



Language Program Directors Speak Out: Challenges and Opportunities in Enhancing L2 Pedagogy

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Abstract

Intercultural competence and social justice are increasingly becoming priorities in university-level second language (L2) teaching in the United States. However, previous research demonstrates that, in many departments, deep-rooted instructional practices remain at odds with these objectives. This qualitative study, based on semi-structured interviews, explored the experiences of nine language program directors (LPDs), responsible for shaping and overseeing undergraduate instruction, who worked at nine different four-year colleges and universities in the United States during 2021-2022. It aimed to identify (a) the primary teaching methods used in their departments and (b) self-reported obstacles encountered in effecting pedagogical change. Findings revealed a heavy reliance on communicative approaches, frequently accompanied by goals to prioritize social justice and intercultural competence, which were hindered for some participants by institutional, departmental/programmatic, resource, knowledge/skill, and attitudinal barriers. Recommendations are provided for minimizing such obstacles, promoting democratic sharing of pedagogical knowledge within departments/programs, and enabling evidence-based pedagogical change.

Keywords: *Second/Foreign Language Pedagogy, Language Program Direction, Social Justice Education, Intercultural Competence*

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Introduction

Second language (L2) teaching and learning scholarship increasingly emphasizes equipping students with multifaceted academic skills, content knowledge, and literacy in addition to oral proficiency (Dupuy & Michelson, 2019; Paesani et al., 2016). L2 teaching and pedagogy must also respond to rampant discrimination, racism, hate crimes, and ideological polarization both in the United States and worldwide (McLaren, 2019; Paesani et al., 2023; Randolph Jr. & Johnson, 2017). These challenges – paired with existential threats faced by many United States postsecondary L2 programs by decreased enrollments and funding (Johnson, 2019) – illustrate the heightened stakes of modern L2 pedagogy. In response, many universities and departments have adopted mission statements related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and the promotion of social justice (Thaler, 2013). However, such objectives remain at odds with United States university L2 departments' and mass-market textbooks' widespread use of communicative language teaching (CLT), which, in certain iterations, often emphasizes surface-level oral production at the expense of more in-depth sociocultural and sociopolitical topics (Allen & Paesani, 2010; Paesani et al., 2023; Peñas & Quevedo-Webb, 2021).

This mismatch of objectives and methods echoes the Modern Language Association's 2007 call for drastic curricular change in L2 teaching and illustrates its continued relevance 17 years later (Lomicka & Lord, 2018). As a field, we urgently need to make our aims of teaching for social justice a reality (Piller, 2007; Reagan & Osborn, 2021; Wassell & Glynn, 2022). Although scholars have documented the implementation of pedagogical activities centering social justice (Dion, 2020; Goodspeed et al., 2023; Kong, 2022; Leiva et al., 2021; Wassell & Koch, 2023) and proposed model materials for planning and teaching (Paesani et al., 2023), they have also noted numerous challenges in advancing L2 pedagogy and observed that L2 teaching tends to resist change (Menke & Paesani, 2019; Wassell et al., 2019). While difficult for all involved, language program directors (LPDs), often find themselves particularly trapped between their responsibility for pedagogical oversight (and thus for instituting/initiating change) and the effects of institutional barriers and inertia (Goodspeed et al., 2023; Maxim, 2014; Swanson & Levine, 2020). However, prior scholarship has not directly spoken to LPDs across institutions and L2s to investigate the challenges they face in their roles as pedagogical mediators. Thus, this qualitative study aimed to understand LPDs' challenges, opportunities, and future directions in enacting curricular change. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed via thematic analysis. Concrete implications for language program direction are provided to facilitate LPDs' ability to effectively shape L2 pedagogy in accordance with pertinent learning objectives.

Literature Review

Overview of L2 Teaching Approaches/Methods/Techniques¹

Predominant L2 pedagogies have evolved over time, shifting from grammar-translation in the early twentieth century (Chastain, 1976) to the audio-lingual approach in the 1940s-1950s (Lado, 1964), and finally to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the 1960s, which continues to heavily influence present-day L2 pedagogy (Allen & Paesani, 2010; Lomicka & Lord, 2018).

Approaches/methods/techniques from the early twentieth century, including grammar-translation and the audio-lingual approach, tended to be rule-based, emphasized repetition without meaningful context, and did not prioritize proficiency, creativity, or the expression of personal meaning in the L2 (Omaggio Hadley, 2001). In response to these deficiencies, CLT became increasingly popular in the 1960s/70s and focused on students' ability to communicate in the L2 in contextualized, real-life situations that could be encountered in an imagined target culture, now better understood as diverse, plural, and multifaceted target cultures. Amidst the massive rise of CLT, different iterations began to emerge. Early versions, or "strong" CLT (Howatt, 1984), emphasized the use of real-world tasks in the classroom incorporating oral and written L2 production and interpretation (Canale & Swain, 1980). Unfortunately, "weak" CLT (Howatt, 1984) is generally more commonly used in modern university L2 teaching and textbooks. Instead of focusing on using language, "weak" CLT emphasizes learning language, often artificially separating language and content (Byrnes, 2006) and sometimes devolving into an overemphasis on grammar and vocabulary (Allen & Paesani, 2010).

¹ Traditionally, scholarship on L2 pedagogy has clearly separated the terms *approach* – theoretical frameworks guiding teaching and learning, *method* – course materials and curriculum used to enact the approach, and *technique* – activities and teaching practices (Omaggio Hadley, 2001). However, this study uses the term *approaches/methods/techniques* since LPDs in this study often referred to teaching practices of others in their department untrained in L2 pedagogy who did not make neat or conscious separations of these terms in their day-to-day.

