, there is an increasing emphasis on establishing a connection between education and the workforce. Modern education is now centered on learning processes linked to employment and the quantifiable assessment of student progress. Competency-Based programs have been extensively adopted across various educational levels, including higher education. However, understanding the implications of this policy implementation and educators' responses is crucial. This study specifically focuses on Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) within the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) and English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). CBLT and EMI are often implemented in countries or regions where with a desire to provide students with access to international educational standards, global knowledge, and opportunities.

The selected university has transformed its programs to follow the CBLT and EMI models, including the B.A. in ELT, which trains future English teachers. This research aims to evaluate how CBLT has been implemented and its impact on teacher agency.

Through this article, the focus will be on two of the research questions guiding this study as follows:

1. How does the CBLT model manifest in practice?
2. How do teachers interpret and comprehend the CBLT model? Do they see CBLT as an opportunity or as an imposition?

This qualitative study analyzes teacher agency within the Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) model implemented in a B.A. program for English Language Teaching at a state university in Mexico's Northwest region. It is essential to mention that all subjects are taught in English, and this study collected data through all subjects, not only focusing on language, but on instruction. The study explores how teachers navigate this model in classrooms and the assessment dynamics that result from this top-down policy implementation. The researcher's interest in this topic arose from personal experiences working within the public education system and witnessing the challenges of implementing competency-based models. The study seeks to shed light on how teachers respond to this policy shift and how it affects their agency in the teaching process.

The research contributes to understanding the implementation of CBLT in an ELT context and examines how teachers respond to external policy changes. It aims to uncover teachers' perceptions, factors influencing their agency, and whether they embrace or resist the policy. It is fundamental to mention that agency is characterized by active involvement over time within various structural contexts. It incorporates the interplay of routine, creative

thinking, and critical assessment, simultaneously preserving and reshaping these frameworks in reaction to changing circumstances (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). This research addresses gaps in the literature regarding agency and CBLT in an ELT context, focusing on the critical role of teachers in implementing top-down policies. A "top-down policy" denotes an educational strategy where central or higher-level governmental or educational bodies take the lead in initiating and executing educational decisions, directives, and reforms. These policies are subsequently disseminated to schools, districts, and classrooms. "Top-down implementation often refers to the process of executing what the policy mandates, to reach the goals stated and with the means outlined in the policy statutes" Viennet, R., & Pont, B. (2017, p. 21).

.

These policies frequently have an impact on various facets of the education system, including curriculum, assessment methods, funding allocation, teacher certification, and other operational aspects.

## Literature Review

The Competency-based approach has gained traction in various educational programs on a global scale. However, the successful implementation of this model requires adjustments across pedagogical aspects, including conceptualization, material selection, instructional strategies, and assessment methodologies for target competencies. Advocates of CBE/CBLT emphasize placing learners at the core of the learning process, a challenging area for educators. This study is interested on teachers' transformation process when confronting this task and how teachers and administrators respond to this educational policy. Biesta (2008) highlights that evidence-based models often prioritize quantifiable results, potentially overshadowing critical reasoning and leading to a technical practice approach. This raises concerns about valuing what can be measured rather than measuring what is truly valuable (Biesta, 2008, p.43).

CBE/CBLT proponents suggest that the approach standardizes concepts, providing a roadmap to achieve desired competencies (Argudín, 2010). The curriculum takes content from external standards and local objectives and structures it into a plan for effective teaching and learning. This roadmap guides educators on how to attain desired student performance outcomes (Richards, 2013). However, Kumaravadivelu (2008) notes that established methods are often based on idealized concepts tailored to utopian contexts, detached from the realities of the classroom. This gap between unreal methods and actual classroom situations hinders teachers' ability to address the challenges they encounter daily (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p.165). Consequently, standardized education may

not always align with the diverse realities of students and classrooms. This study seeks to explore the influence of political pressures on teachers, primary agents of education, and how such influence impacts their identities and teaching practices in response to imposed models.

This qualitative investigation seeks to examine two distinct strands of constructivism: cognitive constructivism and social constructivism. Piaget pioneered cognitive constructivism, emphasizing the internal construction of knowledge, while Vygotsky's sociocultural theory represents social constructivism, emphasizing the pivotal role of environmental interaction in learners' development (Schcolnik, Kol, & Abarbanel, 2006, p. 13). Social constructivists emphasize active engagement over passive observation. Duffy and Cunningham (1996) assert that learning is a dynamic process requiring learner involvement. Additionally, Schcolnik, Kol, et. al (2006) conceive that knowledge construction leads to authentic learner authorship and ownership, embodying a sense of empowerment and appropriation (p. 14).

Sociocultural theory suggests that learning is scaffolded by a more knowledgeable individual, such as a teacher or peer, guiding learners toward higher levels of development. Autonomy and self-management, facilitated by language, enable students to engage collaboratively with peers or facilitators, enhancing their skills and knowledge until mastery is achieved (Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2019). The "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD), a concept introduced by Vygotsky, refers to the disparity between a learner's independent problem-solving abilities and their potential development through collaboration with capable peers or guidance from adults (Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in Mitchell, et al. 2019). The ZPD implies that new language knowledge is co-constructed through collaborative discourse, potentially without formal instruction.

