



**UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA**

Trabajo de investigación presentado como requisito
parcial para optar al título de:

Licenciado en Lenguas Extranjeras

Autor

Carlos Alberto Vélez Castrillón

Universidad de Antioquia

Escuela de Idiomas

Medellín, Colombia

2020



Cooperative Learning to Improve Group Work Effectiveness

Carlos Alberto Vélez Castrillón

Practicum Advisor

Astrid Tangarife Sánchez

Magister in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

Medellín

June 2020

Abstract

This action research was aimed at increasing group work effectiveness of ninth graders at a public institution in Girardota through the implementation of cooperative learning strategies at a public institution in Girardota. The entire group was divided into ten groups of four students and they were trained in the development of tasks using roles. Data were collected through a journal, an interview to the teacher, and a focus group. Data analysis showed that cooperative learning strategies increase the effectiveness of group work at different levels. Based on these positive results, it would be interesting to analyze the students' performance after implementing this same strategy throughout a whole school year to do the analysis of the performance of students.

Key words: Cooperative Learning, Effectiveness, Group Work.

Degree Requirement

This action research project is submitted as a requirement of the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English-French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellin, Colombia.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my practicum, research and thesis advisor, Astrid Tangarife Sánchez, for her ongoing support and guidance. Without this, conducting this action research project, and writing this report would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank my parents and family for their unconditional patience and love. With this, and my own courage and conviction to become a better professional, I have begun an onward, emotional journey of personal development.

In addition, a very special acknowledgment to my cooperating teacher and students at I.E. Emiliano García, for their ongoing collaboration and commitment with this project. We worked together to make a change for the better in the English classroom, and their voices will be heard.

Table of Contents

Preface	6
Context	7
Statement of the Problem	8
Theoretical Framework	11
Cooperative and Collaborative Learning	11
The Benefits of Cooperative Learning	14
Group Work Effectiveness	15
Research Question	16
Objectives	16
General Objective	16
Specific Objectives	16
Action Plan	17
Development of Actions	18
Data Analysis	22
Findings and Interpretations	22
Conclusions	31
Reflections	32
References	34
Appendix A	35
Appendix B	36

Preface

During the process of my personal development, I have learned many strategies about English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching. As a teacher I have always regarded the most appropriate methodology to help students to meet their goals and improve their English level. Despite that, after many observations, I found that the implementation of group work activities were not as effective as they should be. With the strong conviction that the teacher needs to provide students with enriching experiences that make the ESL learning not only a fun, but positive experience. I decided to investigate in-depth the development of group work activities, and I identified *Cooperative Learning* as a potential strategy to make it effective.

The findings of my research not only expanded my knowledge about methods and methodologies, but also helped me to have a better understanding of the students' points of view, and their feelings with respect to well-structured activities in learning.

Description of the Context

The i.e. Emiliano García is a well-organized school located in Girardota, with the Bureau-Veritas Certification. Its mission is to guarantee a quality educational service with a strategic directional and a holistic pedagogical model, and respect for diversity through a well-prepared team of teachers who are involved with the educational community.

Moreover, the institution is open to change and progress through meaningful learning, and scientific and technological knowledge. With respect to its vision, by 2025 the institution pursues to be an inclusive organization, recognized for its holistic approach by the educational community, engaged with the humanistic and environmental development, a peaceful coexistence, and able to improve the students' life-quality, their comprehension of the world and their identity.

With respect to the students, it is a group of ninth graders conformed by nineteen girls and sixteen boys, with ages between fourteen and sixteen who are residents of the town. In addition, the students' attitude towards English learning is not positive; in other words, they seem not to be interested in learning this language; a fact that might be caused by the rural condition in which students are involved. Moreover, many families belong to a low socio-economic stratum, some of them are farmers who grow their products and live mostly in the rural areas of the town. Equally important is the fact that these ninth graders only have three hours of English instruction per week that are usually reduced to two for external circumstances.

Regarding the Cooperative Teacher (CT), Camilo Betancur is a young-adult teacher who is 39 years old, and has a degree in Foreign Languages obtained in 2012 in the University of Antioquia. In addition, Camilo has a master's degree in "Gestión de la

Tecnología Educativa” obtained in 2015 in the University of Santander and speaks French and Portuguese. In general, his attitude towards his students and his role as a teacher is in accordance with the Ministry of National Education’s (MEN) regulations; he always tries to keep good relations with the students and he gives his best to provide them with a good instruction. Equally important, the CT is a very attentive cooperating teacher who is always willing to help the student-teacher to comply with everything he needs.

This institution is a big school and its facilities are adequate for learning. Specifically, for English learning they have an adequate English laboratory with updated equipment and devices; it is a good place conditioned with everything that students need to work in terms of instruction with ICT’s. Everybody has access to a tablet and headphones; there is a good TV set, a surround system, a whiteboard, and air conditioning. Despite all this, the students take the English classes in a common classroom where they study all their subjects; therefore, the environment of the classroom is not thought for English learning.