Although CLT certainly has useful components, Allen and Paesani (2010) and Dupuy and Michelson (2019) have remarked that it may not be sufficient to fulfill the needs of today's L2 learners. This problematization aligns with the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages' (2007) call for large-scale curricular change in L2 teaching and is also reflected in ACTFL's 5Cs of the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (2015). According to these standards, Communication is a necessary but insufficient outcome; instead, L2 courses should also focus on Cultural knowledge and understanding, Comparisons between cultural contexts, Connections with other academic disciplines, and compassionate engagement with multilingual Communities. Consequently, interest has also increased in literacies-based methods – such as multiliteracies (Kern, 2000; New London Group, 1996; Paesani et al., 2016) – aiming to seamlessly incorporate language and content; promote critical thinking, analysis, and other 21st-century skills; and foster written and interpretive abilities in addition to oral proficiency.

Teaching for Social Justice

Given the recent proliferation of racism, discrimination, and ideological polarization both in the United States and worldwide (McLaren, 2019), there has also been an overall increase in universities' and L2 departments' prioritization of teaching for social justice (Caballero-García, 2018; Starkie & Sidotti, 2023). For example, ACTFL's 2016 and 2019 position statements reinforce the organization's prioritization of diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI), and social justice in L2 teaching. Crucially, though, Wassell and Koch (2023) caution against perceiving this transition toward DEI-based teaching as a done deal, noting that “The terms diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice have become ubiquitous (...). Yet the extent to which the ideals behind these words are realities in today's world language classrooms is less clear” (p. 85).

Therefore, scholars and instructors have begun theoretically outlining social justice education in the L2 classroom and proposing sample activities across levels. Randolph and Johnson (2017) outlined the essential components of social justice-oriented L2 education: namely, a pedagogy that affords students appropriate autonomy, provides opportunities for reflection, uses authentic resources, challenges dominant cultural narratives, encourages out-of-class critical reflection, teaches students to respectfully navigate controversial topics, and fosters trust and community in the classroom. Abrahams and Farías (2010) emphasize that this type of instruction is especially important in L2 courses since “the power of language in the construction and struggle against such social evils as discrimination, injustice, and domination should be untapped as a means to social transformation” (p. 111) and Macedo (2019) argues that education should also aim to deconstruct the colonial legacies of commonly taught languages.

Similarly, Paesani et al. (2023) developed a template for L2 teachers to plan for social justice-based instruction and created model units and lessons for French, German, and Spanish at various levels organized around themes such as linguistic oppression and language identity in French Louisiana or cultural appropriation and stereotyping in Latin America. Somewhat similarly, Peñas and Quevedo-Webb (2021) are compiling an ongoing list of social justice units and lesson plans for L2 Spanish grouped around themes such as *La ropa y la identidad*, which focuses on how physical appearance contributes to identity expression for members of various minoritized groups. Finally, recognizing the limitations of popular L2 French textbooks, Blattner et al. (2023) detail the creation and use of #OnYGo, an open educational resource (OER) for beginning French that “redraws the francophone landscape through a lens of social justice and cultivates learners' awareness of language variation and identity via translanguaging, the development of metalinguistic awareness, and the thoughtful use of digital tools” (p. 141). The authors advocate for more widespread adoption of OER-based curricula to better represent the cultural and linguistic diversity of French-speaking communities.

The Role of Language Program Directors (LPDs)

Despite this burgeoning body of pedagogical resources that could be instrumental in transforming L2 teaching, it is important to note that the large-scale, consistent implementation of any approach/method/technique – be it grounded in social justice, literacies, or communication – in L2

departments is often the responsibility, at least in part, of an LPD. In most moderate-large four-year United States universities, as well as many smaller institutions, there is at least one faculty member (typically non-tenure-track) charged with overseeing undergraduate beginning and intermediate L2 instruction, implementing pedagogies and assessments, selecting materials, coordinating logistics, and training and evaluating instructors (Levine et al., 2008; Lord, 2014; Paesani & Barrette, 2005). Some faculty in these roles may also teach undergraduate or graduate classes and/or conduct research. Since specific duties vary across universities and departments, this study purposefully cast a wide net, seeking to include the voices of all individuals with LPD-like roles to best reflect the diverse realities of LPDs in four-year university programs in the United States. Although the official position titles of these faculty members vary (Lord, 2014) and include language program coordinators, language program directors, and directors or coordinators of basic language, this study adopted the term language program directors (LPDs), since this was the most common title employed by participants themselves.

Barriers to Pedagogical Change in L2 Departments

LPDs play an important role in dictating pedagogical approaches/methods/techniques and in aligning instruction to meet the department's learning objectives (Levine et al., 2008). In many ways, they embody Campbell's (2012) description of teachers who "are seen as alternatively agents of socialization as well as change agents, whose choices and actions variably reflect the implementation, interpretation, adaptation, alteration, substitution, subversion, and/or creation of the curriculum contexts in which they work" (p. 183). However, scholarship has demonstrated that their influence is not as direct or unhampered as it may seem; instead, as Menke and Paesani (2019) remark, "entrenched" practices – such as weak CLT – that have been predominant for decades are infamously hard to change (Swaffar, 2014, p. 33). Consequently, the widespread curricular reform called for in the MLA (2007) report remains largely unachieved in university L2 teaching in the United States. Instead, programs that have been redesigned around social justice or literacy-informed instruction are the exception rather than the norm (Swanson & Levine, 2020).

