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Pedagogía en Inglés

**THE EFFECT OF ABILITY-GROUPING TECHNIQUES ON STUDENTS'
PERCEPTIONS OF SPEAKING TASKS**

Tesis de Pregrado para optar al título de Profesor de Inglés para la Enseñanza
Básica y Media

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Santiago, Enero de 2017

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, after this long process we would like to thank our alma mater Universidad Andrés Bello. The Faculty of Education has given us the opportunity to learn under an outstanding English program. Teachers have provided us with the proper tools to get where we are now, and have prepared us to successfully face this thesis process. Furthermore, the course that was most helpful to get through this process was Educational Research, conducted by Carol Gómez, in which we learned all the terminology and concepts that were necessary to write ideas properly.

In spite of the fact Carol Gómez taught Educational Research I and II, we were fortunate to have her as our teacher guide for our thesis as well. She guided our writing and provided us with knowledge and ideas to carry on through the semester. She was always there for us, including weekends and after class hours, and she was always willing to answer any question.

We would like to dedicate this section to thank our family for their support and encouragement not only in this last year, but also throughout the entire program. Notwithstanding the fact that as a group we have managed to overcome difficulties of different nature, it would be irrespective to take all credit without mentioning the effort of our beloved parents. Finally, as this study was done by five members, it is important to emphasize our commitment to collaboratively succeed the many shortcomings and setbacks in the way – which eventually created a bond that none of us will forget.

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ABSTRACT

One critical problem in Chilean EFL teaching is that most teachers cannot interact with school learners using the target language. The latter corresponds to a shortage of opportunities for learners to practice the speaking skill through conversation and collaboration. Accordingly, grouping learners accurately in classes have proved to encourage the referred opportunities. Therefore, since consensus on grouping techniques is controversial, the current study aimed to contrast learners' perceptions on Homogeneous and Heterogeneous ability-grouping by comparing two tenth grade courses in a Chilean subsidized school. On the one hand, Group A was arranged homogeneously in compliance with learners' low, middle, or high ability level diagnosed in an oral pretest, so learners with similar level were together. On the other hand, Group B was arranged heterogeneously so learners with different levels were gathered. This experiment followed a comparison-group design and used as an instrument a questionnaire with a Likert scale to measure learners' perceptions on grouping techniques. The application consisted on six lessons for both treatment groups, which featured six different collaborative activities taken from three different types of tasks. The activities and their respective type of task are, from first to last: Role Play and Interview (Interpersonal tasks), Who am I and Debate (Transactional tasks), Story Telling and Poster Presentation (Extensive tasks). Consequently, the main finding of the study shows that all learners (from both, Groups A and B) perceived grouping techniques positively. Finally, when contrasting both grouping techniques, learners from Group B (Heterogeneous) perceived most of the activities more positively than Group A (Homogeneous).

RESUMEN

Un problema crítico en la enseñanza del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera en Chile es que la mayoría de los profesores no pueden interactuar con sus alumnos del colegio usando el lengua meta. Lo anterior corresponde a una falta de oportunidades de los estudiantes para practicar la habilidad de hablar a través de conversaciones y trabajo colaborativo. De acuerdo a esto, agrupar a los alumnos precisamente en clases ha demostrado incentivar dichas oportunidades. Por lo tanto, ya que el consenso en técnicas de agrupación es controversial, el presente estudio apunta a contrastar las percepciones de los alumnos de acuerdo a agrupaciones de habilidades homogéneas y heterogéneas comparando dos segundos medios en un colegio chileno subvencionado. Por una parte el Grupo A fue organizado homogéneamente de acuerdo a sus competencias en el idioma mediante una prueba de diagnóstico para que los estudiantes con nivel similar estuvieran juntos. Por otra parte, el Grupo B fue organizado heterogéneamente para que los estudiantes con diferentes niveles estuvieran juntos. Este experimento siguió un diseño de comparación y fue utilizado un instrumento correspondiente a un cuestionario con una escala Likert para medir las percepciones de los estudiantes de acuerdo a las técnicas de agrupación. La aplicación consistió en seis clases para ambos grupos en tratamiento, las cuales incluyeron los seis tipos de actividades colaborativas de tres tipos diferentes de tarea. Las actividades y sus respectivos tipo de actividades son, de la primera a la última: “Juego de Roles” y “Entrevista” (Tarea Interpersonal), “Quién soy yo” y “Debate” (Tarea Transaccional), “Contar una Historia” y “Presentación de Afiche” (Tarea Extensiva). Consecuentemente, el principal hallazgo del estudio muestra que todos los estudiantes (ambos grupos, A y B) percibieron las técnicas de agrupación positivamente. Finalmente, contrastando ambas técnicas de

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agrupación, los estudiantes del Grupo B (heterogéneo) percibieron la mayor parte de las actividades más positivamente que el Grupo A (homogéneo)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Chilean EFL Context

Over the last decade, the Chilean educational system has undergone a series of updates regarding the focus of English teaching. The English Language Learning Strengthening Program (Programa de Fortalecimiento del Aprendizaje del Idioma Inglés) and the English Opens Doors Program (Programa Inglés Abre Puertas) were first implemented in 2004 and helped to raise awareness on the importance of English in Chile. However, it was in 2009 through the curricular adjustment - which proposed a change of approach moving from Grammar-based instruction to Communicative Language Teaching; and the General Education Law (Ley General de la Educación, or LGE) - that nationwide principles for schools to follow were first established and included.

Together with the change of approach, according to Bases Curriculares Idioma Extranjero Inglés (2013), other aspects of English teaching and learning were emphasized by incorporating to the Chilean curriculum the principles of communication and other language learning theories, such as the following:

- i) Students should learn cooperatively through interaction with peers (Cooperative Language Learning),
- ii) Other subjects should be integrated into the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class (Content-based Instruction),
- iii) Teachers should provide students with comprehensible and meaningful input to make learning possible (Natural Approach), and
- iv) Using tasks based on real-life situations would be beneficial to learn the language (Task-based Language Teaching).

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Despite the above initiatives, and according to our practicum experiences as pre-service teachers, communication-based EFL instruction is yet far from being successfully achieved in Chilean classrooms due to the old-fashioned methodologies that still take place in many settings. The context for EFL teaching seems to be pessimistic since its characteristics do not facilitate learning, and many times hinder the possibilities to apply what the curricular bases suggest. For example, the fact that many schools have a large class size, meaning 40 to 45 students per classroom, makes it hard to monitor each students' performance, especially if the lesson needs to be based on communication. As discussed by Chen and Goh (2011); "large classes have a direct impact on the amount of time individual students have to get involved in the activities and lower the effectiveness of these activities. They also hinder communication between students and teachers" (p.339). For instance, several schools in Chile deal with this reality of having classes up to 40 students, which makes the process of involving every student in the activity significantly complex. Moreover, teachers might face setbacks when trying to overcome this problem because many schools count with little classroom space, therefore, it is difficult to create activities that elicit speaking and collaboration.

Another problem regarding teaching methodologies is that most teachers still conduct their classes having grammar as the focus; thus, students' oral production is very low and misled since speaking is not as well trained as grammar. Teachers tend to focus mainly on the Reading, Listening and Writing skills, while the speaking skill is either left behind or almost inexistent. The Ministry of Education (MINEDUC, 2012) states that English Language must be presented by applying the Communicative Approach, in which students face contextualized activities and tasks meaningfully. From this idea, it is visible that there is an inconsistency between the theory of using the communicative approach as a means for teaching, and the real application of its principles.

Accordingly, it seems critical then to look for classroom practices, which could promote communication not only to some, but to all learners. Therefore, if teachers are to achieve participation of a whole class, then careful attention should be paid to learners individually. For instance, as pre-service teachers we are aware that all learners have different ability levels when it comes to learning a new subject. Hence, it appears to be that teachers should find an instruction method that engages low-ability learners, encourages the middle ones, and challenges high-ability learners every class. Then, there is a need to look for practicalities to overcome the obstacles that prevent teachers from fostering and improving communication in classrooms. Literature suggests a series of ability-grouping techniques that could have a meaningful impact in EFL classrooms and benefit the application of communicative tasks. Consequently, different articles will be cited and revised as means to organize the background of our study.

1.2 Theoretical Motivation

The theoretical motivation for conducting a study regarding grouping techniques for the development of communicative skills lies on the premise that learning a language is best achieved through social interaction. Vygotsky (1978, in Boblet, 2012) states that: “every stage in a child’s cultural development made two appearances, first between people on the social level (inter-psychologically), and then inside the child on an internal level (intra-psychologically) (p. 5).

From this vantage, it is important to remember that language development is intrinsically based on social communication. Therefore, it is a good idea to explore how interaction in class can effectively develop learners’ communicative skills. For example, Vygotsky suggests that the potential for cognitive development depends upon the “zone of proximal development” (ZPD) which he defines as: “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential

development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, in Boblet, 2012, p. 3). Consequently, learning in a communicative environment, such as in a group of learners, may increase opportunities for comprehension due to its explicit cooperative nature. The latter could be achieved by considering Bruner's Scaffolding theory. "Scaffolding refers to the steps taken to reduce the degrees of freedom in carrying out some task so that the child can concentrate on the difficult skill she is in the process of acquiring" (Bruner, 1978, in Michell & Sharpe, 2005, p. 32). Hence, guidance is likely to be a decisive factor when it comes to setting an objective for a communicative environment. However, the fact that scaffolding seems ideal in theory does not mean that it will be the same in practice. Teachers must be aware that some learners simply do not know how to be effectively cooperative when working in groups. Beebe and Masterson (2003, in Burke, 2011) describe that "there may be pressure from a group to conform to the majority opinion" and that "an individual may dominate the discussion" (p.88). Furthermore, some members of the group may rely too heavily on others to do the work (Beebe & Masterson, 2003, in Burke, 2011) by not pitching in to help and not adequately contributing to the group (Freeman & Greenacre, 2011, in Burke, 2011). Consequently, it is critical to practically investigate how learners feel and learn in different cooperative activities.

Gardner (1984, in Huang, 2014), states that "everyone has eight different potential intelligences: linguistic, visual spatial, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist" (p.86). In childhood, individuals start with all eight intelligences at the same level of dominance, and as they grow up – in different contexts, with diverse motivations and external influences- they start developing some intelligences more than others. Since language learning has its basis on the linguistic intelligence, the

current study focuses on developing and testing the mentioned skill in a communicative environment.

Finally, since we want to explain the reasons behind our interest in the application of communicative tasks, it is necessary to relate this theoretical framework with the perceived practices inside Chilean classrooms.

1.3 Pedagogical Motivation

Even when the Chilean Curriculum establishes that English should be taught meaningfully and communicatively, the reality is that classes are mainly focused on grammar-based activities. Therefore, learners do not have as many opportunities as they should to produce the language effectively. In concordance with what we have seen, large classes are a common reality in our context, thus it is even more difficult to group learners properly to have them work efficiently. When the teacher gives learners the opportunity to choose the groups to work with, hence randomly, they do not know how to group themselves in a way that will fulfill the aim of the task. They prefer to work with their acquaintances rather than with a peer that is equally or more knowledgeable for the task. Therefore, a great number of learners does not work and mostly speak in Spanish instead of using the target language. In addition to this issue, strong learners unconsciously tend to take control of the task while other learners do not contribute, wasting the cooperative benefits of group work.

