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Using Cooperative Learning to Increase Motivation

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Abstract

This action research was conducted at a public institution located in Medellín with 37 fifth graders between nine and 11 years old. It was aimed at exploring the effectiveness of cooperative learning to increase students' motivation towards English learning. Data were collected through a motivation and interpersonal skills survey applied at two moments throughout the academic period, before and after the implementation of the project; a personal research journal in which I registered different situations and insights regarding the research process; video recordings that were useful to analyze the compliance of the research objectives; a focus group in which some students expressed their feelings and perceptions towards cooperative learning and its effect on motivation; and an interview with the CT to know her point of view regarding the strategy and the students' level of motivation after the implementation of the project. Data analysis showed that there was some improvement in terms of positive interdependence and individual accountability among students, but not as expected. Collaborative learning was more evident than cooperative learning in this context, not only because grouping was more effective when students were allowed to choose their group instead of being assigned, but also because implementing roles and rewards proved to be ineffective. However, motivation did increase because of the activities proposed as evinced in some segments of the video recordings and what the students expressed in the focus group. Further research on cooperative learning should be more flexible considering that children are constantly changing and asking for novelty.

Keywords: cooperative learning, collaborative learning, motivation

Título en español: Implementación del Aprendizaje Cooperativo para Incrementar la Motivación

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Degree Requirement

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Preface

I firmly believe that motivation plays a crucial role in the process of teaching and learning a foreign language. As a teacher, I am always motivated in my classes, I enjoy teaching and I try to share that motivation with my students. To me, this is an essential requirement in an English class as learning cannot effectively take place without motivation. Hence, upon observing the initial English classes during my practicum in fifth grade, I became concerned when I found out that most of the 37 students in the class seemed disinterested; it seemed that they did not want to be there, they did not show interest in learning English, participating in the proposed activities, or even paying attention to the teacher. The sense of demotivation was palpable in the class environment.

At that point, I tried to identify the sources of demotivation in the students, and I concluded that constant and non-contextualized individual activities might be the main catalyst of that demotivation. As a consequence, I searched for a strategy to improve that situation and that is when I examined Cooperative Learning, its principles, and its potential to deal with this situation, and decided to implement it with the aim of increasing the students' motivation.

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Description of the Context

The educational institution Santos Ángeles Custodios is located in the industrial area of Guayabal neighborhood, right next to the zone known as Barrio Antioquia. It is a public school that benefits the children of the surrounding neighborhoods which are from middle to low socio-economic strata. The school has a big and bright classroom equipped with a laptop, a television, a projector, and internet connection. However, the projector is rendered ineffective due to the excessive brightness in the classroom, making it impossible to see the projected images.

Although the institution has a computer classroom, it is often occupied for Technology classes, limiting its availability for other subjects. The library in the institution lacks English materials, except for a few English-Spanish dictionaries. On a positive note, there is a paved soccer field and a medium-sized auditorium that can be utilized for more dynamic English classes.

The mission of the institution is to form human beings with principles and values who coexist in a healthy school environment guided by teachers and families committed to their educational processes. Regarding its vision, the institution intends to consolidate as an inclusive institution with high-quality standards that contribute to the students' life projects which are expected to be beneficial for them, their families, and the city. Moreover, according to the Institutional Educational Plan, their philosophy revolves around three main points: leadership, knowledge, and coexistence, besides the spiritual and religious foundations of the institution.

The English subject, along with Spanish and French are part of the area of “Proyecto de humanidades”. The institution justifies the teaching of English in the globalized world in which we live. They aim to give the students the necessary tools and knowledge for being able to access an intercultural world that is constantly advancing in science and technology. Besides, they believe that English is essential for those students who want to apply for academic exchanges

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abroad as well as for getting more and better professional opportunities in the future. This action research was implemented in fifth grade whose English classes take place once a week for two hours. Its main objective is to help students produce oral and written texts about themselves, their family, and their environment through games and collaborative work. However, what I observed is that most of the class activities were developed through individual work, and games were usually not implemented.

In relation to the English teachers, there are four in high school and all of them hold a degree in English teaching. On the contrary, the English teachers in elementary school did not study to become English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. The cooperating teacher, for instance, has a degree in basic education; nonetheless, she has learned English on her own and through the small courses provided by the municipality of Medellín for its teachers. Her language level is still low, and her teaching strategies are mainly focused on grammar and vocabulary. She is aware of the importance of cooperative work but she prefers individual activities because she has better control of the class.