Regarding the English syllabus for ninth graders, the topics that the institution has included in the contents are in accordance with the MEN’s regulations, and it is focused on fostering students’ comprehension and oral production skills. Some of the suggested strategies for this purpose are reading comprehension activities, translations, games, songs, among others, intended to achieve a better domain of the foreign language and strengthen the socialization processes within the class.

Statement of the Problem

Through my observations and reflections, conversations with the CT, and a survey applied to the students and the CT, I found that one of the most common strategies used by the teacher to conduct his English classes was group-work. However, this strategy has not

proved to be an effective activity because the students have developed bad habits and bad behaviors, not conducive to a learning experience. For instance, some of them are always waiting for someone else to do their work, and in those spaces they do not let others work; consequently, the students who want to work cannot concentrate, and the activity that was meant to be a meaningful experience becomes a waste of time and only a relaxing time for some students. I am concerned about this because students who are not very committed with English learning can find a comfort zone in that situation in which they do not do anything; this situation could be understood as a lack of opportunity to learn. The inclusive objective of education in which all class members are expected to actively participate, would not be consistent with this situation.

With respect to my observations and reflections, when I refer to the activities implemented by the teacher as alternatives to engage students in learning, I believe that something is missing; for instance, the implementation of a well-defined Cooperative Learning strategy through group-work as a part of the teacher's methodology. As a consequence, I thought it would be necessary to involve all the students in group-work activities, so they feel themselves as a part of a common objective. All this is important because when the cycles in classes are so repetitive, students tend to anticipate to the development of the class: they always have the same groups, do not do the activities suggested by the teacher, they end up wasting time, so the objective of the class is not met. Something important to consider is the fact that they are teenagers and they would probably be more engaged if the activities were more interesting.

Additionally, for the school it is important that the students communicate in English, so they need to improve their communicative skills. In order to make this possible,

I intended to implement a well-defined Cooperative Learning strategy in which the students could work in groups more effectively, and ultimately improve their linguistic performance. I believe that if the teacher creates the opportunity to work cooperatively, the role of the students in each group – secretary, strategist- must be clear. Furthermore, all the work must be supervised by the teacher through constant feedback to help students to improve their individual and group performance. Cooperative work can help students in different ways because learning through interaction with other peers may result in a more interactive way of learning, and they can also compare their own level with others’.

Through some conversations with my CT, I could learn that his ideas agree with mine; he also thinks that there is a big potential in group-work activities, but he is not implementing an effective strategy that involves all students in the learning process. For that reason, I think that this strategy I am planning to implement will be successful; I will have his support because he strongly agrees with the objectives of my action research.

In order to get information about the students and the teacher’s preferences to work in class (individually or in groups), I designed a survey for the teacher and for the students to ask them about this. The survey applied to the teacher showed that he prefers to develop group work activities in classes. As for the students, 85% answered positively about group work the results also showed that most of them think that working in groups let them work more cooperatively because they can interact with their peers, individual attainments are easier to reach, they can improve their social skills, they learn to be more participative, and class time runs faster. However, they also recognize that in normal group work activities there are always some students waiting for the best leveled students to do their job.

Theoretical Background

Cooperative Learning (CL) is a powerful approach that can help students to improve their language skills because through group-work students can get involved in communicative situations oriented to produce language through interaction. In this particular context, I identified that one of the most important issues is the lack of controlled and well-directed group-work activities, and the students' low level. It is then necessary to develop strategies such as CL so it can help them to achieve learning goals. In the following lines, I will develop the concepts underlying my action research project: Cooperative Learning, Collaborative Learning, and Group Work Effectiveness.

Cooperative and Collaborative Learning

In the first place, there is a very notorious gap among students in the school context because students have different English levels, so teachers must deal with this issue when implementing any teaching-learning strategy. For that reason, implementing Cooperative Learning in classes could be rewarding if the planned activities are thought for every student to participate. In this respect, Deutsh (1962), and Johnson and Jhonson. (1991) state that cooperative learning situations turn into a positive interdependence between students because they realize that every student in the group can achieve their learning goals only if the other members of the group achieve theirs too.

In modern language teaching, an important strategy used by many teachers around the world is cooperative/collaborative learning; in fact, for many scholars there is no difference between cooperative and collaborative learning, but according to Pateşan et al. (2016), there are some differences; for instance, collaborative learning is a wider strategy that involves the whole process of learning while cooperative learning is more focused on

facilitating the accomplishment of a specific goal through students working together in groups. These authors also state that in collaborative learning the students develop a very strong ownership of the process and the teacher acts as a consultant, but the students determine if they have enough information to accomplish the task. In contrast, in cooperative learning, the teacher maintains control of the process at each stage of the students' work; the students are under the teacher's supervision (p. 480).

Correspondingly, for the development of this project I decided on cooperative learning as the strategy to be used because I would be involved in all the processes of interaction. According to Johnson and Johnson (1989), in cooperative learning there are three ways of student-student interaction that may be structured in school classes: competitive, individual, and cooperative. The same authors stated that the sense of competitiveness reinforces the values of getting more than others in the students, beating and defeating others, seeing winning as important, and believing that opposing and obstructing the success of others is a natural way of life. Additionally, as individuals each member of the group can develop social and communicative skills that encourage them to explore and go beyond their own processes of learning; cooperative work lets students achieve goals and realize that as a part of a group they can be an important piece (p. 36).