Because of the fact mentioned above, most learners are not used to producing the language orally, leading them to face technical problems with the target language and emotional frustrations among the group members. As pre-service teachers, we have could see the difficulties when applying speaking activities. Since a considerable number of Chilean students are not used to speaking English in class, teachers will certainly have to work out on how to

make them (students) actively participate. Nonetheless, there is no practical consensus as to how the speaking skill could be best developed.

As future teachers, we are concerned about learners' perceptions towards the learning of English. Most of the time, teachers tend to focus only on academic performance leaving perceptions aside. Learners' perceptions are related to the Wash-back Effect proposed by Brown (2007) which is the impact of our teaching practices on learners; how they perceive what teachers do regarding teaching and evaluation. This effect can be either positive or negative. Hence, perceptions are imperative to improve the quality of our teaching practices. By doing so, learners can face classes that are more suitable in respect to their personal characteristics and needs.

This study will benefit teachers who are seeking for improvements in their fields, and once they know about their learners' perceptions, they can adapt their teaching methodologies to have meaningful classes. Consequently, we believe that one of the most important aspects of the target language is to learn how to produce it for real-life communicational settings and not only for schooling purposes.

We believe that it would not be fair for learners to be assessed on their linguistic performance since they will be exposed to this study for a short period. For this reason, perceptions can be studied and analyzed for that amount of time to get an insight on how they feel. In addition to this, we agree that interaction is key for learners' social development, getting involved in an environment in which they can have opportunities to socialize and negotiate learning.

1.4 The Current Study

This study aims to determine the effects of ability-grouping techniques on EFL learners' perceptions of communicative tasks by applying two techniques: a) grouping students by similar ability levels, hence, homogeneously, and b) grouping students with different abilities, forming heterogeneous groups. From this moment on, and for the purposes of this study, we will define the two techniques as:

- i) Homogeneous ability grouping, and
- ii) Heterogeneous ability grouping.

As for the specific objectives, we have the following three:

- 1) To determine the effects of ability grouping on learners' perceptions of interpersonal activities
- 2) To determine the effects of ability grouping on learners' perceptions of transactional activities
- 3) To determine the effects of ability grouping on learners' perceptions of extensive activities

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Ability Grouping

Ability grouping has increasingly been practiced by teachers around the world. In a brief definition, ability grouping can be described as “the practice of dividing students for instruction on the basis of their perceived capacities for learning” (Adodo & Agbayewa, 2011, p. 48). Therefore, for this research, the concept of ability grouping is going to be considered as grouping students per their perceived ability level as language learners.

There are two technique groups considered for ability grouping: homogeneous grouping and heterogeneous grouping. The first technique consists on arranging students from one class into groups with similar ability level, while the second technique consists on arranging the same students into groups with different levels of. Many authors support ability grouping by arguing that “moderate gains occur in students’ academic achievement when educators adopt practices used in gifted education such as ability grouping” (Kulik & Kulik, 1990; Slavin, 1987, in Tieso 2005, p.61), which means that using grouping techniques in the classroom can be beneficial for the learners’ academic achievement.

Grouping by learners’ abilities has become a much-known technique in teaching nowadays, used by different institutions around the globe and in our context, as well. Thereby, several authors along history have taken their side to support ability grouping and its effects on teaching. Kerckhoff (1986, in Aydin & Tugal, 2005), for instance, supports this with “The traditional hypothesis”, which claims that ability grouping yields positive gains by all learners regardless of the group they are placed in (p.2).

For this research, the two ability-grouping techniques that will be addressed are homogeneous grouping and heterogeneous grouping. Both have

benefits for the learners; however, there is a debate on which of these grouping techniques is the best to help learners feel more comfortable in the classroom. This question has not been answered yet, and it has opened an interesting gap in research that we are now seeking to resolve.

2.1.1 Homogeneous grouping.

Homogeneous grouping is a technique that consists of arranging students in the classroom in groups with similar ability levels. This means that by arranging students homogeneously, students with a perceived high-ability level will be together in a group, while students with a perceived low ability level will be together in another group, both groups being in the same classroom. This can be significantly beneficial for learners because, as Kerckhoff (1986, in Aydin & Tugal, 2005) pointed out,

High-ability students can move faster without having to slow down for their less competent friends on the one hand, and on the other, low-ability, students can benefit from this segregation in that the teachers can provide them with an appropriate curriculum and pace of instruction. (p.2)

This means that teachers can plan their classes per specific needs of their learners, while they can benefit from their peers working at their own pace of instruction. "One of the arguments supporting the practice of grouping students homogeneously is that it simplifies teachers' instruction of students varying ability levels" (Oakes, 1985, in Wright-Castro et al., 2003, p. 39), providing the learners a more adequate and personalized education.

Learners with high-ability levels could challenge each other and improve themselves while together, whilst the learners in the low-ability group feel more comfortable to work with their peers who have a similar pace of work. "Some proponents of this practice argue that homogeneous ability grouping is sensitive

to the various abilities of students, often making them feel more comfortable to receive instruction with students who are at their same level (Oakes, 1985, in Wright-Castro et al., 2003, p. 39). This way, students in the low-ability group do not feel the pressure of reaching up to their classmates in the high-ability group, and the latter group has the freedom to move forward without stopping for their slower peers.

Adodo and Agbayewa (2011), another advocate for homogeneous grouping, stated that “the high-ability students maintain interest and incentive in homogeneous group but they languished when grouped with the slow learners” (pp. 48-49). This means when high-ability students are grouped with peers whose ability level is similar; they can be interested and motivated. On the contrary, while high ability students are grouped with low-ability students, this mixture only affected students' interest in the task. To support this premise, Lou et al. (1996, in Adodo & Agbayewa, 2011) opined that “it is unethical to retard the achievement of high-ability students by assigning them to heterogeneous group class settings where they might spend their time instructing other group members rather than learning information they did not already know” (p. 49). Moreover, the results from Adodo and Agbayewa's study (2011) showed that homogeneous ability level grouping was superior for promoting students learning outcome. Furthermore, Kulik & Kulik (1985, in Allan, 1991) also states teaching homogeneous groups can be beneficial for low-ability students' self-esteem, as well as for high-ability students; “Limited studies of remedial programs provide evidence that instruction in homogeneous groups has positive effects on the self-esteem of slow learners. Programs designed for gifted students have trivial effects on self-esteem” (p. 64).

In addition to its benefits, homogeneous grouping may benefit students' self-esteem; as students who are assorted this way can accomplish the task by

complementing and working as a team, without having to rely on stronger students.

“In a homogeneous scheme, active students are grouped together to fight it out, allowing reticent learners to interact more casually. If you have designed a task that has a defined outcome and learners understand that there is a job to be accomplished, then grouping the reticent learners together forces them to take the initiative to complete the task even though there may be a minimal use of English” (Rance-Roney, 2010, p. 23).

Hence, students should execute the task by working as a team, and because they belong to a similar ability level, they would all have to make a leveled contribution. Rance-Roney (2010) stated “When the objective is for learners to work with a problem and achieve consensus on a solution, this homogeneous grouping scheme will maximize chances for all group members to engage in conversation” (p.23).

As homogeneous grouping brings up many benefits for students, so does heterogeneous grouping. This controversy puts the two techniques in a debate on which one is considered best for teaching practices.

2.1.2 Heterogeneous grouping.

Heterogeneous grouping is a technique that consists of grouping students in the classroom into groups with different ability levels. This way, high, middle and low ability students are complementing ideas in the same group. This type of grouping has scaffolding as one of the most prominent supporting theories, mentioned by Bruner in 1957. In accordance with Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976), “scaffolding consists essentially of the adult ‘controlling’ those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner’s capacity, thus permitting him to

concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence” (p.90).

From this vantage, it is important to clarify that when arranged heterogeneously, high-level students are likely to behave as experienced adults since their knowledge in the subject is superior. Notwithstanding the fact that higher-ability students tend to finish tasks earlier, the remaining time of a class can be used to collaborate with peers that are still working, becoming “second teachers” in the classroom. We agree on the fact that it is important to create an environment where students can feel comfortable while learning the language; hence, distributing students properly could be considered of critical importance. Supporters of heterogeneous grouping believe this type of arrangement can increase students' achievements as well as their social attributes.

Heterogeneous groups in consideration of their diverse academic and social attributes would foster more and deeper collaboration with members helping each other construct knowledge and understanding. For instance, less knowledgeable students gain from seeing how their peers approach problems, and more knowledgeable students gain a deeper understanding of the subject by teaching it to others. (Felder & Brent, 1994, in Jahng & Bullen, 2012, p.2)

By having different ability levels in a group, students can learn more from their peers where higher students can teach lower students, gaining more on how their classmates solve problems. Apart from that, high-ability students tend to boost confidence by working as models for their low-ability peers, a behavior that can motivate not only specific students, but also the overall group.

Brabham and Villaume (2001, in Bikarian, 2009) commented:

Sometimes we create groups of students who are reading on similar instruction levels; sometimes we form groups of students

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who will benefit from a particular strategy focus; and sometimes we group students heterogeneously to provide extended opportunities for sharing similar interests, collaborating, and peer modeling (p.263).

Thus, learners would feel that when grouped heterogeneously, they could have more opportunities to complement ideas and to collaborate with each other. By having different ability levels, they can lean on their peers for support and benefit from their different ways of working.

Bikarian (2009) also stated that:

Students have told me that they both enjoy and produce better results when grouped heterogeneously because students with different abilities are in their group and can help them if they start to struggle with a concept or skill (p. 1).

When one of the group members gets frustrated carrying out a task, other members of the group with different skills and ideas could help solving that problem and continue working side by side. Furthermore, learners may get better results by being arranged heterogeneously as they could fill their knowledge gaps with other members' expertise. The latter might be reflected in their academic performance and self-confidence.

In addition, Hallam (2002, in Bikarian, 2009) stated that:

Heterogeneous grouping provides equity of opportunity, encourages cooperative behavior and social integration, provides role models for less able pupils, enhances pupil/teacher interactions, reduces competition, allows pupils to work at their own pace, provides a sense of continuity and security for primary pupils, and forces teachers to acknowledge that the pupils in their class are not a homogeneous group (p. 30).

Although there are many positive aspects of heterogeneous grouping, it is important to mention that neither homogeneous nor heterogeneous ability grouping is proven better than the other. As Emily et al. (2003, in Adodo & Agbayewa, 2011) proposed, both ability-grouping techniques had a differential effect on students' learning and neither homogeneous nor heterogeneous ability-grouping classes was uniformly superior for promoting achievements of students. Because of this gap, we have taken interest in comparing these two techniques of homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping to see which of the two is perceived as better by learners at the time of working with oral activities in the English class.

2.1.3 Learners' levels of ability.

In terms of grouping learners per ability level, there are generally three main groups in which students are divided per their perceived level of ability; high, middle and low (Slavin, 1987; Hallinan & Sorensen, 1983, in Aydin & Tugal, 2005), which will be defined in the next sections.

2.1.3.1 High-ability learners.

Learners who are perceived to perform at an outstanding level and show great potential in performance are labelled as high-ability learners. These learners operate at a higher level of speed and can easily keep up with individual and/or group activities, and according to Kerckhoff (1986, in Aydin & Tugal, 2005) high-ability learners can move faster without having to slow down for their so-called less competent friends.

2.1.3.2 Middle-ability learners.

Middle-ability groups are commonly used in schools where three ability groups are formed: high, middle and low. The middle-ability learners are learners who do not qualify for either the high or the low level of ability; they can

be faster at working to belong to the low-ability group, and at the same time, not competent enough to belong to the high-ability group.