Fifth-one is a group composed of 37 children who are around nine and 11 years old. Some of them have expressed their interest in learning English for traveling abroad, either for tourist or academic purposes. Besides, in a survey applied to the students, some of them mentioned that they liked the English classes because they felt they learned, and sometimes the class was fun. However, this interest is not reflected in what they do and what they express in class; some of them say that they do not like the English class, that they would prefer to stay at home, that they do not have any interest in passing to the next level, and some comments of frustration for not knowing anything about English are also common.

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Statement of the Problem

The first time I met this 37-student group, I wondered how I would manage to manage such a messy environment. I was used to small and quiet groups of adults who hardly ever participated, but wanted to be there. These kids were running, shouting, arguing, and playing. I even heard some comments of disapproval about the English class, and it was difficult for me to understand why most of the students were distracted and unmotivated. In the first two classes that I observed, I noticed that the teacher had a pre-established structure for her classes. First, she explained the topic in a traditional grammar-centered way, and then she asked the students to individually complete a filling-the-blank activity.

Bearing this in mind, I observed that the main problem of this group was the lack of motivation, and consequently the students' low commitment towards the English subject. At that point, I thought that cooperative learning could give the students the opportunity to play, interact, learn, and therefore, increase their motivation in class. When I started teaching, I tried that strategy, and I noticed a big difference in the students' attention when they were doing group activities in contrast to individual activities. In the former, it was evident that they enjoyed working together, they wanted to complete the activity assigned, and it was easier and less time-consuming to give them feedback. In the latter, I realized that only a small part of the group paid attention to the guidelines, and even a smaller part completed the activity. This experience made me conclude that the lack of interaction and cooperative work could be the main cause of the students' demotivation.

In order to have evidence of this problem, I collected some data from the cooperating teacher, my research journal, and the students, who answered a six-question survey. The first question, aimed at inquiring whether the students liked the English class or not, had 16 positive

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answers and one negative answer. It is interesting to highlight that almost half of the group liked the class and 14 of them liked it sometimes, which evidenced that they were not completely motivated towards the class. Similarly, in my research journal of February 9th, I also registered some comments¹ expressed by some students such as “I’m not coming on Thursday”, “I want to fail the subject, so that my mom comes”, and “How stressful! I should have stayed at home”, which evidenced the negative attitudes towards the class.

They were also asked about the activities that motivated them the most to learn English. The answers let me know that only two students preferred to work individually, five of them preferred to work in pairs, while 20 of them felt that when they worked in groups, they were more motivated to participate in class. Taking this into consideration, it was evident that working in groups was a strategy that could foster the students’ motivation as I expressed in my research journal of April 20th; I highlighted the students’ enjoyment when playing “burro”, in which they had fun and learned at the same time. I noticed that starting the class with a game created an environment of excitement and motivation for the subsequent activities even if they were not games.

Another question was related to their motivation, commitment, and self-perception about the English class. Interestingly, 26 out of 31 students expressed that when working in groups they felt more motivated towards the class and more capable of completing the activities proposed. This sense of capability could be interpreted as a positive sense of self-perception as well as commitment towards the activities and the class. In my research journal, I registered a rewarding moment when I asked them to gather in groups, so that they could help each other, to write a series of numbers in letters. I noticed that this activity increased the students’ motivation

¹ Most of the data were collected in Spanish and translated into English in this text.

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and commitment towards the class; then I assigned individual homework that consisted of writing more numbers, but they had the option of completing it in class if they wanted to. Some of the students were so motivated that they decided to do the homework in class, and even one of them asked me to assign her more numbers because she felt she was learning, which was clear evidence of the potential of cooperative learning for motivation purposes. The fifth question was aimed at inquiring about how often the students helped each other when working in groups. The answers evinced that when working in groups, students helped each other in the learning process; 16 students said they always helped their peers while 15 said they were always helped.

Bearing in mind that the cooperating teacher's opinion is as important as the students', I conducted an informal interview with her which turned out to be extremely revealing as it confirmed my initial ideas of why she did not implement group activities in her class. She said that before the pandemic she used to implement group activities in class, but after the pandemic something changed, and she decided to stop those kinds of activities. She was aware she may be very traditional, but she preferred to explain the topic and then propose individual activities.