Similarly, for Pateşan et al. (2016), cooperative learning is directly linked to the individual development of learning of all group members and advocate to ensure that all those individuals are able to solve the problem or complete the task they are assigned. Furthermore, through cooperative learning the students are called to work together in a positive interdependence and not to see their team peers as rivals, there is no admittance to competition inside of teams; if cooperative learning is correctly implemented with groups

of working students who learn together and do not compete with each other, learning will be effective and efficient (p. 482).

In addition to this, Johnson et al. (2009) elaborate on five main elements that should be well structured in a cooperative strategy. The first element is *positive interdependence*: every student can feel that their work is an important element of the group work, so success depends on the commitment of each member of the team; that positive relation is only possible if the role of all the members of the team is clearly stated. The second element is *face-to-face* in order to promote a positive interaction in which every student is able to transmit to other students certain type of knowledge. Although most of knowledge is transmitted by the teacher, group-work allows students to help, assist, encourage, and support each other's efforts in the learning process. The third element is *individual accountability* which highlights the individual work of every member of the group; as every member of the team has a different role in the development of a group activity, the individual improvement can be demonstrated. The fourth element is *social skills* because for the correct development and integration of any kind of group, students need to develop leadership, decision-making, trust-building, communication, and conflict-management skills. The fifth element is *group processing* in which the group has the opportunity to reflect on the individual participation of each student asking if their participation was helpful and if they have something to improve. Such questioning helps students to be focused on their group's performance and ensures that everybody can receive constant feedback about their participation which is the final essence of working cooperatively (p. 366).

The benefits of Cooperative Learning

When a teacher decides to implement Cooperative Learning activities, it is necessary to consider all the benefits it has. Referring to this, Pateşan et al. (2016) elaborated on four main benefits: cooperation makes students get a better understanding of their peers; critical thinking skills are improved, individual self-esteem and respect increase when their work is valued by others, and their oral communicative skills are improved too (p. 482). Likewise, Johnson et al. (2008) also refer to some benefits of CL: positive results in achievement, intergroup relations, acceptance of mainstreamed students, self-esteem, liking of school, development of peer norms in favor of doing well academically, feelings of individual control over the student's own fate in school, cooperativeness, altruism, and a degree of independence and authority among the groups (p. 372).

A case study aimed at exploring the relationship between cooperative learning and academic performance in higher education, specifically in the field of communication was conducted by Tsay and Brady in 2010, in a large Northeastern University with twenty-four undergraduate students in a communication research course. Data were collected through observations, surveys, videotapes and rating scales. Findings suggest that there is a significant positive relationship between the students' involvement in CL and each of the three components used to assess academic performance: individual performance, group performance, and final course grade. Results also show that when students are more actively involved and their participation in CL increases, they obtain higher scores in individual and group work. The analysis also shows that there is a strong relation between the students' interest to participate in a CL activity and the importance of the grades they will receive for their participation.

Group Work Effectiveness

The term *Effectiveness* refers to the ability to produce a desired result or the ability to produce desired outputs. When something is deemed effective, it means it has an intended or expected outcome. Similarly, group work effectiveness claims for that capability to achieve output goals, but it is also related to the accomplishment of different tasks involved in group work such as academic measures of knowledge and skills; motivation; that is, intrinsic and extrinsic thoughts that lead students to develop tasks and actions, and to persist on them to achieve a goal; behavior, the way in which students behave in classroom activities and how those behaviors can affect the normal development of any activity, and interaction as a vital part of any course; this interaction happens naturally as students listen, ask and question each other within the group, as stated by Johnson et al. (2008).

An empirical study conducted by Blatchford et al. (2005), in many schools throughout the UK, has shown that a training program for teachers and students in group working could increase the effectiveness in group work results. Moreover, these authors have used the SPRinG project (Social Pedagogic Research into Group work) to investigate the effects of training teachers and students in the implementation of group work strategies into the classroom. The results would be systematically evaluated by examining pupil progress in terms of attainment, motivation for group working, and within-group interactions. Data were collected through observation, interviewing, questionnaires, and recordings. Furthermore, the duration was four years in which they spent two years in the training of students and teachers, one year in the process of observation and implementation

of the strategies, and the last year in analyzing data and creating a Handbook as a guide for teachers.

The results showed that a good training program for students and teachers may improve the effectiveness in several areas such as students' academic progress, and teachers' professional skills. Additionally, confidence of both teachers and students was enhanced, there was a considerable impact in contemporary educational policies and practices, and high commitment of the people involved in the educational system.

Research Question

How can Cooperative Learning (CL) improve group work effectiveness in an urban public school in Girardota?

General objective

To improve the effectiveness of group work through Cooperative Learning

Specific objectives

To foster students' participation through a variety of purposeful activities

To favor the development of a positive interdependence as a member of the group

To promote students' interaction pursuing oral language improvement

To improve students' skills to work in virtual environments

Action Plan

In order to improve the effectiveness of group work I chose Cooperative Learning as a strategy. As a result, I developed an action plan in accordance with the proposed schedule we had in the institution. To achieve this, I planned some strategies: The socialization of the research proposal to inform the students and the educational community about the goals and objectives of the project, and to let them know their functions and how

the project could be helpful for them. Additionally, for ethical issues I designed a consent form to get their permission and their parents' to develop my project.