2.1.3.3 Low-ability learners.

When learners work, and perform at a low level in comparison to their classmates, and take more time to carry out an activity, they are considered to belong to the group of low-ability learners. It is important to understand that this does not mean that learners are less intelligent, but rather less competent to perform and keep up with some activities. Low-ability learners need to move at their own pace for learning to be achieved. Mamary and Rowe (1985, in Aydin & Tugal, 2005) propose that low-ability learners do not get frustrated by the progress of high-ability learners, hence they can learn at their own pace.

Grouping students by ability may be useful in many contexts, but for this research, we are using this technique to see how the learners feel working in groups arranged either heterogeneously or homogeneously while they work and perform speaking activities. In the next section, the characteristics and importance of the speaking skill are pointed out.

2.2 Speaking as a Linguistic Skill

As stated in Bases Curriculares,

Speaking is a productive skill that allows using the language for communicating ideas orally. Speaking consists of communicating a message with an adequate pronunciation in a comprehensible way in contexts such as conversations, monologues, and oral exchange. In the first stages of language learning, the skill of speaking gains importance when it comes to the acquisition of communicative functions related with the purpose of the message (Translated from Mineduc, 2012, p.9).

Taking into consideration what speaking skill entails, it is imperative to promote an adequate environment for its development. Since speaking is a productive skill, learners need to interact among themselves to fulfill the purpose of communication; therefore, it is not a passive skill that can be acquired by just simply listening to information.

Moreover, Bases Curriculares (Mineduc, 2012) addresses the fact that through oral expression and real-life communicative situations, learners can incorporate significant functions of the language. At the same time, communicative contexts provide learners with strategies and tools, which can reduce their anxiety when speaking in another language.

2.2.1 The importance of promoting speaking skills.

Nowadays the world is interdependent; the fact that people can communicate in a worldwide common language is one major impulse for EFL Chilean classes. Yet, it seems that not many Chilean students are able to start a basic conversation in the target language. Therefore, it is essential to help students overcome the fear of making mistakes to start producing oral language.

Learning a new language and culture of its speakers needs essential skills for the success and development of Chilean students in this globalized world. Learning another language does not contribute only to the cognitive and professional development, but also to understand and respect other cultures' view, to appreciate our own and to develop a globalized conscience and awareness. Additionally, knowing other languages is essential to be able to interact effectively with the rest of the world and to gain access to new knowledge through technological means and social networks. (Translated from Bases Curriculares Inglés, 2013, p.238)

This extract shows the importance of the English language to the Chilean context and the benefits that come when learning it. Although this sounds easy, it is important to remember that there are principles to follow to teach the speaking skill in the classroom in a way that will be beneficial for all students.

2.2.2 Principles for teaching speaking skills.

For every goal achieved, there should be a wise planning behind. Having a clear idea on how to teach speaking skills is decisive when setting objectives. Therefore, teachers should tackle different facets of oral communication to prepare learners output. Table 1 presents seven procedures which are likely to enhance learners speaking skills:

Table 1. Procedures to enhance students speaking skills (Brown, 2007)

<p>Focus on both fluency and accuracy</p>	<p>It is important to make sure that the activities have a linguistic objective behind. Any drilling tasks should have a meaningful purpose as possible.</p>
<p>Intrinsically motivating techniques</p>	<p>Students need to understand how the activity will benefit them. Therefore, activities must be appealing for the students where their interests and their goals are involved in.</p>
<p>Use of authentic language in meaningful contexts</p>	<p>“Any activity can be structured to provide a sense of authenticity” (Brown, 2007). Students must interact while performing a task.</p>

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Appropriate feedback and correction	“It is important that you take advantage of your knowledge of English to inject the kinds of corrective feedback that are appropriate for the moment” (Brown, 2007)
The natural link between speaking and listening	Many interactive activities will mix listening with speaking; however, even though you might be focusing on reinforce speaking; listening skill can be integrated to the students' benefits. The only way that students can dominate the production skill is by comprehension.
Opportunities to initiate oral communication	It is important to let students initiate the language. Normally teachers focus their time by asking questions, giving directions or providing information. Students need to learn how to control a conversation and how to change the subject of it.
Encourage the development of speaking strategies.	Students need to develop their own personal strategies for accomplish speaking production. The teacher here has the job to create awareness of this objective.

Having stated helpful procedures to enhance communication in the classroom, there are ways to achieve this purpose in a lesson. As there are many activities for learners to produce the language orally in the classroom, there are types of speaking performance that can help to achieve different features in language production.

2.2.3 Types of classroom-speaking performance.

According to Brown (2007), there are six types of speaking production for learners to apply in the classroom: imitative, intensive, responsive, transactional, interpersonal and extensive.

2.2.3.1 Imitative speaking.

As Brown (2007) states in his book, imitative activities are mainly focused on some elements of language form. Therefore, learners are not expected to interact with their classmates but to spend time practicing intonation or the pronunciation of a vowel sound. One significant method for teachers to use is drilling, as “Drills offer students an opportunity to listen and to orally repeat certain strings of language that may pose some linguistic difficulty” (Brown, 2007, p. 328). Hence, drilling can be successful if teachers follow the proper steps. Drills must be simple and short for students to understand why they are doing the drill. Moreover, teachers should not overuse drills and activities should lead to communicative goals.

2.2.3.2 Intensive speaking.

Intensive activities are the next step of the imitative activities. As Brown (2007) notes, “intensive speaking includes any speaking performance that is designed to practice phonological or grammatical aspects of language” (p. 329). Therefore, this kind of activities can be self-initiated or be involved in some pair work where students need to reinforce certain language forms.

2.2.3.3 Responsive speaking.

Responsive activities are the most commonly used in the classrooms since they involve short replies from the learners. These replies are sufficient for the activities and do not extend into dialogues. When teachers ask their

learners, what the main idea of the paragraph is, the answer is meaningful and authentic (Brown, 2007).

2.2.3.4 Transactional speaking.

As different as the other activities previously mentioned, transactional activities focus on conveying or exchanging specific information. To mention one difference with responsive activities, transactional performances include more negotiation from the learners in their speech. Conversations are an example of this type of activities which can be in groups or teacher-student oriented (Brown, 2007).

2.2.3.5 Interpersonal speaking.

Interpersonal speaking is another example of a conversational method used in the classroom, nevertheless, this kind of activity carries out more for maintaining social relationships rather than the exchange of facts or information. Therefore, learners need to pay attention to some factors that can help them with their speech such as: slang, sarcasm, ellipsis, colloquial language and emotional charged language (Brown, 2007).

2.2.3.6 Extensive speaking.

The kinds of activities that belong to this type of classroom speaking performance are mainly monologues in the form of oral reports, summaries, or short speeches. They are extensive activities because learners need to be more formal and deliberative while speaking. These speeches can be planned or improvised depending of the type of student (Brown, 2007).

A lot of literature has been reviewed so far regarding the importance for teachers to apply helpful techniques in the classroom for a better learning experience. This research focuses on how the learners perceive these techniques applied by the teachers, and which ones they feel are more suitable

to their pace of learning. The learners' perceptions are what is going to support the use of these different types of activities for their benefit.

2.2.4 Learners' perceptions of speaking tasks.

After reviewing different types of speaking tasks, the main concern is how learners perceive each of them in relation to their abilities. Learners' oral proficiency on different speaking tasks has been reviewed sporadically. Nevertheless, this study intends to explore learners' perceptions rather than their performances as means to understand learners' comfortability when speaking. The latter might help learners' academic success, but the importance of providing a good environment with engaging speaking activities is to help them realize that they can communicate using the target language. The literature about learners' perceptions on speaking activities is scarce, which is one of the reasons why we have taken interest in this area.

2.3 The Current Study

After reviewing the literature mentioned above, this study aims to determine the effects of ability-grouping techniques on EFL learners' perceptions of a range of speaking tasks.

Therefore, from this moment on, and for the purposes of this study, we will define the two independent variables as: a) Homogeneous ability grouping, and b) Heterogeneous ability grouping. On the other hand, the dependent variable of the study will be learners' perceptions of the speaking tasks, which will be implemented in two secondary classes.

As for the types of speaking activities to be considered, the current study leaves aside imitative, intensive and responsive activities because of their lack of interaction, grammar focus and freelance speaking restriction. Consequently, the current study will use interpersonal activities to maintain social relationships,

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transactional activities to elicit conversation, and extensive activities for learners to be more deliberate when speaking.

Based on the identified variables, this study will proceed to state the following Research Questions, which are sought to be answered by the end of the investigation:

- i) Do learners' perceptions of interpersonal speaking tasks differ depending on how they are grouped? If so, how?
- ii) Do learners' perceptions of transactional speaking tasks differ depending on how they are grouped? If so, how?
- iii) Do learners' perceptions of extensive speaking tasks differ depending on how they are grouped? If so, how?
- iv) Does one type of grouping affect learners' perceptions of speaking tasks more positively overall? If so, which and how?

3. METHODOLOGY

After all the ideas reviewed in the literature, the current chapter explains in detail the main methodological procedures followed in this study, such as the research design, the context in which the study was held, and the participants who took part throughout its application. Consequently, we established the methods and instruments to be used, to finally conclude with the data analysis.

3.1 Research Design

This study follows a quantitative approach through an experimental comparison group design. As it is claimed by Denscombe, (2007) “experiments involve the manipulation of circumstances. The researcher needs to identify factors which are significant and then introduce them or exclude them from the situation so that their effect can be observed” (p.61). Hence, to conduct this experiment, the variables defined were Learners' Perceptions and Grouping Techniques, the former being the dependent variable and the latter being the independent variable. It was expected to know the learners' perceptions per way they were grouped.

In a comparison group design, as defined in Mackey and Gass (2005), “participants are randomly assigned to one of the groups, with treatment (the independent variable) differing between or among the groups” (p.146). Furthermore, this research methodology allows contrasting the results obtained from both groups, leading us to identify the differences between participants' perceptions on the two grouping arrangements. As we have two grouping techniques – homogeneous and heterogeneous - about to the two groups that were compared, group A consisted of heterogeneous grouping and group B consisted of homogeneous grouping. It is worth mentioning that both groups were exposed to a series of specific speaking tasks and activities that were mentioned on the Research Questions in the previous chapter.

3.2 Context and Participants

The study was carried out at a subsidized school located in El Bosque, Santiago. This school follows the curriculum proposed by the Ministry of Education. (MINEDUC). In addition to this, the class for our research is accustomed to working with a course book, which has a communicative approach. The school is characterized by a good teaching organization, technical resources, such as an English lab and data projectors.

In this study, two out of four tenth grades were selected to participate. We addressed the groups as "A" and "B", and their ages ranged from 15 to 16 years old. The original number of students in both classes was 81; however, due to uncontrollable factors such as absenteeism (38) and initial withdrawal (8), the final number of participants was 35 (18 for group "A" and 17 for group "B"). As suggested by the literature, in which former ability-grouping studies have detected three proficiency groups in which students can be categorized, we decided to place learners into three different proficiency levels in the target language: Low, Intermediate and High. We did this through a "Placement Test" that will be explained later in the procedures section. Finally, after identifying participants' proficiency level, group "A" was defined as the homogeneous class and group "B" as heterogeneous.

3.3 Instruments

The instrument consists of a four-point Likert Scale questionnaire containing seven closed questions related to learners' perceptions on the group arrangement. The statements were:

- 1) I felt comfortable working in my group.
- 2) I felt that I learnt a little bit more working in my group.
- 3) I felt that I could help my group mates.