In this context, scaffolding is employed to guide learners within the ZPD, facilitating gradual comprehension. Experts or peers engage in supportive dialogue, directing learners' attention to key aspects of the environment and prompting them through problem-solving steps (Mitchell, et al. 2019, p. 288-289). Scaffolding nurtures knowledge construction by offering assistance and guidance during collaborative work.

The constructivist approach is endorsed within the Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) model. Learners should actively explore and interact with content to foster the learning experience, ultimately promoting self-regulation and autonomy. The facilitator's role is to guide, support, and provide tools for practice, fostering critical thinking. However, adequate time, resources, and support are crucial for teachers to implement the CBLT approach effectively. The subsequent sections will explore teachers' perspectives and the terminological nuances of the competency concept and CBLT. The following chart shows some definitions of the CBLT term:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Saadi, Saeedi and Karbalaei (2016)** | CBLT is an interaction of realities of language, which means the social context and the communication needs of students. |
| **Bader Bataineh and Tasnimi (2014)** | CBLT addresses what the learners are expected to do rather than what they are expected to learn about. |
| **Bader Bataineh and Tasnimi (2014)** | CBLT classroom must be oriented towards the ability to complete a real-world task. |
| **Auerbach, (1986, p.413)** | "CBAE/ESL reflects the shift from viewing language learning as an end in itself to viewing it as a means for learners to achieve their individual goals." |

The notion of competence is portrayed as a dynamic amalgamation encompassing cognitive and metacognitive abilities, knowledge, interpersonal, intellectual and practical skills, and ethical principles (Lokhoff et al., 2010, p. 52). Argudin (2010) simplifies this concept, defining it as knowledge applied in action, and elucidates that competence entails grasping how to interpret and perform within diverse contexts. On the other hand, Tobón (2008) expands upon the concept, incorporating the notion of pertinent action and moral involvement: "Competencies surpass knowledge within context since they extend beyond mere action, involving dedication and intention to execute tasks with clarity and comprehension" (p. 10). Given that competencies include students' attitudes and values, the term takes on a more encompassing significance to prepare students for their sociocultural surroundings. In essence, competence means adapting one's performance to meet presented challenges.

## Agency

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) discuss agency as a dynamic interplay involving three dimensions: 1.Routine, representing established patterns of action. 2. Purpose, driving individuals' motivations. 3. Judgment, reflecting engagement with present situations during action. They emphasize the influence of the past on agency, shaping a trajectory toward the future while maintaining a commitment to the present. Teachers' prior experiences directly shape their actions, as they adapt their knowledge to current contexts and anticipate future scenarios. Agency, as defined by the authors, involves temporal engagement within diverse structural environments. It emerges through the interaction of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproducing and transforming these

structures in response to evolving historical challenges (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998).

Moreover, agency is not a static possession, but a contextualized action driven by individuals' beliefs about the most suitable course of action in each situation. As Priestley et al. (2012, p.14) assert, agency is not something inherent but something enacted. Furthermore, agency is rooted not in objective reality but in individuals' subjective realities.

In the context of higher education, quality recognition organizations prompt institutions to transform and align with their quality standards. This transformation hinges on teachers' responses to required policies. Understanding how this model manifests within classrooms is crucial. Teachers are acknowledged as agents within the learning and teaching process, possessing the capacity to navigate their environment (Kalaja et al., 2015). A comprehensive interpretation of agency views it as a sociocultural capability to take action (Ahearn, 2001). Consequently, agency encompasses observable behaviors, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings, all intricately linked to contextual factors and opportunities (Mercer, 2012).

This study seeks to ascertain whether professors accept, adjust, or disregard top-down structural changes. In addition, this study shifts the perspective of professors from mere policy followers to individuals capable of navigating and implementing policies within their local and immediate context.

## Assessment

In a general sense, assessment involves assigning value to a situation. In education, it has evolved into a method of instruction, serving as an opportunity for learning. It forms the basis that students should achieve to continue their education, involving stages for information gathering and decision-making to reach judgments (Garcia Ramos, 1989).

While the primary goal of education is not mere approval but comprehensive personal development (Casanova, 2008), Competency-Based Education (CBE) considers assessment as its backbone, motivating and focusing both teachers and students (Klein-Collins, 2013). This alignment influences how students learn and how teachers instruct, concentrating on what assessments demand (Alderson and Wall, 1993). The shift to the new curriculum paradigm necessitates reevaluating assessment to encompass diverse competency areas. Hence, teachers and students must adopt new roles within CBE, adjusting their actions to enhance learning effectiveness (Bader Bataineh and Tasnimi, 2014).

A symbiotic relationship exists among instruction, learning, and assessment in the CBLT approach (Baartman et al. 2007). They should harmoniously align,

maintaining congruence. Assessment isn't merely an endpoint but a fundamental element linked to learning outcomes (Lokhoff et al., 2010). Within competency-based programs, assessment validates that students have met the established competencies in the graduate profile, acting as a fundamental component (Garcia Ramos, 1989).

Hence, alignment among instruction, learning, and assessment is crucial within CBE curriculum planning, extending to societal employment needs. The challenge lies in striking a balance between standardized evaluations and authentic, holistic education (Sambell, McDowell, and Montgomery, 2013). Critics question if CBLT's fragmentation between teaching and learning truly serves a broader educational purpose (Webster, 2017). As education shifts towards outcomes-based approaches, emphasis on visible operations and measurable outcomes can overshadow the broader dimensions of education (Ryohei, 2017).