I was interested in knowing her perceptions about cooperative learning and her experience before the pandemic. She said she let the students choose the groups, then she assigned roles to each member such as the leader, the one in charge of the behavior, and the one in charge of presenting. That was her strategy to foster students' commitment towards the activity and manage behavior issues. Finally, I asked the teacher about the advantages and disadvantages of working in groups, and she said that students could socialize, share, help each other, and release their energy, but based on her experience, there was a moment in which she felt they were not learning anything, and she was not teaching anything, either. In conclusion, according

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to the survey, my research journal, and the interview, it was evident that the students felt that something was missing for them to feel completely motivated towards the class.

Theoretical Background

In the following lines, I will present the theoretical concepts that form the basis of this action research. First, I will refer to Cooperative Learning and its implementation within the realm of English Language Teaching (ELT) to finish with Motivation and its importance in learning processes.

Cooperative Learning

Davidson and Major (2014) refer to Cooperative Learning (CL) as an instructional approach that emphasizes active participation and cooperation among students, fostering both academic learning and the development of social and interpersonal skills in the educational setting; it also integrates active and social learning through peer interaction in academic activities. Furthermore, in their work about the boundaries among Cooperative Learning, Collaborative Learning, and Problem-based Learning, they state that through CL “students work and learn together actively in small groups to accomplish a common goal in a mutually helpful manner” (p. 14).

It is important to highlight the similarities and differences between Cooperative Learning and Collaborative Learning because these concepts are wrongly used interchangeably. The authors argue that both require small-group interaction, involve a common task or learning activity suitable for group work, and encourage students to exhibit cooperative and mutually helpful behavior as they work together towards a shared learning task. On the one hand, Cooperative learning uses techniques such as goal setting, task design, resource allocation, intentional or at random grouping, role assignment, and rewards; it also implies more teacher

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involvement and emphasizes on social skills and community-building. In Collaborative learning, on the other hand, roles are hardly ever assigned, students choose their groups and rewards are rare; learning focuses on goal and task interdependence, but with limited resources. The authors highlight the differences by stating that CL approaches use some strategies that teachers who implement Collaborative learning usually do not use or accept. In conclusion, these two approaches cannot be treated as a single concept (pp. 32-34).

About this approach, Nastasi and Clements (1991) state that, "Cooperative learning is a group learning process built on the belief that students learn better when they learn together" (p. 110). Moreover, elaborating on the social-affective component, these authors affirm that cooperative learning holds the capacity to improve social-emotional skills and foster positive dispositions towards learning and interpersonal connections (p. 111). In sum, these perspectives highlight the value of CL in promoting academic achievement, social skills, and positive attitudes within the classroom environment. In the same vein, Cohen (1994), refers to CL as an approach in which students work together in small groups so that everyone has the opportunity to participate in a collective activity without the direct intervention of the teacher (p. 3). These perspectives are highly relevant to this study because they provide a theoretical foundation for implementing cooperative learning strategies to address the motivational challenges observed in the classroom.

In the context of the EFL, Cooperative Learning emerges as a powerful instructional approach that fosters active engagement, collaboration, and the development of both academic proficiency and social skills among students. According to Daniels (2005, as cited by Wafaa 2014), Cooperative Learning gives students a framework of support for their language learning experience. Furthermore, Jolliffe (2007) asserts that in a CL classroom context, students are

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motivated to succeed due to the interdependence feature of the task (p. 36). She explains that Positive Interdependence is a key element in CL in which students should perceive a mutual dependency among themselves, recognizing that they collectively succeed or fail as they work together to accomplish the group's task; they should understand that individual success hinges on the success of the entire group (p. 39). Similarly, another important element within the CL is that of Individual Accountability, which can be understood as the requirement for every group member's commitment to be essential for the group's success; the performance of each member must be easily observed and measured by other group members (Slavin, 1983, p. 441).