From the first week, I would teach classes two hours per week following the English syllabus and one hour on the project called "The Carrousel", which is a group work activity that I selected as a strategy to show at the end of the semester the improvement in the effectiveness of group work. The carrousel was a set of group activities in which the whole group would be divided into groups of four and each group would prepare a presentation about a topic previously selected. During four months they would work on the development and preparation of the presentation with continuous feedback provided by the teacher; one hour per week would be dedicated to this activity and at the end, the students would present their results to all the school, each group in a different classroom.

For the Carrousel I would make a rigorous follow-up of the students' progress. I considered important the selection of appropriate topics for each group, taking into account the teenagers' interests and the principles of the school. Some topics could be drug addiction, teen pregnancy, pornography, bullying, extreme sports, cell phone abuse, and others. On the first three weeks, I would work on the design of the carrousel and the group-work activities, and decide on the number of teams according to the number of students.

For collecting data, I planned two interviews to the cooperating teacher, one in the middle of the period and the other at the end, a survey to the students, and some recordings. In addition, I planned two focus groups in order to have a better understanding of the students' feelings about the implementation of my strategies. Subsequently, I planned to analyze data and write the final paper the last four weeks of the semester, in order to

comply with the deadline. Finally, I would do the presentation of the results to the academic community.

Development of Actions

The action strategies planned for the implementation of this research study were the following: I started the process from February 3rd working on the development of a presentation of the project for the students and for the CT, Camilo Betancur, and also I made the review of the syllabus and the English area plan for the semester, in order to develop the planning for classes. Additionally, I prepared the consent form for parents to get the permission to start the project with their kids. During the second week I was introduced to the group because I didn't have the same students from the previous year. So, we talked about how we would work during the semester and how the actions of the project would be carried out; also, on the same week, I did the socialization of the research proposal and I gave the consent form to the students to be signed by their parents and they did it.

Furthermore, on February 17th I faced my first class in total control of the class; the students seemed expectant and attentive for the new system. I helped them with the process of writing a letter for a pen pal using descriptions which was the first topic included in the syllabus for the level. Moreover, that same week we started with our first group work experience; during that activity, I explained the conditions of working in groups through collaborative work to the students and I showed them a presentation to explain the use of roles inside each group and their functions. Additionally, I started to select the topics for the carousel and I shared with them the rules for it.

The selection of the groups was the most important thing to do because up to this point they used to conform groups of friends or based on empathy, but not for collaborative work; the CT and I chose the groups taking into account that in each group must be included one high leveled student, one low leveled and two middle leveled students; we avoided having groups of friends because at the end, one of the five elements of cooperative work is “social skills development”; subsequently, after having the groups conformed we started to work on the first group work activity that I prepared to cover the topic of presentations.

During the week of February 24th I continued with the routine of using the first class of the week to explain the topic and do some exercises to practice. For the second session of the week, we worked on the second group work activity, this time I let them have a little bit more freedom during the activity in order to observe if they could lead their own work respecting the roles they had. The activity ran very well and I could identify some external and internal distracting factors during the activities.

For the week of March 2nd I had only two hours with the group because they had a school activity on Monday, so I proposed to work in the vocabulary from the book that they would probably need for the next coming sessions. We worked on the students’ book in a non-evaluative activity as a preparation for the next assessment. On March 11th, we started a group work activity with individual scores; the students had to bring to class a family picture pasted on the notebook and in groups they had to present a total description of each member of their family; here the group worked individually and after that as a group to correct mistakes and to edit one single presentation of the four families.

March 16th was the day in which the story was divided in two, that day we started the quarantine and for that week we didn't know what to do, we only had to wait for any pronouncement of the school with new guidelines for the new strategies to follow. The carousel activity was cancelled definitively because I needed to have the students into the classroom. During the two following weeks after knowing the government decisions about the pandemic, and after knowing that the students would return to classes on April 20th, I started the creation of some materials to give continuity to the course and to prepare the new virtual system we had to adopt. For this purpose, I created some worksheets related to the subsequent topics from the students' book and I also recorded some audiovisual aids to help them to better understand each topic. We did a poll to know if the students would be able to work in online classes, with negative results because many of them didn't have internet connection and others didn't have a computer; as a consequence, I decided to implement a space in google classroom to upload the materials and give to the students the opportunity to upload the homework whenever they could; this strategy was very useful due to the difficulty of having them online at the same time. The response was very positive because we had 35 active students out of 39.

After the return of students on March 20th, I started a continuous communication with my students through the chat of google classroom, I gave them feedback and solved doubts about the worksheets that I prepared, and I assessed every worksheet they uploaded. I updated the evaluative grids in the school platform which was one of my functions. I had to provide to the school the first period final grade. Next, during the week of May 11th, we started to work in a mandatory worksheet provided by Alcaldía de Girardota, and I adopted the role of a supporter, helping the students to solve doubts and explaining them the topics

covered in that worksheet. During the week of May 18th, I worked on the preparation of the interview to my CT, Camilo Betancur and the questions for the focus group, taking into account the changes in the focus of the project.