LPDs report to stakeholders with unique and often contradictory interests including students, instructors, teaching assistants, tenure-track and tenured faculty, the department chair, and the school, college, and university at large (Allen & Paesani, 2010; VanPatten, 2015). As a result, their curricular decisions are subject to the influence of large- and small-scale forces, hierarchies, and expectations, meaning that:

Successful transformations of existing foreign language programs (...) must take into account (...) historical institutional configurations, emerging interdisciplinary relations, local institutional priorities, faculty roles, internationalization efforts, graduate student training, research and funding priorities in the professions, and even the public discourse on foreign language education. (Urlaub, 2014, p. 4)

Indeed, a commonality among accounts of successful L2 program transformations at U.S. universities is a deliberate, consensus alignment of these components and strong collaboration between all department faculty in conjunction with the LPD. Paesani (2017), for instance, described the extensive coordination, energy, and effort required over three years to implement a cultural literacy-based curriculum in the first three course levels of a University French program. The project involved 12 dedicated instructors who used backward design to create and enact the curriculum and extensive evaluation of the new sequence over the following years. Similarly, Bilbao Terreros and Bono (2019) and Maxim (2014) recounted curricular transformations of undergraduate programs in Spanish/Portuguese and German, respectively, at two private United States universities. Both projects entailed consistent collaboration between tenure-track faculty, lecturers, and graduate students, ongoing pedagogical workshops and training, collective curriculum development, and ongoing evaluation. Finally, Ruf et al. (2023) detailed a three-year project involving postsecondary language teachers participating in a program to develop social-justice-informed curricula for several L2s. Importantly, participants in this program were hired and paid for their work. Taken together, these success stories illustrate the substantial amount of coordination, time, and commitment required to truly achieve change. In addition, an essential question remains regarding the continuing efficacy and stakeholders' perception of such efforts, since only a minority of published attempts report long-term

evaluation of the new curricula.

Research and scholarship have corroborated these difficulties faced by LPDs. Allen and Paesani (2010), for instance, outlined obstacles hindering implementation of multiliteracies pedagogy in university L2 departments, noting that LPDs must seek the buy-in of multiple stakeholders while simultaneously navigating limitations of commercial textbooks and entrenched teaching practices (such as weak CLT). Allen (2014), Arens (2014), and Urlaub (2014) expand on these difficulties, noting that graduate teaching assistants in particular, although often responsible for the majority of introductory and intermediate L2 instruction at large universities in the United States, are frequently unprepared to respond to the challenges of instructional reform. These graduate student instructors, usually supervised by an LPD, typically complete only one semester of formal pedagogical coursework, focused on one or two primary methods/approaches/techniques and their application in the introductory levels of instruction (Allen, 2014; Arens, 2014). Consequently, they can understandably face difficulties when asked to transform their teaching style or adapt to a new curriculum.

Additional challenges faced by LPDs in coordinating curricular change are detailed by Paesani and Allen (2020), who noted that teachers' inflexible beliefs about language pedagogy, mass-produced materials, and a lack of continued professional development for instructors obstruct pedagogical change. Menke and Paesani (2019) also conducted course observations and semi-structured interviews with non-tenure-track L2 teaching faculty, concluding that even instructors trained in approaches/methods/techniques such as multiliteracies or social justice education often fell back into entrenched practices like weak CLT. Relatedly, Baggett et al.'s (2020) study of 196 United States K-12 L2 teachers' critical consciousness found that most participants did not simultaneously consider students' multifaceted identities to be (a) relevant to teaching and learning, (b) their responsibility to address in the classroom, and (c) related to their teaching practices. Although not specific to the university context, this friction illustrates the challenges LPDs face in coordinating pedagogical change across an entire program. Other obstacles reported by teachers and LPDs in adopting social justice-based pedagogies include lack of support from colleagues and students, insufficient curricular resources (Wassell et al., 2019), time and job role constraints, emotional bandwidth (Goodspeed et al., 2023), and emotion labor (Warner & Diao, 2022).

Ultimately, given LPDs' unique positions within their institutions and departments, their potential to influence pedagogical practices, and their accountability to numerous stakeholders, it is essential that research address LPDs directly and allow them to speak out regarding the challenges, obstacles, and/or barriers they encounter in making pedagogical decisions. However, extended conversations with LPDs themselves are largely missing from existing research and scholarship. Therefore, this study is based on semi-structured interviews with LPDs from various colleges and universities in the United States to provide practitioner-informed recommendations for post-secondary language program administration.

Methods

This study was guided by the following research questions (RQs):

1. What pedagogical approaches/methods/techniques did U.S. university LPDs report being used in their departments and how do they perceive these approaches/methods/techniques?
2. What types of self-reported obstacles (if any) are faced by U.S. university LPDs in implementing new pedagogies and/or curricula in their departments?

Participants

This study focused on the experiences, attitudes, and perspectives of nine university LPDs who worked at nine different four-year colleges and universities in the United States during the 2021-2022 academic year. Potential participants were identified by searching the L2 department websites of at least one major Research 1 (R1) or Research 2 (R2) institution and one smaller regional institution in each state and identifying full-time faculty members listed as 'language program directors/coordinators' or

‘directors/coordinators of basic language.’ L2 departments specific to a language such as Spanish, French, German, and Chinese departments, as well as programs within Modern or World Language departments were included. A total of 98 LPDs were invited to participate via an email sent to their institutional email addresses. Given this study’s aim to reflect the diversity of the experiences of LPDs in real institutions – which are not one-size-fits-all – respondents were eligible to participate regardless of language(s) taught, first language(s), department type or name, research interests, and amount of experience as an LPD.