Considerations in implementing cooperative learning in an EFL class encompass various aspects. Group size is an important factor, with an optimal range of four to five members, considering student comfort and the nature of the assignment. Group formation should focus on heterogeneous groups where students with different ability levels can be found. The teacher's role shifts to that of a facilitator, guiding learners and minimizing their own talking time in contrast to that of the students. Students take on active roles such as facilitator, recorder, reporter, timekeeper, and observer of collaborative skills. Individual and group assessment become crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of cooperative learning, aiding in diagnosing student knowledge, monitoring progress, and providing data for final evaluations (Felder & Brent, 2001; Jacob, 2006; Johnson & Johnson, 1998, 1999; Williams, 2002; Zhang, 2010, as cited in Wafaa, 2014). By considering these factors, teachers can create an engaging and effective cooperative learning environment in the EFL classroom, ultimately fostering a rich and dynamic educational experience that encourages active student participation, promotes peer-to-peer support, and contributes to a more comprehensive assessment of both individual and group progress.

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With the objective of finding out the effectiveness of CL in improving learners' English language proficiency in secondary-level education in Nepal, Kumar (2017) conducted a longitudinal research study that involved 150 participants, with 78 randomly assigned to the experimental group and the rest to the control group. The experimental group received CL instruction while the control group followed a traditional teaching approach over a period of 12 weeks. The researcher taught both groups and data were collected through a proficiency test consisting of listening, speaking, reading, and writing papers, a questionnaire to assess attitudes towards CL, and interviews with selected students.

The researcher found that CL is effective in improving the language skills of English learners. In terms of listening, the experimental group outperformed the control group significantly. Similarly, the experimental group showed higher proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing compared to the control group, with significant differences observed in all cases. Attitude assessments also revealed that the majority of the experimental group exhibited positive attitudes towards CL, while most of the control group expressed negative attitudes towards traditional teaching methods. In particular, when this group was interviewed, two students highlighted the inadequacy of the traditional teaching approach in enhancing their English proficiency, and emphasized the need for more interactive and engaging methods that encourage active participation and practice (p. 21). These insightful observations serve to underscore the limitations of conventional teaching in meeting the students' language learning requirements.

Motivation

Ushioda (2014, as cited in Alshenqeeti, 2018) defines *motivation* as “a variable of importance in human learning, reflected in goals and directions pursued, levels of effort invested, depth of engagement, and degree of persistence in learning” (p. 1). Regarding the goals pursued,

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Brown (2000) refers to the Skinner Behavioristic theory to explain the notion that individuals are more likely to pursue objectives when there is a reward involved; the author presents rewards as a means to reinforce human behavior by fostering persistence in individuals who seek to achieve their goals (p. 73).

The importance of motivation in the EFL field is highlighted as it encompasses both the instructional methods used to deliver the content and the ways in which students engage in learning (Saito et al., 2017). Referring to the instructional methods, Alshenqeeti (2018) asserts that teachers should introduce varied strategies in the language classroom so that students' motivation and other affective factors increase. Regarding how students engage in learning, the author states that when students lack motivation to learn, they are less inclined to collaborate, assume self-responsibility, or actively participate in the process of language learning. Similarly, if teachers are unable to enhance learners' "goal-orientedness," they may face a class that lacks motivation (pp. 1,3). On the other hand, Clément (1980) states that when learners have positive experiences in language learning, their self-confidence in using the second language is enhanced as well as their motivation to continue learning it.

When referring to motivation, it is important to establish the differences between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. For doing this, Alshenqeeti (2018), states that "intrinsic motivation" is now employed to describe the act of engaging in a task due to personal interest or enjoyment, while "extrinsic motivation" is used to characterize situations where students perform an action with the anticipation of a specific reward. Likewise, Ryan and Deci (2000), define extrinsic motivation as behavior driven by the desire to obtain a specific outcome or reward, even if it is to avoid punishment. Besides, they explain that this type of motivation involves the presence of rewards that reinforce the desire to engage in activities, while demotivation occurs when there is

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a lack of motivation to pursue goals (pp. 71,72). I believe that recognizing this differentiation is crucial in determining whether intrinsic motivation is also present in the classroom environment along with extrinsic motivation. This distinction could lead us to explore how both types of motivation may interact and influence students' attitudes and behaviors in the context of cooperative learning.