Different assessment types exist, including summative, diagnostic, and formative assessments. Summative assessment gauges the culmination of learning stages, determining if objectives are met, while diagnostic assessment considers students' prior knowledge and perspectives. Formative assessment aims to enhance competencies, focusing on continuous improvement (Bader and Tasnimi, 2014).

In CBE, assessments should be authentic, reflecting real-world tasks and experiences (Garfolo and L'Huillier, 2016). Nonetheless, there's debate about whether standardized evaluations restrict creativity and critical thinking (Saadi, Saeedi, and Karbalaei, 2016). The challenge is aligning CBE with diverse pedagogical and philosophical perspectives (Webster, 2017).

In conclusion, assessment is integral to CBE, driving instruction and learning. It demands alignment, authenticity, and a balance between standardized evaluations and holistic education. Different assessment types serve to various needs, fostering continuous improvement and competence development. The challenge lies in harmonizing CBE's structure with the diverse demands of education. Within the context of CBLT, ensuring that there is consistency between what is taught and what students exhibit through their learning outcomes becomes crucial. For this reason, assessment plays a significant role in this research because it is through the assessment process that the acquired competencies are demonstrated.

## Methodology

This qualitative case study delves into implementing the Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) educational policy within a classroom context. Case studies are extensively documented in the literature for

their ability to provide accessible insights into real individuals and situations (Cohen, Lawrence, and Morrison, 2011). This research employs semi-structured interviews as a critical method, using participant responses, classroom observations, and students' learning outcomes to exemplify classroom processes.

The study is organized using an emergent design, allowing for flexibility and potential shifts in research phases once data collection begins (Creswell, 2012). Themes or categories were established across various data sources to provide a comprehensive understanding, relying on "thick description" for theme categorization (Thomas, 2016).

The decision to conduct a case study stems from an interest in understanding the entirety of the case. The focus is on investigating a subject with theoretical significance and potential pedagogical implications (Duff, 2019). This study is a typical case study, where the primary focus is on the event itself, and its secondary importance lies in its application to larger contexts (Rose, McKinley, and Briggs, 2020).

While a case study allows for an in-depth exploration of unique internal processes, it isn't intended for generalizability due to the influence of diverse circumstances. Nonetheless, it serves as an example of how international education policies unfold in real contexts. Triangulating diverse data sources enhances credibility, offering a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Rose, et al. 2020).

An ecological view underpins the study, acknowledging the phenomena' interconnectedness, making isolating variables' effects challenging. The researcher's role was to provide detailed insight into the teachers' context, capturing the immersive experience of the case study (Thomas, 2016).

The study's initial exploratory phase aimed to gain familiarity with the context, aligning with an interpretive approach that seeks a comprehensive understanding of the subject's environment (Thomas, 2016). The case study's focus lies in its ability to encapsulate a range of circumstances, allowing for an in-depth exploration of key aspects related to teacher agency in CBLT assessment within classrooms.

This case study entailed a comprehensive depiction of the context and individuals involved, followed by data analysis employing Critical Discourse Studies (CDS). The researcher interpreted and categorized the information for analysis, with a subsequent discussion of results structured around interconnected themes. Additionally, data were triangulated across diverse information sources to provide a cohesive rationale for topics and enhance the study's validity. The ensuing section outlines the instruments that aided in the collection of pertinent information for this research.

### Semi-structured Interviews

Data collection for interpretive inquiry involved interview transcripts, informal observations, and students' learning outcomes. The participants included teachers and administrators fundamental to the model's development in the chosen university. Semi-structured interviews provide a framework of issues to address while allowing flexibility to explore specific points in-depth. This approach encourages new ideas to emerge within predetermined thematic boundaries (Rose, McKinley, et al. 2020).

### Classroom Observations

In addition to interviews, classroom observations were conducted to explore how teachers exercise agency within classrooms to influence student learning. Observations in social research involve observing, recording, interpreting, and reflecting on human activity and behavior (Rose, McKinley, and Briggs, 2020). Observations provided a crucial means to delve deeply into classroom realities and teachers' implementation of the CBLT curriculum.

### Students' Learning Outcomes

To evaluate the application of the CBLT policy and its assessment principles, students were requested to provide examples of their learning outcomes. Some students shared their learning evidence, allowing for a comparison with the CBLT assessment premises. This examination focused on the congruence between presented learning outcomes and the CBLT approach.

data were naturally collected through direct interaction, observations, and interviews, encapsulating the essence of qualitative research (Creswell, 2012).

Engagement over a period of 35 hours, including 15 hours of classroom observation across four weeks and semi-structured interviews with participants in the field, was key to building trust and obtaining rich data. Data triangulation was employed by cross-referencing multiple sources against the established CBLT program. A pilot study was conducted to ensure the study's reliability and validity, drawing on techniques outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

A non-probability study was conducted with a purposive sample selection strategy. In essence, this approach perceives sampling as a deliberate process involving strategic decisions regarding the individuals, locations, and methods employed in the research (Palys, 2008, p. 697). In order to choose participants for the study, teachers and staff administrators affiliated with the Bachelor of English Language Teaching program in the North-West Region of Mexico were identified as key

stakeholders who could offer pertinent insights into the research subject and context. The rationale behind their selection was their potential to contribute valuable information. The research site was deliberately chosen because the Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) program had been the program's primary focus for approximately eight years, rendering it an invaluable source of information due to its well-established nature.