Subsequently, for the last week starting on May 25th, I collected data through the interview to my CT, (see Appendix A), in which I asked him about how he usually worked through cooperative work, what he thought about my strategy, and the interpretations that he had about my performance after the beginning of the quarantine –development of worksheets, audiovisual recordings, and support for the students- and the implementation of the focus group, (see Appendix B), in which I selected seven students from the group, and I asked them about their feelings about the group work activities we could have, what they learned about cooperative work, and how do they evaluated my performance after the beginning of the quarantine with creation of materials, and my role as a teacher during this period. Finally, during the rest of the week I analyzed the results of those interviews and I started with the writing of some parts of my final paper. I had a meeting with most of the students via ZOOM on May 29th to express them my gratitude and to give them some conclusions about my work with them.

Data Analysis

During the process of analyzing data, I followed Saldaña (2009), so I took my data and I started to codify the entries through descriptive codes (p. 3) in the right margin. First, I started with my journal which was useful to describe the week by week process I developed during the semester. After that, I codified the information obtained through the interview with my CT, the students' answers in the focus group, and I also did the analysis of some quantitative information that I collected during the process such as attendance,

participation, performance, and insights expressed by them during the quarantine. I selected colors to differentiate the codes and in the entries I split the extracts with continuous lines as recommended by Saldaña (2009).

Subsequently, I started to categorize the codes obtained during the process of encoding and to recognize patterns (p. 9). As a result, I identified big themes to have the information more organized for the discussion of the final paper. These themes were mostly related to the main topic of my research “the effectiveness of cooperative work”, but during the process different codes appeared; those codes were linked to the midstream changes that we had to include due to the current situation of the country caused by Covid-19.

Findings and Interpretations

Effectiveness of Cooperative Learning in Group Work

The results of this action research were positive taking into account the current situation with the COVID-19 Pandemic. First, the data showed that after letting students know what Cooperative Learning was and how it worked, they could understand that the strategy they were using for group work in classes could be improved. Evidence of this was the responses of the students in the focus group in relation to this. They understood the real meaning of Cooperative Learning stated by Pateşan et al. (2016): a strategy focused on facilitating the accomplishment of a specific goal through students working together in groups. For me, it was not surprising because when I started the implementation of my project, I referred to the meaning and the implications of implementing a well-structured cooperative work strategy in their course, and how that would affect their performance. In

that respect, student 1 expressed, ¹“I define cooperative work as a strategy to integrate the students with the objective of reaching a goal”, and student 5 said, “Cooperative work is when several people get together to accomplish an objective”.

Furthermore, effectiveness was also mentioned in the focus group when I asked the students if they found the cooperative work strategy effective for learning, and gratefully all of them answered positively. For instance, student 1 said that it was very effective because in each activity they learned new things; and student 6 mentioned that the technique used by the student teacher before the pandemic helped them to work efficiently into the teams, and to improve their language performance because they could practice the language in group. In the same line, student 5 said that this strategy was very effective because they learned to do something that they had never done before: they learned that by working together they can do a good job.

Moreover, based on my observations, I realized that in normal group work activities in the school, the situation was the same, the best leveled students in each group did the work while the others just waited for the results. In contrast, when I started the implementation with a group work activity, the students showed interest in being part of the group, as I registered it in my journal on February 19th: “Knowing that each member has to do something different to reach a common goal, and that the outcome would work if all the participants’ outcomes join together is an achievement”. This is one of the elements of Cooperative Learning that Deutsh (1962), and Johnson and Jhonson (1991) develop: *positive interdependence* occurs when the students feel that their individual role is an important piece of the group’s final outcome; they can achieve their learning goals only if

¹ The interview and the focus group were conducted in Spanish. The information provided in the paper was translated.

the other members of the group achieve theirs too. Additionally, this element is evidenced in student 1's words: "each member has the responsibility to comply with the activity", and student 2 said that there was something different to do for each member, so they could demonstrate what they knew.

In the same vein, there is also evidence of *individual accountability*, another element of cooperative work. Johnson et al. (2013) highlight that individual improvement can be demonstrated through the assignment of different roles to the members of a team. This is evident in my journal entry from February 24th in which I recorded how I noticed that the students were learning because during the hour of explanation we had before each group work activity, they had to pay attention in order to work effectively during the group work activity. Similarly, to achieve that individual accountability, it is necessary to conform well-structured groups; that is, to keep a balance into the groups: high and low leveled students selected by the teacher. This is expressed by the teacher when I asked him in this respect: "we gave the responsibility to the high leveled students to support those students who did not want to work; that way, they may be committed with the work".

According to Johnson et al. (2013) another element of Cooperative Work is *group processing* in which the group has the opportunity to reflect on the individual participation of each student asking if their participation was helpful and if they have something to improve. Therefore, there is evidence of this element in my journal entry from February 26th in which I described a group work activity that allowed to realize how through the implementation of different roles inside of the group, each student was conscious of others' work. The work was all the time under my supervision due to the fact that we were doing

only our second group work activity; but I am sure that with more experience in this strategy, the teacher would not be aware of this anymore.