In regard to the connection between CL and motivation, Ching-Ying Pan and Hui-Yi Wu conducted an experimental study in 2013 aimed at examining the effects of cooperative learning on English reading comprehension and motivation towards learning among EFL freshmen. The research was developed in a Freshman English Reading course over a full semester, with 78 participants divided into an experimental group of 44 participants and a comparison group with 34 participants. A pretest-posttest comparison group quasi-experimental design was employed, where the experimental group received reciprocal cooperative learning instruction while the comparison group received traditional lecture instruction. Three English reading achievement tests and an English learning motivation scale were administered to both groups. The data analysis included means, standard deviations, t-tests, and one-way ANCOVA. The researcher found statistically significant differences favoring cooperative learning instruction for English reading comprehension, particularly among medium- and low-proficiency students. Additionally, it proved that cooperative learning instruction had a significantly positive effect on student motivation towards learning English reading. This dual benefit, both in terms of comprehension and motivation, underscores the potential of cooperative learning in university-level EFL reading classes.

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Research Question

How can Cooperative Learning increase fifth graders' motivation towards English learning in an elementary school in Medellin?

General objective

To explore the effectiveness of cooperative learning to increase fifth graders' motivation towards English learning.

Specific objectives

To analyze the evolution of students' interpersonal skills through group activities.

To implement cooperative learning activities in which students play specific roles.

To develop strategies that foster positive interdependence among learners.

To evaluate the impact of cooperative learning on students' motivation to learn English.

Action Plan

In order to explore the effectiveness of cooperative learning in increasing fifth graders' motivation towards English learning, I planned to implement the action strategies presented in the following lines. First, in order to socialize the action research proposal with the students and the cooperating teacher, I planned a presentation for them to know what the research was about, what was expected from them, the benefits of the project, and why it was important to address factors related to motivation and attitudes towards English learning. I would subsequently ask the students for their consent to use the data collected through the implementation of the project for academic purposes. The consent form would provide them with the necessary information about the research, its purpose, and the use of their data.

Before the implementation of the Cooperative Learning strategies, I planned a survey to examine two important factors: motivation towards the class and interpersonal skills. These data

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would also be obtained at the end of the implementation to compare their perceptions before and after the implementation. In the second week of August, I would start the implementation of the Cooperative learning strategies which would be designed to promote collaboration, interaction, and engagement among students. I planned to conduct five CL activities which would be registered in my research journal and video-recorded for subsequent analysis.

With the aim of validating the impact of Cooperative Learning to foster motivation, I planned a focus group with eight students selected at random. The information obtained through the focus group would provide me with insights regarding their experiences and perceptions of the classroom environment during the CL activities, analyze their performance, changes in their attitudes towards English learning, and changes in their interpersonal skills. Additionally, I planned an interview with the cooperating teacher to gather her perceptions about the impact of Cooperative Learning on students' motivations. This interview would be conducted before and after the implementation of the Cooperative Learning approach to understand any changes or improvements in students' motivation from the perspective of the CT. Finally, the data collected through the previous tools would be analyzed giving way to the final report of the research implementation and its subsequent presentation to the school community.

Development of Actions

In the upcoming paragraphs, I will refer to the actions I implemented to develop this action research. In the first week, I socialized the research proposal with the students and the cooperating teacher. I planned to do it with a PowerPoint presentation, but I just did it orally as I considered it would be more time-consuming and I had a lot of time constraints. Although I had initially planned to conduct an interview with the CT, I decided to do it only at the end because I could not find the space and the time to do it. Additionally, I conducted the two motivation and

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interpersonal skills surveys, one at the beginning and one at the end, and I gave the informed consent for them and their parents to sign it.

Both the CT interview and the focus group took place on November 2nd. The focus group was conducted by a fellow researcher from the university, and instead of involving only 8 randomly selected students, it was developed with 10 students who I believed might cover the different perspectives of the class, allowing, in that way, a better triangulation of the students' opinions. Surprisingly, it was noteworthy in the focus group that the students displayed a remarkable recollection of group activities, some of which had been carried out as far back as the previous semester. In the case of the CT interview, it took place within the classroom setting, lacking a dedicated space solely designated for the interview. This meant that the teacher had to juggle between managing the students, delivering the lesson, and responding to my questions simultaneously. Consequently, her responses were quite short, and I did not obtain as much information as I had initially expected for future triangulation.