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- 4) I felt that when I needed help, I had the support of my group mates.
- 5) I felt that I could work at my own pace, and I didn't feel pressure to finish.
- 6) I felt that we worked well as a group and we complemented each other.
- 7) I felt that I found new ways of doing the activities, thanks to group work.

Participants completed the questionnaire after each session. Both groups - heterogeneous and homogeneous - received the same questionnaire and were exposed to the same activities.

Below the Likert Scale is presented ranging from Totally Disagree to Totally Agree.

Totally Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Totally Agree
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It is worth mentioning that the entire questionnaire was in Spanish for learners' better understanding of the task. See original instrument in Appendix 1.

3.4 Procedures

The first step in this study was the placement test. This procedure consisted of three sections:

a) An Interpersonal speaking activity in which participants needed to answer questions about themselves,

b) A Transactional speaking activity where participants were shown a map in which they had to give directions from one point to another two times, and

c) An Extensive speaking activity in which participants were shown two pictures in which they needed to describe what they could see in them.

This placement test helped researchers to place students into three proficiency levels: low, medium and high. Later, we arranged homogeneous groups in one class (A) and heterogeneous groups in the other (B). Nonetheless, before its application the placement test was piloted in three classes of three different schools to measure its validity. The classes that were piloted shared similar characteristics to the one in which the study was carried out; they were all students from 10th grade, they had a similar number of students and they were mixed-ability classes.

After piloting the placement test, we analyzed the results to organize the groups. Participants received a score in respect to a scale. On the one hand, Group A takes part of the homogeneous group; therefore, participants were placed in groups that shared the same proficiency level. On the other hand, participants from group B were arranged heterogeneously, meaning that every group member had different proficiency levels.

Once the groups were organized, the classes were held by one of the researchers. The intervention took place for six lessons – two classes devoted to each activity- that were meant to be done in a sequence. The first two lessons were aimed at Interpersonal activities, which consisted of a role-play and an interview. The following two lessons were devoted to the Transactional type, in which “Who am I?” and debate took place. Finally, the two remaining lessons consisted on the Extensive type, in which storytelling and a poster presentation were the activities performed by the learners. The activities were thought to be more challenging as classes moved forward.

3.5 Data Analysis

This is a quantitative study in which one of the measurements of central tendency was used. The questionnaires represent the learners' perceptions in verbal statements, which is why the most suitable measurement of central tendency is the mode (Jamieson, 2004). The mode allows narrowing down the perceptions to determine whether they are positive or negative.

For this type of analysis, the mean and the standard deviation are inappropriate for ordinal data. "Likert scales are commonly used to measure attitude, providing 'a range of responses to a given question or statement'" (Jamieson, 2004, p.1217). This study is concerned about the perceptions of the learners regarding speaking activities and the amount of positive or negative responses to them, and using the mode as a measurement of central tendency will provide us with that information.

Once all the data was collected, the two groups – homogeneous and heterogeneous – were compared to appreciate the difference between them (if there was any). The analysis addressed the following comparison between both groups:

- Statement analysis (seven statements)
- Activity analysis (six activities)
- Type of activity analysis (three types)

The Likert scale for this study was meant to have no neutral statistical conclusions, which means that there were only four intervals scales, so the participants could meaningfully choose the most suitable alternative for their perception (Jamieson, 2004).

4. RESULTS

After reviewing the reasons for conducting the study, the current section aims to show the statistical data obtained from the applied questionnaires. First, learners' perceptions will be measured by the mode. Second, learners' perceptions will be addressed considering percentages of interpersonal, transactional and extensive speaking tasks. Finally, learners' comments in the questionnaire will be shown in accordance with interpersonal, transactional and extensive speaking tasks.

4.1 Learners' Perceptions of Ability Grouping: Mode Measures

As outlined in Table 2, statements from one to seven ranged participants' perceptions of the six activities performed from one to four – Totally disagree and totally agree respectively- regarding the Likert scale. Consequently, it is pivotal to mention that participants' perceptions are measured by the mode of the Likert scale numbers of the latter.

Interestingly, the first trend at sight is that overall, participants' perceptions on the performed activities can be claimed as positive because the mode in all cases ranged from 3.0 to 4.0 – meaning that participants whether agreed or strongly agreed with the questionnaire statements.

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Table 2. Learners' perceptions of ability grouping: mode measures

Statements		Interpersonal				Transactional				Extensive			
		Role Play		Interview		Who am I		Debate		Story Telling		Poster	
		A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
1	I felt comfortable working in my group	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3.5	4
2	I felt that I learned a little bit more working in my group	3	3	3	3	3	3	3.5	3.5	3	3	4	3
3	I felt that I was able help my group mates	3	3	3	4	3	3	3.5	3	3	3	3	3.5
4	I felt that when I needed help, I had the support of my group mates	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	3	4	3	4	3.5
5	I felt that I could work at my own pace, and I didn't feel pressure to finish	4	4	4	4	4	3.5	4	3	3.5	4	4	3
6	I felt that we worked well as a group and we complemented each other	4	4	4	3	4	3	4	4	3.5	3	3	3
7	I felt that I found new ways of doing the activities, thanks to group work	3	4	3.5	3	3	3	3.5	4	3	4	3.5	3.5
Mode		4	4	4	4	3	3	4	3	3	3	4	3.3

The study commenced the sessions with the Interpersonal activity called “Role Play”. As presented in Table 2, the mode in groups A and B was 4.0, meaning that both groups had the highest positive responses from the participants’ perceptions. The same mode can be appreciated in the second interpersonal activity called “Interview”.

As for the transactional activities, “Who am I?” showed that both groups A and B shared a mode of 3.0, which marks a slight decrease in learners’ preference in comparison to the Interpersonal activities. On the other hand, the “Debate” activity had a slight difference between the groups’ perceptions –

Group A with a mode of 4.0, while group B concluded with a mode of 3.0 - since Group B perceived Transactional tasks less positively than Group A. Even though there is a difference of one point, both modes, 3.0 and 4.0 are still positive. Consequently, learners perceived Transactional tasks less positively than Interpersonal tasks with a difference of one point in the Likert scale.

Finally, for the extensive activities, "Story Telling" presented a mode of 3.0 for both groups A and B. Thus, we can observe that "Story Telling" alongside "Who am I" are both considered less positive than "Role Play" and "Interview" when considering perceptions of Group A and Group B. Dissimilarly, for the "Poster Presentation" the mode, which is still positive, differed between both groups – group A with a mode of 4.0, while group B presented a mode of 3.25.

Therefore, the overall mode ranged from three to four in the Likert scale, meaning there were no significant differences between homogeneous and heterogeneous groups because both perceived all six lessons positively.

4.2 Learners' Perceptions of Ability Grouping: Percentage Measures

Table 3 shows a deeper insight on our participants' perceptions. Percentages from 0% to 100% describe the percentage of participants who perceived the activity positively, meaning that they marked either three or four in the Likert Scale.

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Table 3. Learners' perceptions of ability grouping: percentage of total agreement and agreement

Statement	Interpersonal				Transactional				Extensive			
	Role Play		Interview		Who am I		Debate		Story Telling		Poster	
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
1	94%	100%	100%	100%	94%	100%	89%	100%	83%	94%	100%	94%
2	94%	88%	94%	94%	83%	82%	89%	94%	78%	82%	89%	88%
3	94%	94%	83%	88%	67%	94%	89%	100%	78%	82%	89%	94%
4	100%	94%	94%	94%	89%	94%	89%	100%	83%	100%	83%	94%
5	67%	82%	78%	76%	83%	94%	78%	88%	78%	76%	72%	88%
6	89%	94%	94%	100%	83%	94%	78%	100%	78%	88%	94%	94%
7	100%	76%	89%	82%	83%	94%	67%	76%	72%	73%	67%	82%
TOTAL	91%	90%	90%	91%	83%	93%	83%	94%	79%	85%	85%	91%

4.2.1 Learners' perceptions of interpersonal speaking tasks.

As we can see in Table 3, in both Interpersonal activities “Role Play” and “Interview”, learners’ perceptions averaged 91% and 90% for groups A and B. However, in the “Role Play” activity there are some important differences in percentages among the statements, being appreciated with a difference of 15% in statement five.

A percentage of learners from group A (Homogeneous) perceived that they could not work at their own pace and felt more pressured as compared with group B (Heterogeneous) in the “Role Play” activity.

5	I felt that I could work at my own pace, and I didn't feel pressured to finish.
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Moreover, in statement seven we can observe that group A shows 100% of learners' positive response, whereas group B shows 76%, meaning a difference of 24%. From here, we can infer that in contrast to Group A, which completely agreed on the benefits that group work brought them to complete the activity, in Group B, 24% of the participants disagreed on the helpfulness of group work for this activity.

7	I felt that I found new ways of doing the activities, thanks to group work.
---	---

As for the "Interview" activity, in statement six, group A shows 94% of positive responses in comparison with the 100% that group B presented, meaning a difference of 6% between them. Even though, there is a slight difference, it is worth mentioning that 6% of the participants in Group A felt that group work did not take place to complement each other.

6	I felt that we worked well as a group and we complemented each other
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4.2.2 Learners' perceptions of transactional speaking tasks.

As for the Transactional activity "Who am I", there is a more noticeable difference to consider when comparing both groups' perceptions. With a difference of 10%, in Group A, 83% of the participants perceived the activity positively in general terms while in Group B, 93% of the participants did. If we go into a deeper analysis, in "Who am I" a similar difference can be observed in statement three.

Group A shows a percentage of 67% of agreement while on the other hand, group B shows 94%. Out of this, we can observe a large difference of 27% of difference in perceptions between groups. Consequently, the participants in group A (Heterogeneous) showed 27% of disagreement

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regarding the fact of being able to help their group mates. Dissimilarly, Group B (Homogeneous) majorly perceived that they could help their group mates.

3	I felt that I was able to help my group mates
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In the case of "Debate" activity, there are five differences to consider between both groups. Firstly, the total averages in the percentages between the groups are the following: Group A 83% and group B 94%, meaning that 11% more of learners perceived the activity positively in Group A.

If we go deeper into each difference, we can begin by describing statement one. In this statement, there was a difference of 11% between both groups, Group A averaged 89% whereas group B averaged 100%. That is to say, Group A felt less comfortable working in groups than Group B, in which all participants felt comfortable within their groups.

1	I felt comfortable working in my group
---	--

Likewise, following with the analysis of statement three, the difference in average is also 11%. Therefore, Group A averaged 89% of positive perceived perceptions, while in Group B 100% perceived statement three positively:

3	I felt that I was able to help my group mates
---	---

This means that Group A felt that they were less able to help their group mates in comparison with Group B.

As for statement number four, both Groups, A and B averaged the same as in the above statement with 89% and 100% respectively. The latter explains

that in Group A, 11% of the participants felt that when they needed help, they did not have support from their group mates as participants in Group B.

4	I felt that when I needed help, I had the support of my group mates
---	---

As for statement number six, on the one hand, 78% of the participants in Group A felt that they worked well as a group and that they complemented each other. On the other hand, the remaining percentage (22%) felt that they did not. Contrasting this, 100% of the participants in Group B agreed that they did work well and complemented each other.

6	I felt that we worked well as a group and we complemented each other
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In the group comparison in statement number seven, there was an average difference of 9% between both groups' perceptions. While 67% of the participants in Group A agreed on the fact that they felt that group work provided new ways of doing the activities, in Group B, 76% agreed on the same perception. It is worth mentioning that, even though both percentages were above 50% of agreement, they were the lowest set of scores of all the statements for all the activities.