Subsequently, there are many positive results for students and teachers in well-oriented cooperative learning strategies, as stated by Johnson et al. (2008); one of them is *cooperativeness*, and is evidenced in my journal on February 26th, in which I described how all the time during the group work activity I was supervising, and I could verify that all the students in each group were working in an organized way and each student was doing what I asked to do. Through cooperative work the students can learn to work in group effectively, which is important because the modern world requires people who know how to work in teams, and as Pateşan et al. (2016) state, cooperation makes students get a better understanding of their peers.

In addition, another very important positive result I could identify in my research was *motivation*; Blatchford et al. (2005) define motivation as the result of the effectiveness in group work. In my journal on February 19th I wrote that if the students feel that the activity proposed is well structured, motivation is evident; in that entry I expressed how positively surprised I was to see how excited the students were of starting a new activity. Again, in the entry of the on February 26th, they were in a kind of rush to start soon and they were very receptive, an indicator of motivation for me. On March 11th I wrote in the journal that after having only three group work activities under the cooperative learning strategy and its roles, the students seemed to have clarity about what they were expected to do, and they were starting the activities with little information or details, this is the kind of training mentioned by Blatchford et al. (2005) in their empirical study.

Another evidence of this is in the answer of my cooperative teacher when I asked him about the commitment of the students with this new strategy; he answered, “Yes, I could observe the commitment, because each student had a role inside the subgroup; so, as in a gear if one of the pieces does not work, the work could not go well. In the classroom activities we had, there was evidence of that. In fact, the result was positive”.

Teachers’ Role in Cooperative Work

During the implementation of a cooperative learning strategy the teacher plays a very important role, starting with the group selection; there are several aspects to take into account. First, the groups should not exceed four participants and they should be well-balanced, trying to have same leveled groups; and as stated by Pateşan et al. (2016), in cooperative learning there is no place for competition inside the groups, and if the strategy is correctly implemented the students work to learn together; in that way, learning will be effective and efficient. Second, in any learning activity it is very important to set rules about behavior and discipline and that is what I did as mentioned in my first journal entry in which I mentioned that from the first contact I had with the students I let them know the rules for classes.

Furthermore, in the journal on February 12th, I explained how I selected the groups taking into account the students’ English level, and not their friendship, so I tried to maintain all the groups in a similar level to avoid competition. An important evidence of this changing strategy I adopted is evident in the interview to my cooperating teacher who told me how he used to conform groups in classroom activities; he explained, “before Carlos’ arrival I used to let the students choose the groups by themselves, I mean, they

were free to choose their teams, and that was my mistake”. In that respect, the students are conscious about it as student 7 mentioned in the focus group, “for many students, laziness is over because each student’s work is a different piece of the complete task”. Also, there is evidence of the effectiveness of this strategy as the student 5 said, “many students could realize what they were able to produce in English, they only lacked confidence”.

For the few weeks we worked with this strategy, I tried to present original activities for the students and understandable materials to work in classes. It resulted very important to link the topics with real life themes to engage students with the activities; in the journal on March 11th I described one of those very effective activities. During the semester I could check the importance of teacher’s training; they have to act not only as a transmitter of knowledge but also as a facilitator, guide, and creator. In particular, after the beginning of the quarantine, I had to adapt my practicum to the current conditions, since the students would not be present in the school.

In any case, the most important fact was the continuity of the school year; so I started the creation of new materials to support the development of the course. In that way, I created some worksheets and audiovisual aids to help the students to better understand the topics. The most challenging issue was the difficulties that many students had to work online such as the lack of devices and internet; so I decided to use google classroom as the platform to work with them. In that platform the students could work at any time they could, they could submit their works, and they could ask questions to the teacher through the chat; I answered their questions every day and I used the chat to give them feedback too. At that time feedback turned into the most important tool to ensure that continuity, as I

wrote in the journal on April 20th, feedback helped me to increase students' self-confidence and to keep them interested in the activities.

Cooperative Work in Virtual Environments

The COVID-19 crisis showed me that it is very complicated to implement group work activities with students with those necessities; perhaps it would be easier to implement virtual cooperative learning in private schools where students normally have all the required tools. In any sense, the strategy I adopted during the quarantine can in some way be called cooperative work as I was working with my students all the time, but I strongly believe that for cooperative learning to be implemented, it is necessary to keep face-to-face interaction, one of the five elements of cooperative learning stated by Johnson et al. (2013). However, there are many positive results in the work I did. For instance, I obtained positive evaluations with respect to the materials created to support students during this difficult time. In relation to my CT as he mentioned in the interview, the materials resulted very appropriate for the students' level, and the results showed that the students learned; the CT also said that the recorded materials were very effective because they were paced and using a friendly vocabulary for the students. It was important for them to know that it was the teacher who was explaining, not any YouTube video. It is a manner of trust.

According to the students, as expressed in the focus group, the effectiveness resulted very high as shown in tables 1 and 2.