| Participant | Position | Studies |
|---|---|---|
| Catalina | Full-time professor | Business Adm./MA in Ed/ PhD in Applied Linguistics (student) |
| Flor | Full-time professor | ELT BA/MA in CBE /PhD in Applied Linguistics (student) |
| Diana | Administrative/Full-time professor | ELT BA/MA in CBE |
| Gabriela | Administrative/Full-time professor | Economy/ELT(Experience)/ MA in Ed |
| Clara | Administrative/Full-time professor | Ecology/MA in Social Sciences/PhD in Social Sciences |
| Laura | Hourly-paid | ELT BA/MA in CBE (did not finish) |
| Mariana | Hourly-paid | ELT/ MA in Teachers' Formation |
| 7 students | Students | ELT BA students |

Every individual involved in the study, including the university itself, was given a fictional name to safeguard their confidentiality. For the purposes of this research, the selected university will be referred to as "Metropolitan University."

## Results

The results section will present the analysis gathered from the following inquiries: How does the CBLT model manifest in practice? How do teachers interpret and comprehend the CBLT model? Do they see CBLT as an opportunity or as an imposition? In this segment, I delve into the participants' perceptions of CBLT as either an opportunity or an imposition. The overwhelming consensus among the participants is that CBLT is seen as an opportunity, with only one individual regarding it as an imposition. However, even this participant acknowledges the beneficial aspects of the model. For instance, Gabriela articulates her viewpoint, asserting that CBLT provides an opportunity to enhance the teaching process:

Gabriela " For me is an opportunity, from the beginning... it probably was because we were in the English area, we have already learned to work with the development of skills. Then, when they started to train us to move to competencies and talk about how to develop skills, we already had training, we understood... What do I have to do to develop one skill or another? It was then an opportunity to apply it to English Language Teaching and any other subject you

could teach. And, it was not an abrupt transition where you say: how do I do this? Then, opportunity? Yes. You can do many things inside and outside the classroom, as opposed to traditional teaching that did not allow it many times."

Drawing from her experience as an English teacher, she highlights the alignment between CBLT's skill development approach and the skills-focused nature of the English curriculum. Gabriela underscores that the transition to CBLT was not abrupt for her due to her prior skill-oriented training, making it an opportunity to integrate the approach into her teaching practice. Her perspective underscores the compatibility of CBLT with existing pedagogical frameworks.

Similarly, Patricia's perspective aligns with Gabriela's sentiments:

Patricia: "Oh, yes, it (CBLT) is a growing opportunity when used appropriately. With enough tools for the student to achieve...the student can self-regulate and manage his knowledge during the whole semester. Then, if there is no facilitator, it would be easy to enrich the knowledge. For that reason, I believe the model is an opportunity be used with all it has."

Patricia identifies CBLT as a growing opportunity when appropriately implemented. She accentuates the role of CBLT in empowering students to self-regulate their learning journey, enabling a comprehensive and enriching educational experience. Patricia's emphasis on appropriate implementation reflects her endorsement of CBLT's constructivist underpinnings. Moreover, Patricia acknowledges the absence of resistance to the model and anticipates a future revision of study programs to ensure continued alignment with CBLT principles.

Clara, an administrator, expresses a positive attitude toward CBLT as well:

Clara: "I always see it (CBE) as an opportunity; as an administrator, it was an opportunity to do things differently and make my institution grow. I never saw it as an imposition."

She views it as an opportunity to drive institutional growth and innovative practices, aligning with the institution's vision. Clara's endorsement highlights CBLT's potential to foster educational transformation beyond the classroom.

Flor's perspective resonates with the theme of opportunity.

Flor: For me, it is an opportunity that my institution allows me to see my student as a whole... for me is an advantage; I love it. Yes, I work a little more because teachers' commitment is higher; you see more facets of students. You see more colors, and you must attend to all of those colors. You wait if the student had a situation at that moment until he catches up, then you

> accept it and see how you evaluate that aspect that he has been losing. It is more work, but I think it is better. You are considering the individual and not only a group. We are people"

She identifies CBLT as a means to holistically perceive students and their diverse needs. Flor acknowledges the increased workload associated with CBLT but underscores its value in nurturing individual growth and acknowledging each student's unique circumstances. Her commitment to CBLT's human-centered approach is evident in her language choices, emphasizing terms like "colors," "attend," "accept," and "individual."

Alejandra echoes the sentiment of opportunity, emphasizing the advantages of CBLT in facilitating specific and targeted student evaluation. She views CBLT as a means to enhance assessment precision and student attainment.

In these excerpts, a prevailing narrative of endorsement and optimism towards CBLT emerges. Teachers view CBLT as a vehicle for improved pedagogy, individualized student engagement, and holistic growth. This enthusiastic response underscores CBLT's alignment with participants' pedagogical philosophies and its perceived potential for positive educational transformation.

### Reflecting CBLT Principles in Classroom Practice

The interviews yielded another aspect of approval, highlighting that CBLT enhances specificity in assessment, rendering students' expectations more transparent. Alejandra's perspective exemplifies this sentiment, perceiving CBLT as an opportunity due to its precise evaluative framework. Furthermore, the interviews unveil how both teachers and students internalize the terms inherent in the CBLT curriculum, as evidenced in the following notes:



Use of Assessment

*The teacher talked about a project that Ss. have to complete to close with the topic. She said (the third element of knowledge) refering to the didactical sequence.*

*Figure 1. Observation Note 1*



Is CBE observed? How?