28 LPDs responded to the invitation to participate. Of these respondents, the nine who were available for an interview in late Fall 2021 or early Spring 2022 were selected for the study. They included seven identifying as women and two as men (Table 1). They had between 1-19.5 years of experience as LPDs with an average of 7.1 years. Six participants taught Spanish, two French, and one Portuguese. Five worked at R1 institutions, two at R2 institutions, and two at smaller, regional institutions across the Western, Southwestern, Midwestern, Eastern, and Southeastern United States. They reported diverse research interests in the fields of applied second language acquisition, language pedagogy, and applied linguistics. Two participants also conducted research on literature and culture related to their language of focus.

Table 1. *Summary of Participant Characteristics*

Pseudonym	Gender Identity	First Language (L1)	Primary Language Taught	Institution Type	Institution Location (U.S)	Department Name	# Years Experience as a Language Program Coordinator/Director at Time of Interview
Andrew	Man	English	French	R1	Southwest	French and Italian	19.5
Emma	Woman	English	Spanish	Regional	Midwest	Modern Languages	6
Holly	Woman	English	French	R2	Midwest	Modern Languages	3
Josefina	Woman	Spanish	Spanish	R1	Midwest	Spanish & Portuguese	7
Katy	Woman	English	Spanish	R1	Midwest	Modern Languages	3.5
Lucía	Woman	Spanish	Spanish	R1	Midwest	Hispanic & Italian Studies	5
Marina	Woman	Spanish	Portuguese	R1	West	Spanish & Portuguese	4
Richard	Man	English	Spanish	R2	Southwest	Modern Languages & Linguistics	15
Sarah	Woman	English	Spanish	Regional	East	Modern Languages	1

Data Collection

The data for this study consisted of semi-structured interviews. Each participant was interviewed by the researcher via Zoom in Fall 2021 or Spring 2022. Interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 21 minutes 52 seconds and 44 minutes 32 seconds (average duration: 34 minutes 26 seconds).

The interviews were organized in two sections reflecting the study’s RQs. The first part of the interviews asked participants to discuss the teaching approaches/methods/techniques used by themselves and other

instructors in their departments and their perceptions of these approaches/methods/techniques. The second part of the interviews focused on challenges faced by participants in implementing new pedagogies or curricula in their departments. Within this format, the interviews were conducted in semi-structured fashion (Glesne, 2016), allowing for questions and comments that emerged to be incorporated and for open, collegial dialogue to occur, and acknowledging that all research interviews are inherently “sites of social interaction, where ideas, facts, views, details, and stories are collaboratively produced by interviewee and interviewer” (Mann, 2011, p. 8). To encourage them to freely share their experiences, participants had no pre-existing relationship with the researcher and were assured that their identifying information would be kept confidential.

Data Analysis

Before beginning analysis, participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identities and all mentions of their institutions’ names in the interview were removed. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and member-checked for accuracy with participants via email. Qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts was rooted in thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldaña, 2021) and involved qualitative coding to “categorize patterns of meaning” (Jnanathapaswi, 2021) and “sear[ch] for themes and patterns through [separating] data into categories (..) and then analyzing the coded clumps of data” (Glesne, 2016, p. 301). Research questions were developed deductively rather than inductively (Miles & Huberman, 1994), meaning that they were specific and dictated the types of themes (although not the specific themes) identified during data analysis, namely the pedagogical methods/approaches/techniques used in participants’ departments and challenges and obstacles faced by participants in making pedagogical changes. Coding was conducted in Google Sheets by splitting each interview transcript into separate rows and performing two subsequent rounds of coding (Saldaña, 2021).

Coding

The first round of qualitative coding (Saldaña, 2021) involved examining the interview transcripts line-by-line to identify patterns and themes, which were noted in the margins and combined into a codebook, allowing for visualization of the codes and subcodes. Next, a second round of coding aimed to test, revise, condense, consolidate, and combine codes, to “understand the relationships among them and to develop themes and theoretical organization” (Glesne, 2016, p. 200). This refinement of codes was subject to the interpretation and judgment of the researcher as well as the co-construction of meaning that occurred during the interviews themselves, but was firmly grounded in the data through a constant comparative process whereby codes appearing in one part of the data (e.g., for one participant or at the beginning of an interview as opposed to the end) were compared with those in other parts to uncover possible relationships between them (Glesne, 2016).

Findings

Balancing Traditional and Contemporary Approaches/Methods/Techniques

Participants reported three categories of approaches/methods/techniques that were employed in their departments: (a) CLT, (b) approaches/methods/techniques focused on intercultural competence, social justice, or multiliteracies, and (c) traditional approaches/methods/techniques such as grammar-translation (Table 2).