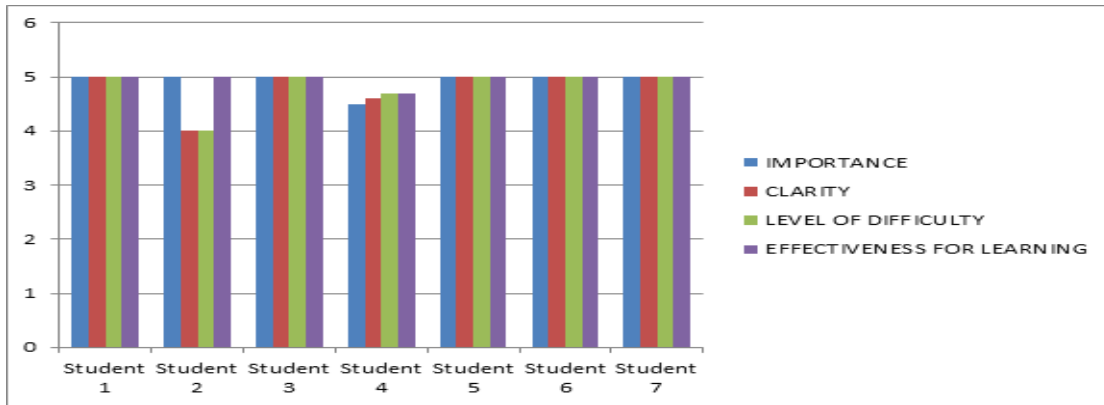


Table 1. Students' Evaluation for the Worksheets Created by the Teacher

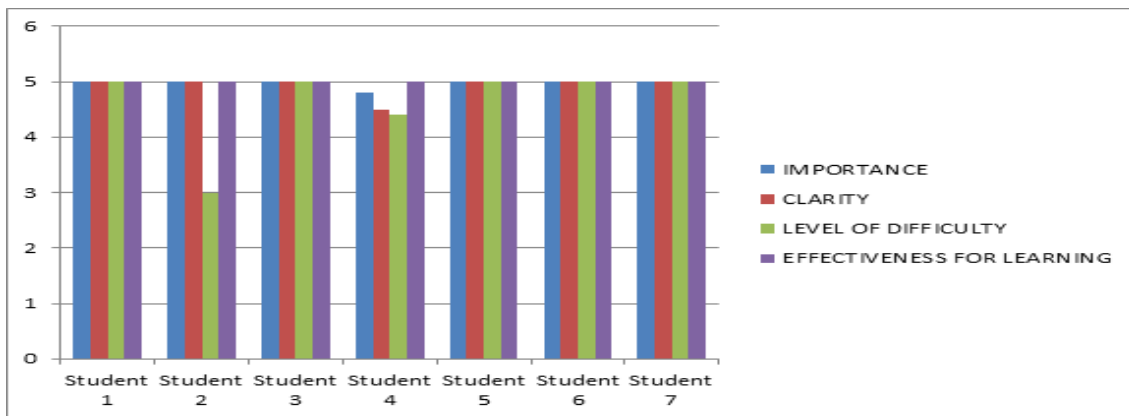


Table 2. Students' Evaluation for the Visual Aids Created by the Teacher

Another important finding in my practicum research is the analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the virtual learning; I asked my CT about his thoughts in that respect and he said that the main advantages are the increase on students' autonomy, responsibility and organization, besides becoming self-taught. He also mentioned these disadvantages: not all the students count with all the technological tools to work in the virtual mode, so it is difficult to implement teaching and assessing activities. Subsequently, in the focus group, student 1 said that the advantage is that they learn to be more responsible and they obtain help from the internet, and the disadvantage is that when they

spend time at home they have to do homework and housework, so it affects their performance; student 3 said that the advantage is that they can repeat the videos and the information as many times as they want, and the disadvantage is that the students can cheat using translators, so for the teacher it is very difficult to know if the work was done by the student.

Conclusions

Cooperative Learning is a strategy that may lead teachers to improve their practices when working in groups in classrooms; the implementation of this kind of strategy must be well-structured and it is necessary to think and re-think about the students' condition. There are other aspects that need to be taken into account such as the context, the facilities of the institution, and students' level. Reflection makes possible to understand students' needs and to understand the institution's goals.

The process of turning a normal learning situation in public schools into an effective learning experience has been proved during the development of this project. Working over the consciousness that the students need to have enriching experiences that promote their active participation and motivate them to continue such participation, the teachers are called to be more creative when implementing any strategy to transmit knowledge. In particular, I strongly believe that training is the best way to create more interesting and effective environments for the learners.

In conclusion, this project showed that a well reflected implementation of Cooperative Learning in instruction, specifically in group work activities may turn to be very effective, not only for the achievements of the students, but also in creating a friendly environment inside the classroom. Despite the fact that this research was interrupted by the

COVID-19, and that I had to adapt my project to a virtual learning mode, I could obtain positive results regarding the students' achievement and to demonstrate the effectiveness of cooperative learning in group work. For future researches in this topic, I recommend to dedicate more time to previous reflections about the context of the students and the institution, and the previous methodology used in the classroom.