*The teacher based the content on the didactical sequence of the CBE program. Then, she was talking about a project, refering to the didactical sequence. Ss seemed to understand about the project & the references that the teacher was making to the didactical sequence.*

*Figure 2. Observation Note 2*

Flor explained the planned student activities and reviewed the didactical sequence, a key element of the CBLT curriculum. This practice reflects how the CBLT model defines the path toward desired student outcomes

(Richards, 2013). Flor's incorporation of the didactical sequence underscores students' awareness of their learning journey and assessment process.

Moreover, the teacher's adherence to the didactical sequence aligns with the institutional CBLT ideology. However, this can also limit teachers' autonomy, potentially diminishing their individual contributions to the classroom based on their experiences and pedagogical beliefs. This aspect echoes Hawkings et al.'s (2015) argument that educators may become narrowly focused on instrumental tasks, potentially detracting from their broader intellectual commitments and societal responsibilities.

Transitioning to the humanistic dimension of CBLT, teacher participants also underscored the model's emphasis on holistic student development. Within this framework, students' personal circumstances are acknowledged, and instructors assume a mentoring role to comprehensively support students. This humanistic aspect resonates as a key component of teachers' positive attitudes toward CBLT, as exemplified by Flor's statement:

> Flor: "I love it because we see the student as a human being. I like to think that I am working for humans and would like to contribute to being happier. If people are happy, we will live better, be more self-confident, and live and produce. Even when you push your students to give an extra, they perform better if you do it and know that you are interested in them. It is a win-win relationship. I do not get involved a lot with students. I do not think they need another friend, but I like that they feel that they interest me a lot, that their being and their happiness is important to me."

Teachers' endorsement of CBLT as a humanistic pedagogical approach is recurrent throughout interviews. This approach veers away from traditional detached numbers and statistics of education, fostering a closer teacher-student relationship. Flor's remarks emphasize her genuine interest in students' welfare, reflecting her commitment to their holistic growth. Notably, this caring disposition is observable in classroom settings, where teachers dedicate time to address students' academic concerns and exhibit flexibility toward learning challenges.

Ruohotie-Lyhty's (2013) assertions on significant, empathetic interactions shaping teachers' self-perception and identity resonate within the context of the Metropolitan University's educational model. Flexibility toward students' difficulties and academic matters underscores the humanistic ethos embedded within the CBLT approach. This observation reinforces the notion that the model's humanistic dimension is integral to its manifestation in classroom practices.

### The good teacher has always worked with competencies

Flor illustrates how she perceives an effective teacher as one who has consistently operated within a competency framework:

> Flor: "A very personal opinion is that the good teacher has always worked with competencies. It was accomplished to separate this vision of preparing students to incorporate them into the world of work. The student had to be treated as an integral being; I think the good teacher has always treated his students by a competency model because you not only see a grade in the student (at least that has always been my perspective). For me, assessment is formed by many things, and I have always said, the grade, the number is cold...for me, the student has a lot to teach. But I think a good teacher has always acted by competencies, is seeing your student as an integral human being, and not only a person with reading skills, reflection and a grade, it's over. No, I think that is much more than that."

Her beliefs exemplify the infiltration of these overarching ideologies into teachers' consciousness, thus influencing their instructional practices.

> Mariana: "I believe that we always have worked with competencies. They have a name now, but I feel that we always have worked by competencies. I feel that working by competencies is more organised because the teacher can see what he wants to achieve and what is wanted and could be reached. Then, if it is well organised, and the teacher understands it well, he can reach all the competencies established in the program or the curriculum, I do not know, and obviously, reach those objectives... Another positive aspect is when one can `read' the competencies. There is a way to follow, a direction. You are not lost because a teacher who is not working within a CBE program can often make their way or see the themes without landing them or linking them. And that is very important because you help the student see the complete picture of what he will learn and why."

Mariana further highlights the organizational benefits of working with competencies, emphasizing the clarity and direction they provide for lesson planning and learning objectives. Her sentiments resonate with the notion that CBLT offers a structured guide for teaching within the constructs of predetermined competencies, thereby aligning with concept of Richards (2013) when suggesting CBLT as a roadmap for reaching competencies. standardization through didactical sequences.

However, Kumaravadivelu (2008) asserts that established teaching methods are often overly idealized and detached from complex classroom realities. Despite this, participants in this study affirm their adaptability within the CBLT framework, underscoring their agency in tailoring the method to suit individual student contexts. Nonetheless, the participants' endorsement of competency-based teaching suggests an assimilation of CBLT's principles into their pedagogical identities.

In the following section, the study will delve into the assessment aspect within the context of CBLT, shedding light on its implications within the presented case study.

### Assessing Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT)

Among the assessment components integral to CBLT, the incorporation of rubrics stands out. A rubric function as a checklist, delineating the specific elements required in an assignment and indicating how it will be evaluated. This tool serves to gauge the level and caliber of a task or activity. In a rubric, criteria are outlined to evaluate students, along with the corresponding scores attributed to each criterion. Patricia elaborates on aspects she finds advantageous about the CBLT model implemented at the Metropolitan University:

> Patricia: "We have the rubrics, that maybe not all of them are used, but we have them. Then the student knows what is expected from him from the beginning when you ask for a mind map; then, the bibliography of the didactical sequence is also another resource. Then, I know what is expected of me and what I must do to develop such content or learning. I believe that students have enough tools, have the online platform, have spaces to look for digital bibliography, students have the library, and maybe they would like to have more bibliographies. Still, there is the bibliography, there are didactical sequences, there are rubrics, and there is a facilitator... I do consider that they have enough tools to work."