Table 2. List and Progression of Qualitative Codes for RQ1 – Prevalent Methods/Approaches/Techniques

First Code List	Final Code List
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLT • Task-Based Teaching • Project-Based Learning • Integrated Performance Assessments • Meaning-Centered Teaching • Flipped Classrooms • Content-Based Teaching • Student-Centered Methods • Intercultural Competence • Interlingual Competence • Dictated by Textbook • Grammar-Translation • Teacher-Centered Methods • Forms-Focused Methods • Drills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Task-Based Teaching – Project-Based Learning – Integrated Performance Assessments • Newer/Contemporary Methods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Content-Based Teaching – Methods Based on Intercultural / Interlingual Competence – Multiliteracies – Social Justice Approaches • Traditional Methods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Grammar-Translation – Forms-Focused Methods – Drills

Of these pedagogical frameworks, CLT was particularly prevalent, confirming previous observations by Allen & Paesani (2010) and Paesani et al. (2023). All nine participants identified at least one aspect of teaching in their departments that could be considered ‘communicative’, with (at least in theory) an overarching emphasis on meaning rather than rote grammar and vocabulary, as illustrated below by Sarah and Josefina (all emphasis added):

Our instructors agreed to use [...] projects as the primary assessments in the course. So we could definitely call that a **project or performance-based assessment model**. And the design of the program, which is like a **flipped [classroom] model**, sort of moves the explicit instruction to outside the classroom and then leaves the **communicative activities** in the classroom (Sarah, Spanish LPD at regional institution on the East coast).

Our courses are **content driven**². And there is some degree of focus on form, meaning that when the need arises to address an issue or give feedback [on grammar], then the feedback is provided, but we **don’t** have the **grammar lesson, grammar explanation, grammar unit** explicitly built-in within the courses (Josefina, Spanish LPD at Midwest R1).

As illustrated by these quotes, some participants such as Sarah specifically mentioned “communication” or “communicative” in describing their departments’ methods. Others, like Josefina, discussed CLT indirectly, by identifying what it, in theory, is *not* – explicit and repeated in-class grammar instruction. In repeating the word ‘grammar’ three times: “grammar lesson, grammar explanation, grammar unit”, Josefina emphasized her belief that CLT is often misunderstood and implemented in a grammar-centric way, a stance that she had established earlier in the interview, stating “We’re not all on the same page. (...) If we *mean* communicative language teaching, we cannot be talking about focus on grammar and forms, (...) where they drive our syllabus, like I often see.” Misunderstandings and mis-implementations such as these have also been widely documented in the literature (Allen & Paesani, 2010; Byrnes, 2006).

Relatedly, when discussing their department’s approaches/methods/techniques, participants often focused

² Although many proponents of content-based instruction do not associate it with CLT, Josefina had stated elsewhere in the interview that she personally did consider the former to be situated under the umbrella of CLT: “By focusing on content, we center meaning instead of grammar, which is a key tenet of communicative teaching.”

on how they were enacted. Interestingly, many participants described communicative approaches/methods/techniques with words or phrases indicating that they deemed these approaches a type of *ideal* that was not routinely *implemented* in their departments. These statements often accompanied comments about the presence of competing pedagogies that could be classified as ‘traditional’, or grammar-focused. For instance, Richard noted:

I’d say second-year teaching assistants should be doing a pretty decent job of not lecturing grammar [...] in class. The five or six full-time instructors that we have – chances are that their teaching is really traditional. They still do a lot of teacher-led things [...]. Maybe not, hopefully not grammar call-and-response, but they do a lot of grammar-based drills (Richard, Spanish LPD at Southeast R2).

In this statement, Richard used “decent job” and “maybe not, hopefully not” to indicate his perception of communicative, meaning-based methods as an ideal that he then contrasts with the grammar and form-focused activities employed by his instructors. Significantly fewer participants identified CLT as being consistently practiced in their departments. A notable exception to this pattern was Lucía, who remarked:

Our purpose is to have truly communicative language teaching ... in the sense that our purpose is to have meaning to convey messages and to learn about each other and the people in our community. So that is our framework – the communicative approach – and I hate to say that because everybody says that, but I think that we truly achieve that (Lucía, Spanish LPD at Midwest R1).

In this passage, Lucía separated herself from “everybody” else who claimed to use CLT and stated that she believed that her department truly achieved that goal. In this way, Lucía stood out from the other eight participants, perhaps because, in recent years, she received departmental permission and financial support to completely redesign the Spanish language program at her institution, including the course descriptions, syllabi, and materials.

Approaches/methods/techniques other than CLT – such as those focused on intercultural competence or social justice – were mentioned by many participants as being important, but not consistently applied in their departments. As demonstrated below by Andrew, several LPDs in this sample reported wanting to be “better” and “more intention[al]” with social justice, diversity, and equity, but were hindered by various impediments.

I think that one thing we have to do better and more intentionally in our program is how inclusive our content is and how much diversity and equity is represented in our materials. I really want to do a deep analysis on how well we’re doing in terms of being socially conscious and including everyone. But so much of my time is spent managing instructors and teaching frameworks and approaches (Andrew, French LPD at Southwest R1).

Finally, participants’ perceptions of the approaches/methods/techniques used in their departments were often tied to their beliefs about second language acquisition, language teaching and learning, and the nature of language and/or communication. As could be expected, these beliefs varied widely between participants and often corresponded with their professional or research interests. For instance, Mariana’s research focused on input (the understandable language that learners are exposed to; Krashen, 1985) and output (student production of the L2; Swain, 2000) in L2 learning. Consequently, in explaining why she perceived the more traditional teaching materials of others in her department to be ineffective, she stated:

You can’t have a language program that focuses on input and output sequences ending in tasks – and tasks have a purpose at the end and they’re something tangible that you can walk away with – you can’t do that with any old, traditional textbook, but they [her colleagues] think you can (Mariana, Portuguese LPD at Western R1).