7	I felt that I found new ways of doing the activities thanks to group work
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4.2.3 Learners' perceptions of extensive speaking tasks.

The last speaking activities to be compared belong to the "Extensive" type of task. It is worth mentioning that the overall average of participants' positive perceptions on the "Extensive" task was 79% for Group A, and 85% for Group B. First, we considered groups' perceptions of the fourth "Story Telling" statement.

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Hereby, there was a substantial averaged difference of 17% in participants' positive perceptions of both groups. Although 100% of participants in Group B felt that when they needed help they had the support of their group mates, 83% of participants in Group A felt the same.

4	I felt that when I needed help, I had the support of my group mates
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As for the sixth statement, there was an averaged difference of 10% between both groups' positive perceptions when we considered statement number six. While 78% of participants in Group A thought that they worked well as a group and that they complemented each other, in Group B 88% of the participants felt the same.

6	I felt that we worked well as a group and we complemented each other
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Moving on to the last activity to be compared – Poster Presentation - we considered to analyze statements five and six. In statement five, with an average difference of 16% between both groups, 72% of participants in Group A felt that they could work at their own pace and did not feel pressured to finish. In contrast, 88% of participants in Group B felt the same when considering statement number five.

5	I felt that I could work at my own pace, and I didn't feel pressure to finish.
---	--

Lastly, when comparing statement number seven, there was an average difference of 15% between both groups. On the one hand, 67% of participants in Group A felt that they found new ways of doing the activities thanks to group work. On the other hand, 82% of participants in Group B felt the same in statement seven.

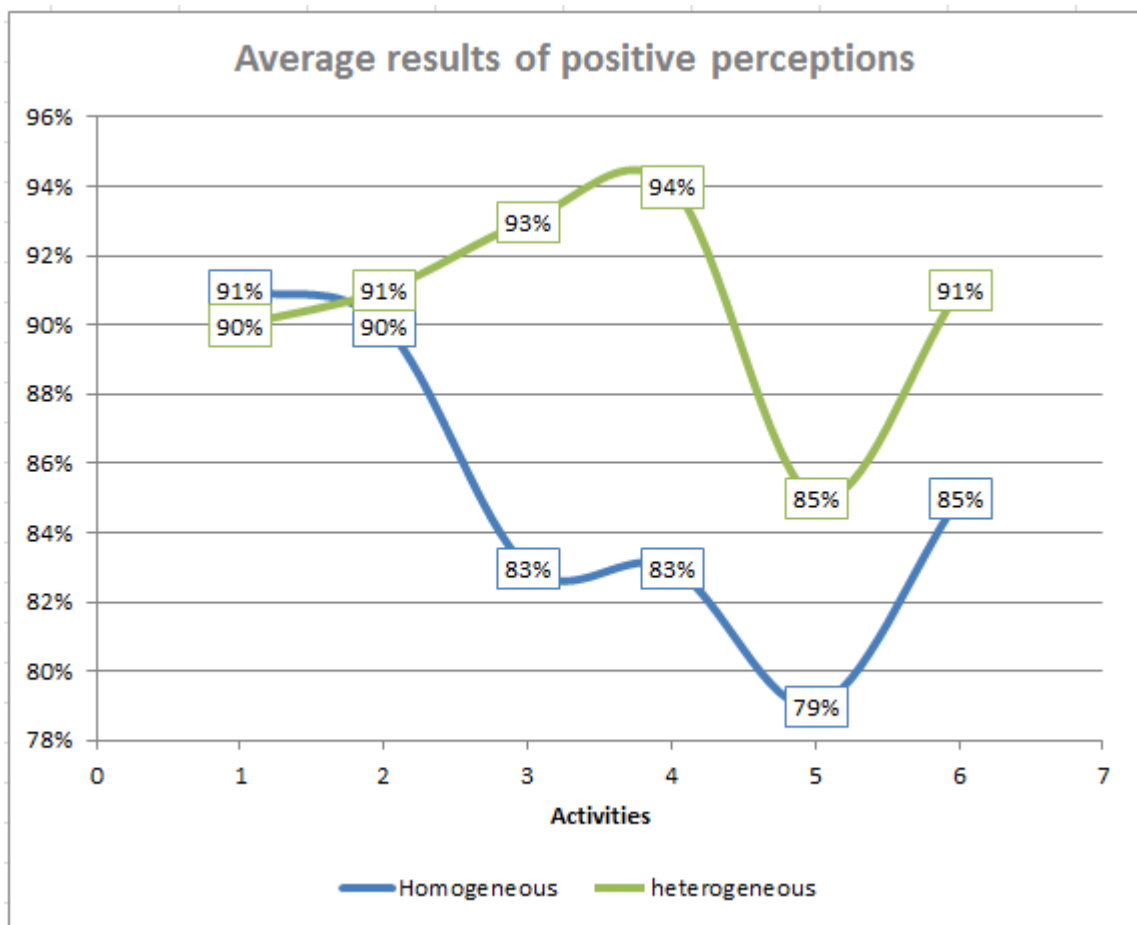
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7

I felt that I found new ways of doing the activities thanks to group work

Finally, after contrasting the average results for both groups and the differences between statements, we realized that there was a trend in the average results.

Graph 1. Average results of positive perceptions



As Table 4 portrays, Group B showed a tendency in having more positive perceptions in five of the six activities. Group A had slightly more positive perceptions only in activity one (Role Play) with a difference of just 1%. Subsequently, all percentages in Group B were above 90% throughout the

activities, whereas Group A had percentages below 90% from activity three to six. Notwithstanding the fact that perceptions on homogeneous grouping are still considered positive (because they are above 50%), the comparison reflects that heterogeneous grouping had a greater effect on students' perceptions.

4.3 Learners' Perceptions of Ability Grouping: Questionnaire Comments

In addition to the Likert Scale, the questionnaire applied in the study had a section in which participants could freely express their opinions about the activities performed. Consequently, these comments could be either positive or negative depending on each participant's perception. After analyzing participants' comments, these were categorized into five themes.

The first theme is "Comfort", which shows the level of contentment learners had within the group. In the questionnaire, there were only three comments referring to "Comfort", which is not a significant number. Nonetheless, they can help our study to complement data from the results. The same happens with the second theme "Learning took Place", with two comments referring to it. This theme was included because it measures if learners could learn, thus helpful for discussion. "Team Work" is the third theme, which deals with learners' collaborative work for the same purpose. The fourth theme is "Lack of Time"; as some learners stated they needed more time to finish the activities. Finally, the last theme is "New Ways of Learning", where learners would comment whether the activity was innovative and appropriate for learning. Interestingly, the latter was the most referred theme by participants with a number of eighteen comments overall.

As *Table 4* shows, the total number of comments is thirty nine between both groups and considering all themes -which were either positive or negative. Since questionnaire's comments were not mandatory to write, many participants' questionnaires were left without comments to consider (0).

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Table 4. Percentages of groups' comments arranged by themes

Theme	Interpersonal				Transactional				Extensive				Total
	Role play		Interview		Who am I		Debate		Story Telling		Poster Presentation		
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	
Comfort	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Learning took place	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Team work	4	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	7
Lack of Time	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	4	9
New ways of learning	3	7	0	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	18
Total n° of comments	10	11	0	2	0	2	3	1	1	4	0	5	39

4.3.1 Participants comments on interpersonal tasks.

First, in the Interpersonal task “Role Play”, there were some differences to contrast between groups. When considering “Comfort”, Group A did not have comments while two comments in Group B considered that theme in their questionnaire’s comments. As one of the participants claimed:

“I felt comfortable in the class and it was one of the few classes I wanted to participate”

As for “Learning took place”, two participants’ comments in Group A wrote that they could learn. For instance, the comments say:

“It was a good class and dynamic to learn new words”

“I enjoyed working in group; I think you can learn better”

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Interestingly, in Group B there were no comments referring to new ways of learning.

Moving on to the theme "Team work", four comments in Group A claimed that they worked collaboratively. For example, one student commented:

"I think that these activities are very helpful because they allow us to help each other within the group"

As for Group B, only one participant commented:

"It was a creative way of working, since each of us had to contribute for the group to complement"

Following with the theme "Lack of Time", one comment from Group A referred to the fact that participants needed more time to complete the task by saying:

"Maybe if we would have had more time, we could have done the activity at ease and less pressured".

This means that those learners felt that they could have done much better in the activity, but time was an impediment to do so. Evenly, there was also one comment in Group B referring to the latter:

"Good class, fun, but too fast"

Lastly, for the theme "New Ways of Learning", Group A wrote three comments against the seven written in Group B. As for Group A, one participant opined:

"Very good class, fun and interactive"

Equally, one of the comments in Group B stated:

"I liked the activity and sharing with peers I did not used to work with"

The fact that in the theme "New Ways of Learning" there are similar comments from both groups should not surprise us. Overall, in the "Role Play" activity, both groups have comments for all five themes and referred to equal facts.

In the second Interpersonal activity "Interview", Group A had no comments, while Group B had two comments regarding the theme "New Ways of Learning". One comment is:

"I liked the different ways the teacher taught the class".

4.3.2 Participants' Comments on Transactional Tasks.

In the second type of speaking activity, Group A presented no comments in the activity "Who am I", while Group B presented two. The first comment deals with the theme "Comfort" and the learner stated:

"I felt that it was nice to work with different people".

As for the second comment, which belongs to the theme "New Ways of Learning", the learner stated:

"The activity was very creative and good"

Following with the "Debate" activity, Group A presented three comments, from which two belong to "Team Work" and one to "New Ways of Learning". As stated in Group A in "Team Work", the participant felt the group interacted

satisfactorily, and ideas were shared. Additionally, in Group B there were only two comments regarding “New Ways of Learning”. One of those comments stated that activities like a debate were encouraging for learning. For instance:

*“Today there was more communication as a group
and we exchanged knowledge”*

“I like to have different activities, like Debate”

4.3.3 Participants Comments on Extensive Tasks.

Regarding Extensive tasks, the last two activities “Story Telling” and “Poster Presentation” only presented the themes “Lack of Time” and “New Ways of Learning”. Firstly, in the “Story Telling” activity, there were no comments regarding “Lack of Time” in Group A, whereas in Group B there were three comments:

“Fun but too fast”

*“The class was too short and we had to rush
to finish with the activity”*

“Classes should be slower”

Regarding the theme “New Ways of Learning”, in Group A only one learner commented:

“Very good class, dynamic and fun”

Similarly, in Group B there was also one comment written regarding the same theme:

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"Wow, best class ever"

Finally, in the "Poster Presentation" activity, Group A did not comment on the activity, while in Group B five participants commented on the matter. Three comments addressed the theme "Lack of Time", and for the theme "New Ways of Learning", two comments were addressed. One of the learners stated:

"We needed more time" while another said

"The classes were very different"

It is important to remember that at this stage of the study, not many participants commented on the questionnaire, which is reflected on the results, represented by zero on Table 4.

5. DISCUSSION

The current chapter will explain the results obtained in the study, which will answer the research questions. The chapter is divided into four sections in accordance to the research questions, which are the following:

- i) Do learners' perceptions of interpersonal speaking tasks differ depending on how they are grouped? If so, how?
- ii) Do learners' perceptions of transactional speaking tasks differ depending on how they are grouped? If so, how?
- iii) Do learners' perceptions of extensive speaking tasks differ depending on how they are grouped? If so, how?
- iv) Does one type of grouping affect learners' perceptions of speaking tasks more positively overall? If so, which and how?