Mariana, Patricia, Flor, and other participants also accentuate the significance of rubrics, attesting to their specific utility and ready availability within the system for both teachers and students. Mariana underscores rubrics' role in simplifying teachers' tasks while acknowledging the potential complexities arising from intricate rubric design. She advocates for judicious rubric construction, emphasizing their fairness to students and facilitating effective feedback. The approval of rubrics is echoed by other participants who hail them as valuable components of CBLT. Mariana underscores the compatibility of CBLT with her teaching practices, thus reflecting an embrace of the model's philosophy.

Moreover, the adoption of rubrics for assessment reveals a degree of resonance with the CBLT principles among the participants. This aspect resonates with the model's core tenets of competency-based education, emphasizing skill development and holistic evaluation beyond rote memorization.

## Summative and Formative Assessment

Participants in this study express an underlying belief that certain elements are discouraged within the CBLT approach due to the summative implications they carry. It is noted that CBLT curriculum and assessment place greater emphasis on formative assessment. This perspective on assessment is elaborated through participants' accounts, as detailed below:

> Flor: "I like the rubrics, of course, I do exams because that is another misunderstanding: - in CBE, you do not make exams-... Of course, you take exams, but the questions have to be elaborated differently. I like to put them in hypothetical situations, expose them to their future practice and ask them. I always ask for an electronic portfolio integration at the end. Attendance is very important; for me, a student is formed with all class interactions. You learn different ways of working and solving problems, and not problems in the negative sense, but in the situations that arise."

Flor emphasizes her support for the CBLT model, clarifying that exams are not entirely excluded. She explains her approach to exams, embedding them in hypothetical scenarios that mirror real-world contexts. Additionally, electronic portfolios and projects are instrumental in acquainting students with practical challenges, preparing them for professional realities. Flor's perspective demonstrates her alignment with the CBLT assessment philosophy, where assessment is designed to reflect application-oriented competence.

Gabriela, too, underscores the merits of CBLT assessment, highlighting the shift towards a more comprehensive evaluation approach:

> Gabriela: "Something innovative for me is that you are not only evaluating knowledge. You holistically evaluate the student. You consider all those aspects that help you develop as a human being because you can have brilliant students, let's say... very skilful in the knowledge area. Still, they do not know how to be; you don't see them as professionals. You say he knows a lot but does not know how to develop. Competencies in that way come and allow you to say, "Well, assess the student in all aspects, not only on acquiring knowledge." And it is difficult for the student at first to demonstrate that he knows. But later, he gets used to it. He gets used to knowing that he has all the competencies: you have to know, you have to know how to do, you have to demonstrate me everything, not only on a sheet of paper show your knowledge, that maybe you have it recorded, you have a good memory, but you do not know how to apply it, you do not know how to share it. There is where the student learns to do this, and you do this, you have to demonstrate to me thoroughly that you know how to apply it, and how to share it."

Gabriela emphasizes the transformative nature of CBLT assessment, celebrating its withdrawal from mere knowledge evaluation. She commends the competency-based evaluation that engenders a holistic appraisal of students' growth. Gabriela further explains the multifaceted evaluation process, emphasizing active student engagement, self-assessment, and adaptive learning strategies. This aspect aligns with CBLT's philosophy of cultivating well-rounded competencies, echoing the broader philosophy of this educational paradigm.

Additionally, students' perspectives highlight their appreciation for the paradigm shift facilitated by the CBLT approach, acknowledging the transformation in both teachers' and students' roles:

> Students: "At a professional level, we do not have to depend on the teacher. We have everything written; we must do our part because the teacher is not here to guide us. He is here to support... not to be like mom or dad... is seeing the teacher more as a facilitator... The teacher will never say, "this is what I want, and do not do more than that. On the contrary, they say: do not do less than this. You can do it until here, but I would like you to do it until there."

Students acknowledge the evolving dynamic within the CBLT framework, where teachers transition from knowledge transmitters to facilitators, supporting an interactive, collaborative approach. The focus shifts from pursuing idealized outcomes to demonstrating acquired knowledge and skills, fostering active involvement and mutual learning.

As seen in this section, the assessment aspects of CBLT are evaluated through diverse lenses by participants in this study. While rubrics find favor for their structured evaluation and transparent criteria, the balance between summative and formative assessment is recognized. The formative emphasis aligns with CBLT's tenets, reflecting a deeper understanding of learning outcomes, practical application, and holistic development. This emphasis resonates with participants' appreciation for the model's shift in pedagogical roles, fostering student agency and active engagement while transcending conventional assessment paradigms.

## Conclusion

This article highlights the assimilation of the constructivist aspects of Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT), encompassing student assessment, among participating teachers. Both teachers and students exhibit an awareness of CBLT ideology and its classroom application regulations. This awareness contrasts with studies indicating that CBLT has devolved into a simulation due to insufficient comprehension of Competency-Based Education (CBE) principles (Pamplón Irigoyen and Villalobos, 2015; Robles-Haros

and Estévez-Nenninger, 2016; Lukindo, 2016; Saadi, Saeedi and Karbalaei, 2016; Velasco-Martínez, Díaz-Barriga and Tójar-Hurtado, 2017).