Similarly, Holly, whose research interests included individual differences in second language acquisition, repeatedly referenced the importance of these factors in explaining why she generally approved of her department’s teaching methods/approaches/techniques, but doesn’t expect them to work for every student:

I guess that's the whole goal – trying to be individualized and humane. And I don't think it [her department's pedagogical framework] works for some people. You have to understand how people react and unfortunately, you can't really do that for every single student. You have to choose a style. People react differently to different styles and that's part of the job to figure all of that out (Holly, French LPD at Midwest R2).

In sum, participants reported a variety of approaches/methods/techniques that were used in their departments, but those classified as 'communicative' were the most common and were mentioned by all nine LPDs in this study. In many cases, more modern teaching frameworks, including those focused on intercultural competence or social justice, were associated with language indicating that they were perceived as ideal methods that were not necessarily implemented in practice. Participants' perceptions of their department's teaching methods/approaches/techniques were influenced by their own professional and academic backgrounds, research interests, and beliefs about second language acquisition.

Institutional, Departmental, Resource, Knowledge, and Attitudinal Barriers to Pedagogical Change

Participants identified five categories of obstacles they faced when implementing pedagogical changes in their departments: institutional barriers, departmental and programmatic barriers, resource barriers, knowledge and skill barriers, and attitude barriers (see Table 3). These categories often overlapped and co-occurred in the data. Additionally, the types and frequency of barriers varied from participant to participant, which is logical given the complexity of higher education institutions and L2 departments as well as the diversity of universities, geographical locations, L2s, and research specialties represented by the participants in this study.

Table 3. *List and Progression of Qualitative Codes for RQ2 – Obstacles to Pedagogical Change*

Preliminary Code List	Final Code List
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of Pedagogical Knowledge • Lack of Pedagogical Skills • Lack of Content Knowledge • Beliefs of Literature and Culture Professors • History / Tradition of the Profession • Status Quo • Commercial Materials / Textbooks • Covid-Related Difficulties • Lack of Continued Training in L2 Pedagogy • Students' Misconceptions about Language Learning • Practical Limitations • Time Constraints – Teaching • Time Constraints – Training Instructors • Too many Job Responsibilities • Too many Administrative Duties • Job Fatigue / Burnout • Too many Stakeholders • Limited Funding • Limited Instructors • Lack of Clearly Articulated Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional Barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lack of University Support for Languages – Institutional Hierarchy – Institutional Stakeholders • Departmental / Programmatic Barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Departmental Hierarchy – Departmental Stakeholders – Lack of Departmental Unification – Lack of Clearly Articulated Program Objectives – Program / Course Structure • Resource Barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lack of Funding – Lack of Instructors – Time Constraints – Job Responsibilities – Job Fatigue / Burnout – Commercial Materials / Textbooks • Knowledge / Skill Barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lack of Content Knowledge – Lack of Pedagogical Knowledge

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objectives • Lack of Departmental Unification • Institutional / Departmental Hierarchy • Program / Course Structure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of Cultural Knowledge - Lack of Continued Training in L2 Pedagogy - Misunderstandings of Methods • Attitudinal Barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Desire to Maintain Status Quo (Professional Tradition) - Lack of Interest in L2 Pedagogy - Inflexible Beliefs about Teaching - Lack of Recognition of LPDs' Expertise |
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The barriers described by Emma were primarily resource barriers and barriers posed by her institution's recent policy changes, obstacles echoing those mentioned by Wassell et al. (2019), Goodspeed et al. (2023), and Warner and Diao (2022). As one of only two Spanish professors at a smaller, regional university, she lacked the funding, staff, time, and energy necessary to implement an intercultural, social justice-based curriculum as illustrated in successful transformations such as those reported by Paesani (2017) and Maxim (2014):

Our biggest challenge is that we are understaffed and underfunded. 60% of our classes are taught by adjuncts who are local high school teachers teaching at night. So even Spanish 1 is only offered twice a week. And we recently discovered that our institution changed its foreign language recommendations for undergraduates to suggest that they take only two semesters, beginning in their junior or senior year. When I started working here, we had two full-time instructors and four tenure-track instructors, and I was the new hire of the four. And since then, we have lost two of them and we've constantly had at least two on leave, so it's really just one other instructor and me. I'm supposed to only teach three courses per semester, but I've been teaching five, in addition to research and service. I'm honestly just so exhausted all the time. And because of [...] that, we use a pretty traditional textbook, which isn't the worst thing, but it's not the material focused on intercultural competence and understanding and empathy and fostering social justice that I dream of (Emma, Spanish LPD at regional Midwest institution).

While no other participant described resource barriers as serious as Emma, they all encountered challenges in trying to make pedagogical changes. For example, Sarah, also a Spanish LPD at a smaller regional institution, described departmental/programmatic and attitudinal barriers rooted in a lack of communication and collaboration between faculty that prevented her from effecting pedagogical change or even knowing the objectives of the program that she directed:

I was never involved in creating any objectives for our undergraduate language program even though I'm the director of that program. So I really don't know what the objectives are. I just haven't been in those conversations (Sarah, Spanish LPD at regional institution on the East coast).