5.1 The Effect of Grouping on Learners' Perceptions of Interpersonal Speaking Tasks

As reviewed before in the Literature Chapter, interpersonal speaking is another example of a conversational method used in the classroom, nevertheless, this kind of activity carries out more for maintaining social relationships rather than the exchange of facts or information (Brown, 2007). The current study worked with two Interpersonal activities: "Role Play" and "Interview", allowing learners to feel more comfortable in a collaborative environment by enhancing social relationships within the groups. After applying both activities, the results showed positive perceptions from the learners in both homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping techniques, presenting 90% and 91% of positive response. For instance, in the Role Play activity, the homogeneous group (A) had 94% of positive perception in the statement related to comfort (*"I felt comfortable working in my group"*), whereas the heterogeneous

group had 100% of positive response. The fact that heterogeneous grouping had a more positive impact in students' perceptions is supported by Hallam (2002, in Bikarian, 2009) who claims that "Heterogeneous grouping provides equity of opportunity, encourages cooperative behavior and social integration [...]" (p.30).

As for the second Interpersonal activity "Interview", both homogeneous and heterogeneous groups scored 100% in the same statement mentioned before. Consequently, both results support the idea of social relationships being prioritized, as proposed by Brown (2007).

Nonetheless, when considering the statement "*I felt that I could work at my own pace, I didn't feel pressure to finish*", many learners felt that they were rushed to complete the task, which caused this statement to be the least positively perceived. This perception does not support Kerckhoff's idea of learners working at their own pace when grouped homogeneously (Kerckhoff, 1986, in Aydin & Tugal, 2005), but they rather felt pressured. The latter could have happened due to the lack of familiarity learners had with the activities. As one of the learners commented:

"Maybe if we would have had more time, we would have done the activity at ease and less pressured"

As a consequence, in this case learners perceived they could have done a better work if they had more time available to finish.

In contrast to the above, Hallam (2002, in Bikarian, 2009) argues that it is heterogeneous grouping the one that allows pupils to work at their own pace; idea that is reflected in the 82% of positive perceptions the heterogeneous groups presented in the "Role Play" activity.

Following with perceptions in the activity "Interview", both homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping presented 94% of positive responses on the

statement *"I felt that I learned a little bit more working in my group"*. Thus, even though groups were arranged differently, learners' perceptions were the same when it came to learning. As Felder and Brent proposed, "Heterogeneous groups in consideration of their diverse academic and social attributes would foster more and deeper collaboration with members helping each other construct knowledge and understanding" (1994, in Jahng & Bullen, 2012, p.2).

In addition, when considering statement six:

"I felt that we worked well as a group and we complemented each other"

learners in homogeneous groups presented 94% of positive perceptions in the activity "Interview". Therefore, we can say that since learners shared the same ability level in their groups, they could not rely on others to finish and had to work collaboratively similarly to what Rance-Roney (2010) defended:

If you have designed a task that has a defined outcome and learners understand that there is a job to be accomplished, then grouping the reticent learners together forces them to take initiative to complete the task even though there may be a minimal use of English (p.23).

Considering the above, now we can answer our first research question.

Do learners' perceptions of interpersonal speaking tasks differ depending on how they are grouped? If so, how?

Learners' perceptions of Interpersonal speaking tasks do not differ on how they are grouped if we consider the average perceptions of both activities. This outcome may result from the nature of the Interpersonal task, which considers learners' personal interests by motivating them to maintain social interaction rather than the exchange of facts (Brown, 2007).

5.2 The Effect of Grouping on Learners' Perceptions of Transactional Speaking Tasks

First, according to Brown (2007) the purpose of transactional activities is to convey or exchange specific information. Moreover, it can include more negotiation from the learners in their speech. In our study, we chose two transactional activities, "Who am I" and "Debate".

In the first activity, "Who am I", the highest positively perceived perception belongs to the first statement

"I felt comfortable working in my group"

In the homogeneous group, there was 94% of positive perception regarding learners' comfort in the group. "Some proponents of this practice argue that homogeneous ability grouping is sensitive to the various abilities of students, often making them feel more comfortable to receive instruction with students who are at their same level" (Oakes, 1985, in Wright-Castro et al., 2003, p. 39). As for heterogeneous grouping, there were 100% of positive perceptions for statement one, meaning that all learners felt comfortable working with peers of different ability levels. From this vantage, we believe that this result could confirm the fact that working heterogeneously makes learners feel more comfortable. As reviewed in the literature, we agree on the fact that it is important to create an environment where learners can feel comfortable while learning the language; hence, distributing learners properly (heterogeneously) could be considered of critical importance in a Transactional task.

The latter can also support statement three:

"I felt that I was able to help my group mates",

which was the least positively perceived in the activity "Who am I". In contrast, we believe that homogeneous grouping is not as effective as heterogeneous grouping when peers seek for help within the group. In the current study, 67% of learners' perceptions in homogeneous grouping felt they could help their group mates, while 94% of learners' perceptions in heterogeneous grouping felt the same. Furthermore, supporting the previous idea, Felder and Brent (1994 in Jahng & Bullen, 2012) stated that "heterogeneous groups in consideration of their diverse academic and social attributes would foster more and deeper collaboration with members helping each other construct knowledge and understanding" (p.2).

Another important finding in statement two

"I felt that I learn a little bit more working in my group"

Was that both homogeneous and heterogeneous groups' percentages scored similarly, 83% and 82% respectively. Therefore, we can infer that as the activity "Who am I" belongs to the Interpersonal speaking type of task, which means that there is only exchange of personal information, both grouping techniques are suitable for this activity.

Interestingly, in the second Transactional activity "Debate", statement six:

"I felt that we worked well as a group and we complemented each other"

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shows a significant difference between homogeneous (78%) and heterogeneous grouping (100%). Thus, all participants in heterogeneous groups felt that they could work well as a group and that they complemented each other. We can complement the participants' comment of statement six in Bikarian (2009):

Students have told me that they both enjoy and produce better results when grouped heterogeneously because students with different abilities are in their group and can help them if they start to struggle with a concept or skill (p. 1).

Notwithstanding the fact that a minor amount of 78% agreed with statement six in the homogeneous groups, such amount is enough to say that most participants perceived the activity positively. This can be supported by a participant's comment which stated:

"Today there was more communication as a group and we exchanged knowledge"

Literature supports this comment with Rance-Roney's quote "When the objective is for learners to work with a problem and achieve consensus on a solution, this homogeneous grouping scheme will maximize chances for all group members to engage in conversation" (p.23).

Moving on to statement seven:

"I felt that I found new ways of doing the activities, thanks to group work"

both groups presented the lowest percentage in the "Debate" activity. Thereby, 67% of positively perceived perceptions were presented in homogeneous grouping, whereas 76% were presented in heterogeneous grouping, while doing

the activity. Here, it is worth mentioning that learners were seldom exposed to a "Debate" activity performed in English. Nevertheless, both groups scored low percentages for statement seven even when a debate in English was supposed to be new. Thus, group work did not help learners to find new ways of doing the activity as it was expected.

After reviewing the results, we can answer the second research question:

"Do learners' perceptions of transactional speaking tasks differ depending on how they are grouped? If so, how?"

We can say that it does differ on how learners are arranged. 11% of difference confirms that for this type of task, heterogeneous grouping had a more positive effect on how learners perceived the activities than homogeneous grouping. As both "Who am I" and "Debate" activities belong to the Transactional speaking task, specific information was asked to be exchanged among learners. Hence, this could mean that low-ability learners in homogeneous group might feel less confident to do the activity due to the unfamiliarity with the content. Furthermore, Vygotsky's idea of Zone Proximal Development (ZPD) explains that problem solving is determined under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers. For this reason, learners who share the same ability level may not reach a consensus when performing a task because they cannot leave their zone of proximal development, as they are not challenged by high-ability peers.

Adding to the above, scaffolding (Bruner 1957) agrees with the fact that when learners are arranged heterogeneously, they are challenged among them; therefore, they do reach the ZPD. This theory supports this grouping technique for the transactional type of task.

5.3 The Effect of Grouping on Learners' Perceptions of Extensive Speaking Tasks

Extensive oral tasks are described by Brown (2007) as mainly planned or improvised monologues in which learners need to be more formal and deliberate while speaking.

This is an important type of speaking task since learners at this stage are using the language at a higher level, meaning that they are producing more than just exchanging small utterances. Therefore, the two extensive activities "Story-Telling" and "Poster Presentation", both consisting on learners' discourse, are deliberately set to be the last two activities in the study. This, because students' conceivable improvement on oral production enhanced throughout the first four activities. The purpose was to elicit learners' production to ease them gradually into extensive type of oral activities.

To begin with, the activity "Story Telling" presents a slight but still noticeable difference in the total percentage of positive perceptions perceived by the homogeneous and heterogeneous group. Whereas the homogeneous group scored a positive percentage of 79%, the heterogeneous group presented an even more positive percentage of 85%, indicating a tendency for learners to perceive the "Story Telling" activity more positively while being arranged this way.

Furthermore, a difference of 17% can be appreciated between both groups in statement four:

"I felt that when I needed help, I had the support of my group mates".

The homogeneous group presented 83% of positive perceptions, while the heterogeneous group presented 100% of positive perceptions in statement

four. In contrast with the homogeneous group, we can infer that the heterogeneous group felt that they could support each other, and when asked for help, they felt that their classmates supported them. Bikarian (2009) suggests that learners enjoy and produce better results when grouped heterogeneously. Further, learners with different abilities can help their peers if they start to struggle with a concept or skill. Therefore, students that are battling with an idea and cannot move on from this can rely on their peers to help them to fill that gap.

It is worth mentioning that all perceptions in the homogeneous group were below 90%, whereas in the heterogeneous group, perceptions moved from 73% to 100%. Analyzing these results by comparing the statements we can conclude that "Story Telling" was positively perceived when participants were arranged heterogeneously rather than arranged homogeneously, except for statement five:

"I felt that I could work at my own pace, and I didn't feel pressured to finish"

This result may be on account of the lack of time the class had, which led to learners in the heterogeneous group to feel pressured to finish the task. Consequently, three out of the five comments on the activity suggested that learners felt they could have done much more to accomplish the task but they were rushed into finishing. One of the comments reads:

"We were hurried to finish and had little time to complete the activity"

and points out the fact that further research should mind students overall level and pace to make them, in this case, write a story effectively.

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Moreover, in the last activity "Poster Presentation" statement one:

"I felt comfortable working in my group" and
statement two

*"I felt that I learned a little bit more working in
my group"*

were perceived more positively by the homogeneous group than the heterogeneous group. The difference in the first statement is of 6%, with a 100% of positive perceptions for the homogeneous grouping and 94% for the heterogeneous grouping. This small percentage between both groups implies that even though a great number of learners in the heterogeneous group felt comfortable working with their group, even more learners on the homogeneous group felt the same way.

As for the second statement, only 1% stands between the perceptions on both groups, with 89% and 88% for homogeneous and heterogeneous respectively. We can infer that, despite this small difference, learners from both groups felt that they learned something working with their group in this activity, without regard to which grouping technique was used to arrange them.