Teacher agency is situated within an approach that positions educators as learning facilitators, adhering to a predefined sequence or plan. The roster of competencies delineated by CBLT forms the criteria teachers should meet to assist students in attaining target competencies. This aspect suggests a linkage between the teacher's identity, professional experience, and agency. As indicated in the interviews, teachers feel "competent" to teach and evaluate within the CBLT framework, embracing constructivist and neoliberal ideals intrinsic to CBLT. Additionally, Prabhu (1990, cited in Hall, 2011) suggests that pursuing the "best" method is illogical, recognizing that teachers naturally adapt and amalgamate distinct methods to accommodate contextual nuances and personal beliefs.

Classroom observations reveal that teachers incorporate certain elements from the CBLT education model, integrating select features into their courses, yet the classes remain predominantly teacher-centered. This conclusion diverges from Lukindo's (2016) findings, where teachers exhibited knowledge of the model's fundamental aspects but struggled with the practical implementation of CBLT assessment, reverting to traditional assessment methods. This result contrasts with the Metropolitan University's scenario, where both teachers and students are well-acquainted with and trained in the CBLT educational model. The students engage in theoretical discussions guided by the teacher, although the predominant mode remains content delivery. The assertion arises that no singular method can be rigidly adhered to with a guarantee of optimal outcomes; instructors retain the flexibility to adapt based on contextual and local expertise. Hall's (2011) notion of "postmethod" underscores teachers' enhanced roles in decision-making, guided by a nuanced understanding of their students and pedagogical context. Language serves as a conduit for boundless communication and growth, unlocking diverse avenues of understanding.

The key lies in educators' sustained sensitivity towards their learners' linguistic development through EMI. However, a risk emerges if educators succumb to a content-driven approach, relegating their classroom to external methodological dictates. Nonetheless, challenges persist, as not all instructors possess the time, resources, or willingness to shoulder the extensive decision-making this method entails, leading to the replacement of methods with textbook-defined practices. Based on observations at the Metropolitan University, teachers exhibit adaptability in their instructional methods, tailoring their approaches to time constraints and student needs.

## References

[1] Ahearn, L. (2001). Language and Agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 30(1), 109-137.

[2] Alderson, J. C., & Wall, D. (1993). Does Washback Exist? *Applied Linguistics,* 14, 115–129.

[3] Argudin, Y. (2010). *La educación basada en competencias:* Available at:http://itzel.lag.uia.mx/publico/publicaciones/acequias/acequias17/a17p8.html (Accessed: March 17, 2017).

[4] Auerbach, E. R. (1986). Competency-Based ESL: One Step Forward or Two Steps Back? *TESOL Quarterly*, 20(3), 411. doi: 10.2307/3586292.

[5] Baartman, L. K. J. et al. (2007). Teachers' opinions on quality criteria for Competency Assessment Programs. *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 23(6), 857–867. doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2006.04.043.

[6] Bader Bataineh, K. and Tasnimi, M. (2014). Competency-Based Language Teaching. *Express, an International Journal of Multi Disciplinary Research,* 1(7), 2348–2052.

[7] Biesta, G., Priestley, M. and Robinson, S. (2015). The role of beliefs in teacher agency. *Teachers and Teaching*, 21(6), 624–640. doi: 10.1080/13540602.2015.1044325.

[8] Casanova, Ma. A. (2008). *Educar para la ciudadanía intercultural y democrática.* Madrid, España: Editorial La Muralla.

[9] Cohen, L., Lawrence, M., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research Methods in Education* (7th ed.). Routledge.

[10] Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educative research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research.* 4th edn. Boston, MA: Pearson.

[11] Díaz, F., Arceo, B. and Bravo, R. B. (2014). Diseño y Validación de una propuesta de evaluación auténtica de competencias en un programa de formación de docentes de educación básica en México. Perspectiva Educacional. *Formación de Profesores,* 53(1), 36–56. doi: 10.4151/07189729-Vol.53-Iss.1-Art.210.

[12] Duff, P. (2019). *Case Study Research in Applied Linguistics. In Litosseliti, L. (*ed.) Research Methods in Linguistics. Second Edi. London. New York, Oxford, New Delhi. Sydney: Bloomsbury, pp. 305–330.

[13] Duffy, T. M. and Cunningham, D. J. (1996). *Constructivism: Implications for the Design and Delivery of Instruction*. In Foundations for Research in Educative Communications and Technology, pp. 1–31.

[14] Emirbayer, M. and Mische, A. (1998). What is agency? *American Journal of Sociology,* 103(4), 962–1023. doi: 10.1086/231294.

[15] Garcia Ramos (1989). *Las Funciones del Profesorado.* Análisis de la Programación y de la Evaluación. Bordon, 41(3), 447–458.

[16] Garfolo, B. T. and L'Huillier, B. (2016). Competency Based Education (CBE): Baby Steps for the United States. *Academy of Business Research Journal,* 1, 97–114.