Reflections

Being inside the classroom sharing with the students, and getting to know them better, I could improve my social skills, the capacity to understand the hidden context of a classroom and the school; I had the opportunity of understand the interactions and the level of professionalism that any person needs to belong to a school community. Today, I better understand the limitations of schools, students, and families; I am more conscious of my role as a parent, student, and teacher.

With respect to my professional development this research reinforced my beliefs related to the role of the teacher in education; specifically, in English teaching. I learned that a good teacher cannot be satisfied with what exists, he should be aware that what he knows must be improved. I learned that with discipline and disposition, any teacher can make changes in education; probably, one cannot change the educational system, but at least one can make little changes to contribute in our students' development.

This research project resulted very challenging specially because the COVID-19 crisis; the forced interruption in the normal process I was implementing, and the adaptation of new strategies trying to help the school to keep the students interested in learning, turned me into a more resourceful person regarding the mainstream changes demanded by the pandemic. I think that *cooperative learning* is a good strategy to be implemented in

classrooms in both public and private schools around the country. Therefore, for those students who are going to start their practicum stage I recommend, just in case they decide to work on this issue, to take the maximum advantage of time, and to reflect a lot about the conditions required to implement such strategy.

References

- Blatchford, P., Galton, M., Kutnick, P., & Baines, E. (2005). *Improving the Effectiveness of Pupil Groups in Classrooms*.
- Deutsch, M. (1962). *Cooperation and trust: Some theoretical notes*. In Nebraska symposium on motivation. M. R. Jones (Ed.). Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 275-319.
- Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R., & Holubec, E. (2013). *Cooperation in the classroom* (9th ed.). Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company.
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. (1989). *Cooperation and competition: Theory and research*. Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company.
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. (1991). *Leading the cooperative school* (2nd Ed.). Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company.
- Johnson, et al., 2008 *Social Interdependence Theory and Cooperative Learning: The Teacher's Role*, in Gillies, Robyn M., Ashman, Adrian, Terwel, Jan (Eds.). *The Teacher's Role in Implementing Cooperative Learning in the Classroom*, V. 8 of the series Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning, Springer US, 26-36.
- Marioara PATEȘAN, Alina BALAGIU, Dana ZECHIA. (2016). *The benefits of Cooperative Learning*. International Conference KNOWLEDGE-BASED ORGANIZATION Vol. XXII No 2.
- Saldaña, J. (2011). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Tsay, M. & Brady, M. (2010). *A case study of cooperative learning and communication pedagogy: Does working in teams make a difference?* In *Journal of the scholarship of teaching and learning*. Vol. 10, No. 1. Minnesota: University of Minnesota. 78 – 8

Appendix A

Medellín, May 26th

I.E. Emiliano García



INTERVIEW FOR THE CT CAMILO BETANCUR

1. ¿Cómo aplica usted el trabajo colaborativo en clase?
2. ¿Considera usted que el trabajo en grupo implementado por el profesor Carlos antes de la Pandemia puede servir como herramienta para un aprendizaje más efectivo del idioma inglés? Explique por qué
3. ¿Pudo notar si los estudiantes que normalmente no trabajaban cuando se hacían trabajos en grupo, tuvieron más compromiso? Explique por qué
4. ¿Cómo evaluaría usted los talleres diseñados por el profesor para la continuidad del proceso en términos de: (de 1 a 5)
 - Importancia
 - Claridad
 - Nivel de dificultad
 - Efectividad para el aprendizaje
5. ¿Cómo evaluaría usted la efectividad de las ayudas audiovisuales que el profesor ha proporcionado a los estudiantes para cumplir con los talleres?
 - Importancia
 - Claridad
 - Nivel de dificultad
 - Efectividad para el aprendizaje
6. ¿Qué ventajas y desventajas encuentra usted respecto a la implementación del aprendizaje en ambientes virtuales?

Appendix B

Medellín, May 29th

I.E. Emiliano García



QUESTIONS FOR THE FOCUS GROUP WITH 9-1 STUDENTS

1. ¿Cómo definen ustedes el trabajo colaborativo?
2. ¿Podrían decir ustedes que el trabajo en grupo implementado por el profesor Carlos antes de la Pandemia puede servir como herramienta para un aprendizaje más efectivo del idioma inglés? Explique por qué
3. ¿Pudieron notar si las personas que normalmente no trabajaban cuando se hacían trabajos en grupo, lo hicieron más? Explique por qué
4. ¿Cómo evaluaría usted los talleres diseñados por el profesor para la continuidad del proceso desde casa en términos de: (de 1 a 5)
 - Importancia
 - Claridad
 - Nivel de dificultad
 - Efectividad para el aprendizaje
5. ¿Cómo evaluaría usted la efectividad de las ayudas audiovisuales que el profesor les ha proporcionado para cumplir con los talleres? (de 1 a 5)
 - Importancia
 - Claridad
 - Nivel de dificultad
 - Efectividad para el aprendizaje
6. ¿Qué ventajas y desventajas encuentran ustedes respecto a la implementación de actividades virtuales?