Subsequently, in statement six:

*"I felt that we worked well as a group and we
complemented each other"*

no matter how students were grouped, both homogeneous and heterogeneous group scored 94% of positive perceptions towards team work. Furthermore, in the last statement

“I felt that I found new ways of doing the activities, thanks to group work”

a significant difference of 15% indicated that learners in the homogeneous group did not find new ways of doing the task as learners in the heterogeneous group did. As stated in the literature, “heterogeneous groups in consideration of their diverse academic and social attributes would foster more and deeper collaboration with members helping each other construct knowledge and understanding.” (Felder & Brent, 1994, in Jahng & Bullen, 2012, p.2) then learners are grouped with others that differ from them in their academic and social attributes, they, as suggested by Felder and Brent, can construct knowledge and understanding. We can infer that, by working this way, learners can find new ways of doing different tasks; therefore, they can perceive this technique positively for completing an activity, a Poster Presentation in this case.

Finally, to conclude with the last activity, the homogeneous group presented 85% of positive perceptions in total, while the heterogeneous group 91%, suggesting that overall, learners perceived the heterogeneous grouping technique more positively than the homogeneous grouping technique.

In light of what was reviewed above, we can answer research question number three:

Do learners' perceptions of extensive speaking tasks differ depending on how they are grouped? If so, how?

We can conclude that learners' perceptions of extensive speaking tasks do differ depending on which grouping technique is used. When students were arranged heterogeneously, the perceptions of the activity were more positive. The heterogeneous grouping technique being the most positively perceived by the learners for extensive speaking tasks. Therefore, we can conclude that for

this type of speaking task, grouping the students considering different ability levels is beneficial to their perception of the task, hence, their performance. This can be supported by Wood, Bruner and Ross' definition of scaffolding (1976): "scaffolding consists essentially of the adult 'controlling' those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner's capacity, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence" (p.90). Thus, high-ability learners in the heterogeneous group can guide low-ability learners to construct knowledge. Moreover, high-ability learners would represent the adults within the group; therefore, they would be the more knowledgeable peer.

5.4 The Effect of Grouping on Learners' Overall Perceptions on Speaking Tasks

After reviewing the results and the previous research questions on the different speaking tasks, we can now conclude which of the two grouping techniques affects learners' perceptions of speaking tasks more positively overall.

When analyzing literature, a debate arises when talking about the advantages of the different types of ability grouping. Many advocates of homogeneous grouping highlight the importance of this technique in the classroom, as they believe is the most suitable for addressing learners' needs in regards of their different abilities. Kerckhoff (1986, in Aydin & Tugal, 2005), for example, pointed out that as learners are grouped with others who share their ability level, the pace of instruction is suitable for each level. Therefore, learners can move at their own pace without having to either wait for others or rush to finish with the task. Another important advantage emphasized by Oakes (1985, in Wright-Castro et al., 2003) is that grouping the students homogeneously simplifies teachers' instruction to provide students with a more adequate and personalized instruction.

As for the heterogeneous grouping, emphasis is made on the fact that learners grouped with others who have different ability levels can significantly improve collaboration within the group and construct knowledge and understanding. Gain occurs for learners in all levels, for instance, learners in the low-ability group gain from seeing how their peers deal with problems, and learners in the high-ability group gain a deeper understanding of the subject by teaching it to others (Felder & Brent, 1994, in Jahng & Bullen, 2012).

Having those advantages in mind, the effectiveness of the grouping technique will depend on the type of speaking task; Interpersonal, Transactional and Extensive. After analyzing the results in each speaking task, we can conclude that as for the first task (Interpersonal) there was no difference on learners' perceptions, meaning that both grouping techniques are suitable for activities of this type. This may be since this type of activity has to do with maintaining social relationships rather than exchanging information about specific facts (Brown, 2007).

Transactional speaking tasks do present a difference on how learners perceived it according to which grouping technique they are arranged. According to the results, it is more recommendable to use heterogeneous grouping because of the nature of Transactional tasks, which consists on activities that require learners to exchange specific information on a specific topic. As heterogeneous grouping requires learners to collaborate within the group, it becomes easier for them to address this type of task as it involves learners complementing ideas to complete a specific task.

The same scenario is presented for the Extensive speaking task where, indicated by the results, the heterogeneous grouping again is the most suitable technique. We can infer that this is due to the essence of the task which requires previous preparation, hence, learners in the heterogeneous group can, as stated

before, complement ideas and work collaboratively to accomplish the Extensive tasks.

Consequently, we can say that as the first activity (Interpersonal) does not require a deeper understanding from the learners, both homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping are suitable for learners to carry on with the activities in this type of task. As the tasks get more complex and require more preparation, the need for learners to be grouped with others with different ability levels increases. Therefore, according to the results, learners should be grouped heterogeneously to perceive Interpersonal activities more positively.

To conclude with the last research question:

Does one type of grouping affect learners' perceptions of speaking tasks more positively overall? If so, which and how?

Indeed, we can confirm that grouping learners heterogeneously does affect learners' perceptions of speaking tasks more positively in two out of the three speaking tasks in the current study. As for the first task, both homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping are considered to affect learners' perceptions positively.

Literature on heterogeneous grouping proposed that learners arranged by this technique can work on a higher level by constructing knowledge and working collaboratively. Finally, it is appropriate to work with this type of grouping in tasks such as Transactional, Extensive, and Interpersonal as well.

6. CONCLUSIONS

As for the conclusion of the study, the current chapter will address the implications the study could have in the field, explain the limitations throughout its application, to eventually suggest further research.

6.1 Implications

After going through all the steps which implicated creating a study, we have corroborated that teaching the speaking skill of the language is highly challenging. The referred skill seems to be difficult to adapt in the Chilean EFL classes since it demands teachers using the target language for learners -which are sometimes reluctant to try it. In the case of the context in which the study was held, most teachers accustomed to perform their classes using Spanish instead of English. Hence, the six classes performed by the researcher were considerably more demanding for students to understand due to the rare practice of oral input.

Firstly, the fact that both, heterogeneous and homogeneous grouping were perceived positively by learners gives us a good sign. We could realize that both heterogeneous and homogeneous grouping techniques are useful depending on the level of complexity or nature of the task. On the one hand, we obtained positive results when grouping students both homogeneously and heterogeneously for the Interpersonal tasks. As we mentioned before, this is mainly because talking about personal topics -which is the focus of Interpersonal activities- make students feel more comfortable and confident. On the other hand, it was relevant for us to know that when working in Transactional and Extensive activities, students feel more comfortable interacting with peers that have different levels of ability. The fact that homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping was unfamiliar in participants' previous classes did not prevail and both types proved to be effective as the implementation of the study went on. It

results very interesting and relevant to understand how students feel more comfortable when practicing the speaking skill. As it was exposed in previous chapters, the focus of English in our Chilean context has changed in the last few years. That change entails several challenges, being the most imperative one the implementation of speaking tasks. Since most Chilean schools deal with many students per classroom, it seems necessary to implement measures that facilitate and promote communication among students. By grouping them adequately, they will feel more eager to express their ideas using the target language, which is one of our focuses (instead of speaking performance and accuracy).

In addition to this, we can say the findings of this study provide not only contributions, but also guidance for teachers to group students effectively. Since grouping was positively perceived by learners, teachers should start attempting the outcome of different grouping techniques by assigning different types of activities. Sometimes teachers struggle or have a hard time trying to find out the best way to create proper group works. Sometimes teachers give students the possibility of arranging groups considering their personal relationships. In other occasions, teachers group students according to the level of ability of the students. After reading this research study, it is nothing but encouraging to seek the perfect team work in each EFL class. To group students in a way they feel comfortable enough to do activities in a better way, can help us teachers and learners to increase learning in the classroom.

6.2 Limitations

Even though our study obtained fruitful data, it is worth referring to the limitations a study of this nature could have. As for the participants, attendance was a direct limitation in the process of data collection since absentees were a significant number. It is crucial then to consider the number of students per class

and the length of the entire study. The ideal number of learners for conducting an experiment such as this one seems to be above thirty per class. Having many students in a class results in more work, but at the end it may give you more data to draw conclusions on. Nevertheless, many setbacks may appear even when having the right number of participants or when the implementation period seems short. For example, the current study was supposed to last two and a half weeks, but it was eventually complete in almost four. The latter was caused due to local holydays and extracurricular activities, which are highly encouraged by the school setting.

There are many situations to mind and overcome when conducting a study, but in some cases, there are problems unable to foresee. For instance, class three was not done the day it was supposed to because the number of absentees was too high. Therefore, the class had to be cancelled and learners who attended were given English news to read and summarize.

Despite these occurrences, the researcher could adapt the schedule and kept learners on track by creating a e-mail for the class. As for the context of the study, it was a challenge to adapt new ways of teaching in the school. It was critical to know participants well to assign the new tasks correctly, and in this case, it was hard but achievable. Different types of grouping will always be a challenge, but teachers are meant to succeed if they find out how to make learners complement each other.

6.3 Suggestions

As stated before, it is pivotal for teachers to make emphasis on the importance for learners to produce orally in the EFL classroom. However, this is usually not the case and teachers do not encourage learners to produce due to the weight grammar has in the instruction of the language. That said, bringing new activities and grouping techniques to the classroom can in fact enhance

learners' oral production, thus, their perception towards the language. It is necessary to experiment with different types of communicational activities in classes to create a trend in perceptions of ability-grouping.

Furthermore, if research may expand to more detailed comparisons, then a study using an instrument to assess participants' learning after being grouped seems valid. It would be key to know whether participants' positive perceptions can produce positive testing results. Interestingly, there are many possibilities in different educational contexts to experiment with, such as arranging classes in pairs in accordance to their ability level. Such study could reveal to which extent learners can collaborate with each other, and what partnership could develop by working with one peer or two and so on.

Moreover, as this study deals with the speaking skill, we strongly encourage future researchers to replicate this study to provide more evidence on homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping. The latter could be achieved if the three types of speaking tasks remaining (Imitative, Intensive and Responsive) were contrasted in a comparison group design. Additionally, if we are to focus on learners' production in the class, then the writing skill should also be tested. Even when throughout our study we have emphasized the difficulties of teaching the speaking skill, it is certain that the writing skill level of most Chilean EFL learners is not outstanding.

Finally, any experiment dealing with a collaborative approach in classrooms should provide opportunities for learners to produce more language-which is in the end, the final purpose of teaching.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Original questionnaire

Name: _____

Date: _____

Cuestionario N°1
Role Play

Las siguientes afirmaciones son de acuerdo a la actividad que acabas de realizar.

Indica con una ✘ si estás de acuerdo o en desacuerdo, basándote en la escala presentada.

	Reflexión personal sobre el trabajo en grupo	Totalmente en desacuerdo	En Desacuerdo	De Acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
1	Me sentí cómodo/a y a gusto cuando trabajé en grupo				
2	Sentí que aprendí un poco más trabajando en grupo				
3	Sentí que fui capaz de ayudar a mis compañeros de grupo				
4	Sentí que cuando necesité ayuda, recibí apoyo de mis compañeros				
5	Sentí que pude trabajar a mi propio ritmo y no me sentí presionado por terminar				
6	Sentí que trabajamos bien como grupo y nos complementamos bien				
7	Sentí que encontré nuevas maneras de realizar la actividad gracias al trabajo en grupo				

Comentario Personal
(opcional)

Appendix 2. Original Consent



Comité de Ética
Facultad de Educación

16 de Agosto de 2016

The Effects of Ability-grouping on Students' Perceptions of Communicative Tasks

Consentimiento Informado

Yo, _____, he leído la información provista y cualquier pregunta que he realizado ha sido respondida satisfactoriamente. Acepto participar en esta actividad, siendo consciente de mi derecho a retirarme en cualquier momento y por cualquier motivo, sin ningún tipo de perjuicio. También acepto que las entrevistas/observaciones en las que participe sean registradas con una grabadora de audio/video.