[17] Hall, G. (2011). *Exploring English Language Teaching: Language in Action* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203827840

[18] Hawkins, R. E. et al. (2015). Implementation of competency-based medical education: Are we addressing the concerns and challenges? *Medical Education,* 49(11), 1086–1102. doi: 10.1111/medu.12831.

[19] Klein-Collins, R. (2013). Sharpening Our Focus on Learning: The Rise of Competency-Based Approaches to Degree Completion. *Occasional Paper,* 20, 4–21.

[20] Robles-Haros, Estévez-Nenninger, B., (2016). Enfoque por competencias: Problemáticas didácticas que enfrentan el profesorado Competence Approach: Educative Problems Faced by Teachers. *Revista Electrónica Educare* (Educare Electronic Journal), 20(1), 1409–4258. doi: 10.15359/ree.20-1.25.

[21] Kalaja, P. et al. (2015). *Beliefs, Agency and Identity in Foreign Language Learning and Teaching.* 1st ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

[22] Kumaravadivelu, B. (2008). *Understanding Language Teaching: From Method to Post method.* London: Taylor & Francis e-Library.

[23] Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

[24] Lokhoff, J. *et al.* (2010) *Tuning Educative Structures in Europe, A Guide to Formulating Degree Programme Profiles.* Edited by J. (Nuffic) Lokhoff et al. Bilbao, Groningen and The Hague: Universidad de Deusto. Available at: http://tuningacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/A-Guide-to-Formulating-DPP_EN.pdf (Accessed: May 23, 2017).

[25] Lukindo, J. J. (2016) "Exploring Competence Based Education (CBE) in Rural Secondary Schools in Tanzania: English Language Teachers' Conceptions and Experiences," *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(29), pp.64–67. Available at: http://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/viewFile/33596/34539 (Accessed: February 19, 2017).

[26] Mercer, S. (2012) "The Complexity of Learner Agency," *Apples - Journal of Applied Language Studies*, 6(2), pp. 41–59.

[27] Mitchell, R., Myles, F. and Marsden, E. (2019) *Second Language Learning Theories*. 4th edn. New York: Routledge.

[28] Palys, T. (2008) "Purposive Sampling," *Qualitative Research Methods*, 2, pp. 697–8.

[29] Pamplón Irigoyen, E. N. and Villalobos (2015) "Las prácticas docentes en los programas de enseñanza del inglés en primarias públicas," in *La enseñanza del inglés en la primarias públicas mexicanas*, pp. 179–198.

[30] Prabhu, N. S. (1990). There is no best method—why? *TESOL Quarterly*, 24, 161–176. https://doi.org/10.2307/353586897

[31] Priestley, M., Biesta, G. and Robinson, S. (2012) *Teacher Agency and Curriculum Change* (ESRC reference: RES-000-22-4208) Understanding Teacher Agency: The Importance of Relationships.

[32] Richards, J. C. (2013) "Curriculum Approaches in Language Teaching: Forward, Central, and Backward Design," *RELC Journal*, 44(1), pp. 5–33. doi: 10.1177/0033688212473293.

[33] Rose, H., McKinley, J. and Briggs, B.-D. (2020) *Data Collection Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*. First. Great Britain: Bloomsbury.

[34] Ruohotie-Lyhty, M. (2013) "Struggling for a professional identity: two newly qualified language teachers' identity narratives during their first years at work," *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 30, pp. 120–129.

[35] Ryohei, M. (2017) "The Paradox of Evidence-based Education: From the Decline of Education to Abandonment of the Theories of Education *,*" *Educative Studies in Japan: International Yearbook Japanese the Japanese Journal of Educative Research*, 11(822), p. 101/119.

[36] Saadi, M., Saeedi, A. A. R. A. and Karbalaei, A. (2016) "Competency-based English Teaching and Learning: Investigating the Learning Experience of Islamic Azad University Teachers in Iran," *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies (IJHCS) ISSN 2356-5926*, 3(1), pp. 1181–1206.

[37] Sambell, K., McDowell, L. and Montgomery, C. (2013) *Assessment for Learning in Higher Education*. 1st ed. London and New York: Routledge.

[38] Schcolnik, M., Kol, S. and Abarbanel, J. (2006) "Constructivism in Theory and in Practice," *English Teaching Forum*, v44(n4), pp. 12–20.

[39] Thomas, G. (2016) *How to do your Case Study*. Second. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: SAGE Publications.

[40] Tobón, S. (2008) "*La formación basada en competencias en la educación superior: el enfoque complejo,"* México: Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara.

[41] Van Dijk, T. A. (2009). *Discurso y Poder. Contribuciones a los estudios críticos del discurso.* 1st edn. Barcelona: Gedisa

[42] Velasco-Martínez, L. C., Díaz-Barriga, F., & Tójar-Hurtado, J.-C. (2017). Acquisition and Evaluation of Competencies by the Use of Rubrics: Qualitative Study on University Faculty Perceptions in Mexico. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences,* 237(March), 869–874. doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2017.02.185.

[43] Viennet, R., & Pont, B. (2017). Education Policy Implementation: A Literature Review and Proposed Framework (OECD Education Working Paper No. 162). *Directorate for Education and Skills, OECD.* URL https://one.oecd.org/document/EDU/WKP(2017)11/En/pdf

[44] Webster, R. S. (2017) "Education or Quality of Teaching? Implications for Australian Democracy," *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 42(4). doi: 10.14221/ajte.2017v42n9.4.