While Sarah described a lack of coordination, collaboration, and scholarly exchange at the departmental level, Josefina identified this same barrier rooted in institutional hierarchies as well as attitudinal barriers that hindered the recognition of LPDs' expertise. The institutional nature of Josefina's obstacles is likely in part attributable to the fact that she worked at a larger institution than Sarah and therefore had to balance the wishes of more numerous and powerful stakeholders in choosing and implementing pedagogical practices. These difficulties corroborate Urlaub's (2014) discussion of the challenges associated with navigating stakeholders. In addition, despite having a relatively permanent position, Josefina was not tenure-track. In her words:

There is a lot of pressure from tenure-track faculty to get learners to speak and write as accurately as possible. So there's a lot of emphasis on accuracy, whether it should be that way or not. And

so, it's unfortunate that sometimes, instead of having a good, solid group of language experts who can tell you about proficiency and communication and intercultural competence, a lot of decisions are made based on what **somebody else** wants or what **somebody else** believes. And LPDs like myself end up caught in the middle between what I **know** should be done and what I know my institution **expects** me to do. And so, I make concessions and give in more and more. It feels like to an extent there's a lack of trust in [LPDs'] expertise that we just can't shake off (Josefina, Spanish LPD at Midwest R1).

By repeating "somebody else", Josefina emphasized the extent to which she felt obliged to make decisions not based on her own *knowledge, experience, and professional training*, but on outside stakeholders' sometimes uninformed *expectations*. She felt pressure to accommodate these expectations because of the institutional power structure, specifically her non-tenure-track status, and perceived a general institutional attitude that questioned her expertise as an LPD and ability to make programmatic and instructional decisions. Richard identified similar attitudinal barriers when describing why he hesitates to suggest pedagogical or curricular reforms, noting that his department has several instructors who resist change since:

They think they understand how languages are learned, and think they know how to teach, but have not received much pedagogical training (Richard, Spanish LPD at Southeast R2).

Finally, Andrew and Katy also found the lack of knowledge and training of other faculty and instructors in their departments in second language acquisition to be limiting factors in preventing them from effectively shaping pedagogical practices. In many cases, instructors and tenure-track faculty are not required to complete continued second language acquisition and pedagogy training. This is especially true for those in fields outside of linguistics/applied linguistics and education – such as literature and cultural studies – and often results in a lack of practical and methodological knowledge that is difficult to surmount for LPDs aiming to make a smooth pedagogical change (VanPatten, 2015). Such difficulties are then compounded by resource barriers (e.g., time, staffing, and energy) that make it extremely difficult to create and offer professional development opportunities, as noted by Katy:

I have a lot of colleagues whose focus is culture or literature, so they're not spending a lot of time focusing on [pedagogy], which is understandable. But I think it would be beneficial to have a little re-motivation and re-training every so often to remind them 'Oh right! I could do this or that in my class.' I would love to offer extra workshops and classes, but that's something that I have not had time to implement. And it's hard because you just have way more work than you have people to do it, which is a major challenge. I do more than my fair share, and I'm happy to do it, but I'm also tired (Katy, Spanish LPD at Midwest R1).

As she notes, her ability to control pedagogical practices within her department and make changes was limited not by one type of barrier or obstacle alone, but by a combination of departmental/programmatic, institutional, and resource barriers. This overlap and interaction of obstacles was characteristic of all participants' experiences, to varying extents, in making instructional changes in their departments.

To summarize, participants reported five main categories of barriers – institutional, departmental/programmatic, resource, knowledge/skill, and attitudinal – that they perceived as impeding their ability to effect pedagogical change. Barriers were not experienced uniformly by all participants, but instead varied as a result of respondents' institution type, department dynamics, and job responsibilities.

Discussion

These results have important implications for increasing pedagogical quality in United States university L2 courses and departments and for supporting LPDs. As Paesani et al. (2023) and Wassell and Glynn (2022) note, if it is a primary goal of our field to foster social justice by incorporating pedagogical materials that spark conversations around diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice, large-scale

curricular change will be necessary. It is therefore essential that we aid LPDs in overcoming obstacles impeding their ability to make curricular changes in general.

For instance, the nine participants in this study unanimously mentioned CLT as at least one instructional ideal among many for instructors in their departments, corroborating Allen and Paesani's (2010) observations of the continued predominance of the perception of communicative language teaching as the choice *par excellence*. However, except for Lucía, all participants also noted that within their departments, communicative activities were not a consistent reality, confirming conclusions by Howatt (1984) that 'strong' CLT – in which students engage in authentic communication in the L2 to accomplish real-life tasks – is not frequently enacted in the classroom. Unfortunately, if, as a profession, we struggle to teach communicatively (Allen & Paesani, 2010), we are also likely limited in our ability to teach for social justice (at least in a communicative, dialogue-centric way in the L2), a sentiment that was echoed by Katy and Emma in their interviews, who both perceived such instruction as a high priority and not necessarily mutually exclusive with true communicative approaches. Instead, LPDs such as Andrew and Richard in this study find themselves obliged to use their limited time, energy, effort, and emotional bandwidth (Goodspeed et al., 2023; Warner & Diao, 2022) simply to manage the ways in which instructors are (or are not) teaching basic language and content (VanPatten, 2015) instead of devoting these resources to incorporating intercultural competence and social justice into the curriculum.

Therefore, it is important that the profession – both individual instructors/faculty as well as departments and institutions more globally – listen to the voices of LPDs who speak out in their daily professional practice. The five categories of obstacles – institutional, departmental/programmatic, resource, knowledge/skill, and attitude – identified by participants in this study as negatively impacting their ability to exercise professional agency and make meaningful pedagogical change are admittedly difficult to resolve. Nonetheless, the case of Lucía, who received significant departmental support, compensation, funding, training of graduate research assistants, and temporary teaching releases to help redesign her department's Spanish basic language sequence can serve as an example of a successful way to overcome these obstacles holistically.