Comprendo que toda la información provista será tratada en estricta confidencialidad y no será difundida por el/la investigador/a. La única excepción del principio de confidencialidad se presentará en caso de que una Corte solicite los documentos. Me ha sido señalado el tipo de material que será recolectado, el propósito de la investigación, y el uso que se hará del material recolectado una vez finalizada la investigación.

Autorizo que el material de investigación recolectado para este estudio sea publicado, siempre y cuando su nombre y/o cualquier otro tipo de información que pueda identificarla no sea utilizado.

Firma _____

Fecha _____

LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ABILITY-GROUPING TECHNIQUES

Appendix 3. Lesson Plans

i. "Role Play" activity

Universidad Andrés Bello
Facultad de Educación
Pedagogía en Inglés

LESSON PLAN

Grade: 11th grade

Length: 90 minutes

Lesson: First lesson

Main Objective: By the end of the class students will be able to use determined vocabulary in certain survival settings

Learning outcome (s):

Talking about survival settings.

Key Activities:

- Identifying new vocabulary
- Filling the gaps
- Role playing

Contents

Language Skills /strategies:	Lexis	Language function	Language form	Pronunciation
Grammar Speaking Listening Writing	Survival kit: flashlight, matches, needle and thread, pocket knife, safety pin, whistle, compass and first aid kit.	Identifying and talking about survival settings.	Present Simple	/ts/

Assumed knowledge: Students already know the present simple tense.

Anticipated difficulties: Students may have difficulties to understand oral input.

Stages	What the teacher or Sts does	Interaction	Materials-Timing
Warm-up / Engage	Teacher starts the class by setting up the projector. The first slide is going to show unit 4 –which begins in the current class. Then, slide number two shows the main objective of the class “to use vocabulary in	Group	Data PPT 15 min

LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ABILITY-GROUPING TECHNIQUES

	survival settings". After that, teacher gives a paper strip with a question to each group so students can discuss about them.		
Study / presentation	After hearing students' opinions, teacher answers the question – if you could travel in time, when and where would you go? Teacher says he would time travel to the past and that would go and live to the jungle. Then, teacher introduces survival kit vocabulary.		15 min
Practice	Students fill in the gaps in slide 5 using the new vocabulary. The teacher will read the sentences as a monologue to introduce the next activity.		10 min
Activate / production	Role play. The teacher hands in paper strips with the vocabulary for each member of the group. They will have to use them in their role play. Students will pick a case scenario among climbing the Everest, walking through the dessert and lost in an island. Students will have 5 minutes to prepare their role play.		40 min
Close-up/ Wrap-up	Students will answer a questionnaire regarding the role play class.		10 min

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ii. Activity "Interview".

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Pedagogía en Inglés

LESSON PLAN

Grade: 11th grade

Length: 90 minutes

Lesson: Second lesson

<p><u>Main Objective:</u> by the end of the class students will be able to talk about imaginary or unlikely situations.</p> <p><u>Learning outcome (s):</u> Thinking hypothetically.</p> <p><u>Key Activities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Second conditional identification. - Hypothetical Interview. 				
Contents				
Language Skills /strategies:	Lexis	Language function	Language form	Pronunciation
Grammar Speaking Listening Writing	Survival kit: flashlight, matches, needle and thread, pocket knife, safety pin, whistle, compass and first aid kit.	Talking and giving advice in survival settings.	Second Conditional If + sub + verb past + complement, sub + would + verb infinitive + complement	
<p><u>Assumed knowledge:</u> Students already know the present simple.</p> <p><u>Anticipated difficulties:</u> Students may have difficulties to understand oral input.</p>				
Stages	What the teacher or Sts does		Interactio n	Material- Timing
Warm-up / Engage	Teacher brings the three case scenarios from the previous class to ask their students what would they do if they didn't have their aid kit in those survival settings. Then, teacher writes in the board the solutions and ideas from students.		T/S	Data PPT 15 min

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Study / presentation	<p>The teacher introduces the second conditional using the answers previously mentioned by his students.</p> <p>“If +sub + verb past + complement , sub + would + verb infinitive + complement “</p>	T/S	20 min
Practice	<p>Students read the survival questionnaire (Insights book 4) and work with the second conditional by answering the questions. Answers range from a) to d) and each of them score differently in accordance with their relevance in the questions.</p> <p>Finally, the team that scores most points wins.</p>	SS/S	Insights Book 4 25 min
Activate / production	<p>Students create an interview using the second conditional regarding what would they do to survive in such settings. Students need to create 6 questions to ask to their classmates. After that, students must write the answers.</p> <p>The teacher picks some questions to read them out loud.</p>	S SS/S	25 min
Close-up/ Wrap-up	<p>Students will answer a questionnaire regarding the interview class.</p>	S	5 min

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iii. Activity "Who am I".

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Pedagogía en Inglés

LESSON PLAN

Grade: 11th grade

Length: 90 minutes

Lesson: Third lesson

Main Objective: by the end of the class students will be able to say what they can or can't do

Learning outcome (s):

Second Conditional

Usage of *Can* and *Could*.

Key Activities:

- Who am I?

Contents

Language Skills /strategies:	Lexis	Language function	Language form	Pronunciation
Grammar Speaking Listening Writing	Haunted Ghost Strange bruise	To talk about things which you can or can't do..	Can and Could	

Assumed knowledge: Students can read and write

Anticipated difficulties: Students may have difficulties to understand differences with can and could

Stages	What the teacher or Sts does	Interaction	Materials-Timing
Warm-up / Engage	Teacher tells a paranormal story to call the students' attention and to introduce the topic of the lesson. Then students in their groups talk freely about paranormal things that had happened to them.	T/S S	15 min

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Study / presentation	Teacher introduces the grammar features of <i>can</i> and <i>could</i> . Consequently, Teacher uses the students' experiences to explain their usage	T/S	15 min
Practice	Students read the text in Insights book 4 and underline sentences that have <i>can</i> or <i>could</i> . Teacher shows how both worked in the text.	SS/S	25 min
Activate / production	Students draw papers with some characters, and without looking, they put that in their front head and ask questions (e.g. Can I fly? Or, if there was a full moon, could I transform into a creature?) to their group to figure out which character they are. They take turns to ask questions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Voldemort - Vampire - Werewolf - Witch - Ghost - Alien - Zombie - Frankenstein - Mummy 	S SS/S	25 min
Close-up/ Wrap-up	Students answer the questionnaire regarding the activity performed.	S	10 min

LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ABILITY-GROUPING TECHNIQUES

iv. Activity "Debate".

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LESSON PLAN

Grade: 11th grade

Length: 90 minutes

Lesson: Fourth lesson

Main Objective: by the end of the class students will be able to defend a point of view by giving arguments.

Learning outcome (s): Expose ideas and supporting them cleverly.

Key Activities:

- Debate

Contents

Language Skills /strategies:	Lexis	Language function	Language form	Pronunciation
Grammar Speaking Listening Writing	Freelance	Defending a point of view	Freelance	/k/

Assumed knowledge: Students can read and write

Anticipated difficulties: Students may have difficulties understanding oral input.

Stages	What the teacher or Sts does	Interaction	Materials-Timing
Warm-up / Engage	Teacher starts the class by commenting on the horrifying happenings in Syria. After hearing some opinions, teacher asks students whether they believe in life after death. Consequently, teacher shows the main objective of the class: to create a debate regarding life after death.	T/S	15 min
Study / presentation	Teacher explains the instructions of the debate and its organization throughout the class. Students (which are always placed in groups) are given a position to take	T/S	10 min

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	(agree or disagree) on life after death.		
Practice	Groups are given time to organize their reasoning and arguments to justify their position. Dictionaries are allowed.	SS/S	30 min Dictionaries
Activate / production	Groups in pairs stand face to face to start the debate. Teacher uses a rubric to assess groups and individuals' performances, telling which side takes the lead in each debate. Students are given instant feedback as they stand.	S SS/S	30 min
Close-up/ Wrap-up	Students answer the questionnaires regarding the activity performed.	S	5 min

LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ABILITY-GROUPING TECHNIQUES

v. Activity "Story Telling".

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LESSON PLAN

Grade: 11th grade

Length: 90 minutes

Lesson: Fifth lesson

Main Objective: by the end of the class students will be able to tell a story using different expressions.

Learning outcome (s):

- Consolidating the vocabulary of the unit
- Figuring out the meaning of some words by context
- Learning and putting into practice the stress some words
- Reading and listening to comprehend a story
- Consolidating phrasal verbs

Key Activities:

- Reading a text
- Filling a chart
- Writing a text
- Telling a story

Contents

Language Skills /strategies:	Lexis	Language function	Language form	Pronunciation
Grammar Speaking Listening Writing	Vocabulary related to the unit (electricity, whistle, flashlight,)	Talking about past events	Past Simple Phrasal verbs -figure out -go out -try out -find out -look out -take out	Stress First syllables, Compound words

Assumed knowledge: Students already know the vocabulary of the unit

Anticipated difficulties: Students might have difficulties with the pronunciation of some words.

LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ABILITY-GROUPING TECHNIQUES

Stages	What the teacher or Sts does	Interaction	Materials-Timing
Warm-up / Engage	The teacher shows a story on a PPT. Some words (Vocabulary) sre underlined in different formats. Students must find out the meaning of them.	T/S W/C	15 min Data
Study / presentation	The teacher introduces phrasal verbs and the importance of stressing words in English.	T/S	15 min Data
Practice	Students write a chart on which they separate and classify vocabulary regarding their syllables.	S	Data 25 min
Activate / production	In groups, students must write a story in the past using at least 4 phrasal verbs and 4 vocabulary words. They present the story to the class and the teacher checks pronunciation and stress.	SS/S	30 min Copybook
Close-up/ Wrap-up	Students answer questionnaire five.	S	5 min

LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ABILITY-GROUPING TECHNIQUES

vi. Activity "Poster Presentation".

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LESSON PLAN

Grade: 11th grade

Length: 90 minutes

Lesson: Sixth lesson

Main Objective: by the end of the class students will be able to advertise and present about world destinations.

Learning outcome (s):

- To advertise locations.
- Present in front of an audience.

Key Activities:

- Poster presentation

Contents

Language Skills /strategies:	Lexis	Language function	Language form	Pronunciation
Grammar Speaking Listening Writing	Freelance	Advertising and presenting about world destinations	Freelance	/k/

Assumed knowledge: Students can read and write

Anticipated difficulties: Students might have difficulties understanding oral input

Stages	What the teacher or Sts does	Interaction	Materials-Timing
Warm-up / Engage	Teacher starts the class in the lab and tells which beautiful place in the world he would like to visit. Then asks students where they would like to go and why. At the end of the stage teacher shows the main objective of the class: to present and advertise a world marvel.	T/S W/C	10 min Data

LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ABILITY-GROUPING TECHNIQUES

Study / presentation	Teacher shows a guideline with instructions for the main activity of the class: Poster Presentation.	T/S	10 min
Practice	Groups are given cardboard posters and markers. Then groups must decide which place they would like to advertise by surfing in the web for detailed information.	T/S S SS/S	Posters Markers Lab Computers 35 min
Activate / production	Groups present their poster in front of the class and advertise the chosen destination.	SS/S	30 min
Close-up/ Wrap-up	Students answer questionnaire six.	S	5 min