In many cases, though, it may be more realistic and practical to focus on one or two obstacles at a time. At the departmental/programmatic level, this may be as easy as ensuring that: (a) objectives exist and are clearly articulated for the relevant program and for each instructional level and (b) all instructors and faculty are aware of and agree with these objectives and desired learning outcomes. While seemingly obvious, a mutual departmental goal cannot be taken for granted, since Sarah noted that even as LPD, she had never been informed of her department's overarching educational objectives. Even in departments where such knowledge is known or assumed, it may be useful to incorporate regular, brief refreshers in routine faculty meetings to initiate open conversations that will help continue deconstructing departmental/programmatic barriers to pedagogical change. These reunions may also be used to gather input from instructors across courses and levels to build consensus on these objectives and recommend modifications where necessary. Ideally, lecturers, teaching assistants, and graduate students would also be included in these conversations, as in many cases, they are the most involved with day-to-day teaching in novice- and intermediate-level courses. This recommendation also aligns with Allen and Paesani's (2010) call for "extensive intra-departmental collaboration and a reconfiguration of [...] roles" to promote pedagogical continuity across levels of L2 instruction and across faculty and instructors teaching courses at these levels (p. 136). Additionally, as noted by VanPatten (2015), working to break down programmatic/departmental barriers may facilitate reduction of knowledge/skill barriers, especially if these meetings include pedagogical brainstorming sessions and refreshers on teaching techniques and ways to incorporate social justice across course levels. Moreover, cultivating an environment conducive to collaboration and the democratic sharing of knowledge despite professional title or rank may help improve attitudinal barriers, such as those identified by Josefina, by encouraging instructors and faculty to understand the shared nature of their common educational objective. This type of pedagogical sharing may also help promote the acceptance and celebration of diverse types of pedagogical knowledge, spanning both formal training and practical experience, thus supporting the collegial exchange of ideas,

productive constructive criticism, and mutual respect.

Although the remaining two categories of obstacles – institutional and resource-related – are inherently more difficult to overcome, their impact may be mitigated by minimizing the other barriers addressed above. In addition, departments could surmount some of the limitations posed by textbooks and other mass-market materials by incorporating OERs. As revised syllabi, units, and activities are developed, these could also be shared as OERs that could be adapted to suit different educational contexts, thus facilitating the program transformation process for others in the future. Next, given sufficient inter-departmental rapport and collaboration, instructors and faculty may be able to collaborate to present their administrative and resource needs (such as financial resources, additional instructors/personnel, or modified recommendations as to the timing of students' enrollment in the L2 sequence) to their supervisory unit. Separately or concomitantly with the use of OERs, LPDs and departments could use accounts of successful program transformations, such as those reported by Paesani (2017), Bilbao Terreros and Bono (2019), and Maxim (2014) as examples when presenting their requests for resources by framing their needs for funding, personnel, or other support as necessary to achieving the curricular alignment, pedagogical training, and consistent department collaboration that were conducive to favorable outcomes in these cases.

Conclusion

Using a qualitative approach, this study responded to the need to listen to the perspectives and stories of United States postsecondary LPDs in a variety of institution types to examine the obstacles and barriers they face in implementing pedagogical change within their departments. Such research was particularly important given LPDs' primordial role in shaping departmental pedagogy and ensuring that program and university objectives – including those focused on social justice – are met. In particular, this study demonstrated the institutional, departmental/programmatic, resource, knowledge/skill, and attitudinal barriers that can hinder the adoption of pedagogical approaches/methods/techniques supporting these objectives and how these obstacles can coexist and compound one another. It also offered suggestions for L2 program administration to help reduce barriers and the resulting pedagogical inertia as well as to promote intra-departmental cohesion.

Despite these direct implications for L2 program administration, the generalizability of the findings is limited by the small sample size and as such, the findings cannot be applied to all contexts. All participants in this study worked at four-year universities in the United States. Admittedly, at some community colleges, for instance, students may learn L2s simply to hone basic linguistic skills for work-related purposes, perhaps making the objective of curricular transformation as described here less relevant. Finally, it is important to note that space limitations prevented the full portrayal of the co-constructed nature of the interviews in this manuscript by including quotes from the interviewer to contextualize the interaction and responses of interviewees.

These limitations do not invalidate this study's findings; instead, they simply mean that these results should be understood within the context created by the participants of the study. Given the richness and variety of experiences of LPDs in universities across the country, this narrower, context-specific approach to qualitative analysis may be particularly valuable in helping understand and concretize the experiences of subsets of individuals, as exemplified here. Additionally, given the timeframe of data collection (2021-2022), it is likely that participants' responses were influenced, at least to some degree, by difficulties and increased responsibilities tied to the COVID-19 pandemic. This question was included in the interviews, and all participants mentioned that while COVID-19 certainly presented unique circumstances, it tended in most cases to accentuate the types of obstacles they had already identified. Thus, the role of COVID-19 should be accounted for in the interpretation of these findings, but should not necessarily limit the drawing of implications for current practice.

Finally, these limitations relate to important directions for future research. First and foremost, similar

studies should be carried out with larger samples of LPDs across institution types and representing a wider range of L2s. Relatedly, qualitative work and interviews should aim to include expanded populations of instructors and faculty involved in implementing pedagogical methods/approaches/techniques within L2 departments. For instance, simultaneously including teaching assistants, graduate students, and linguistics- and non-linguistics-oriented teaching faculty in the same study (as has been done to some extent in previously reported accounts of successful program transformations), provides a deeper view into the praxis and obstacles faced by those doing the day-to-day teaching, thus increasing the ecological validity of studies exploring pedagogical practices at the departmental scale.

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