Finally, the frequent cancellation of classes in the institution, attributed to labor union activities, forced me to constantly reschedule the Cooperative Learning activities. These activities were video recorded with the purpose of collecting data for further analysis. However, it was challenging to position the camera in a way that captured the entire classroom, resulting in some students being left out of the frame. Moreover, the audio recorded from these videos was generally dominated by the voices of students close to the camera and those who spoke loudly, overshadowing the voices of students engaged in quieter discussions. Unfortunately, I was unable to carry out the last CL activity due to time constraints. The reduced number of classes also had a negative impact on the journal because I could not write as much as I had originally intended.

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Data Analysis

In order to answer the research question, I began with the analysis of the journal by codifying it, taking into consideration what Saldaña (2009) states in this respect, "to codify is to arrange things in a systematic order, to make something part of a system or classification, to categorize" (p. 8). To facilitate this process, I employed a variety of colors to highlight the most pertinent information that would aid in addressing my research question. Once I had highlighted an excerpt within the journal, I labeled it with an appropriate code in an adjacent column and kept it in mind just in case there was any subsequent excerpt that could be named with the same code. As the author expresses it, this coding was the initial step towards deeper analysis and interpretation of the findings (p. 8). Subsequently, I scanned the responses from the two surveys and uploaded the files into Google Drive to then create a Google Sheet where I digitized and compared the results from both surveys using graphical representations, and I meticulously reviewed each graphic and assigned them a code based on the analysis.

I continued with the analysis of the video recordings, the focus group, and the interview with the CT. For this purpose, I carefully observed the videos and took notes of the most relevant situations pertaining to cooperative learning, notes that were analyzed following the same procedure. I transcribed the recordings of the focus group and the interview and thoroughly analyzed these transcriptions as I did with the other data. After codifying all the data, I categorized and compared it with each other to progress to the conceptual phase (Saldaña, 2009, p. 11). To culminate, with the aim of consolidating all the preceding analyses into a single document, I compiled all the codes and categories obtained from the previous analyses into a chart. In this chart, the various sources were arranged on the Y-axis, and the evidence, category, and concept were documented on the X-axis.

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Findings and Interpretations

In the following lines, I will refer to the main findings that emerged from the data analysis. First, I will elaborate on the main strategy of this action research and how what was intended to be Cooperative Learning ended up resembling Collaborative Learning. Subsequently, I will present the findings regarding motivation, to what extent it increased, and why it increased. Evidence from the five sources will be presented to support these findings.

Collaborative Learning rather than Cooperative Learning

In cooperative learning, rewards play a crucial role because it is a way to recognize and promote good work. In this action research, giving rewards such as playing on the soccer field or playing bingo did not have the desired outcome despite the efforts to encourage a positive response; it even posed some challenges in motivating students and fostering cooperative work. Evidence of this is registered in my journal entry of July 27th in which I expressed my frustration because they did not change their bad behavior even when I proposed a reward. Similarly, in one of the video recordings, it is evident that they did not respond positively to a bingo with a reward that I proposed. However, it is important to note that rewards were effective for some students. In the video recording of August 29th, there is a moment in which one student scolded a classmate for not paying attention, emphasizing that without attention, there would be no reward for the group.

In relation to grouping, Davidson and Major (2014) state that cooperative learning involves teacher-assigned or random grouping. I expressed my frustration in this respect in the journal entry of September 11th when I tried random grouping with numbers, but it was a complete chaos, indicating a deviation from the cooperative model to a more collaborative approach in which students got to choose their own groups. Evidence that random grouping was

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not effective can be observed in one of the video recordings in which a student was reluctant to work with the assigned group by expressing, “I am not going to work with them”, a situation that illustrates the challenges of fostering cooperative learning in this context.

Role assignment is another key component in cooperative learning. Some journal entries and the interview with the cooperating teacher reflect the difficulties I faced with this. The teacher highlighted that students struggled to fully assume the assigned roles during the activities, and she recognized the importance of this strategy. As a consequence of these challenges, there was a shift towards a more collaborative approach where role assignment had to be less rigid. After observing one of the videos, I concluded that if I had implemented more engaging roles and provided clearer instructions, this strategy could have been more effective. This opinion aligns with that of the cooperating teacher, who suggested establishing clearer roles, along with time limits and class norms to have better results.

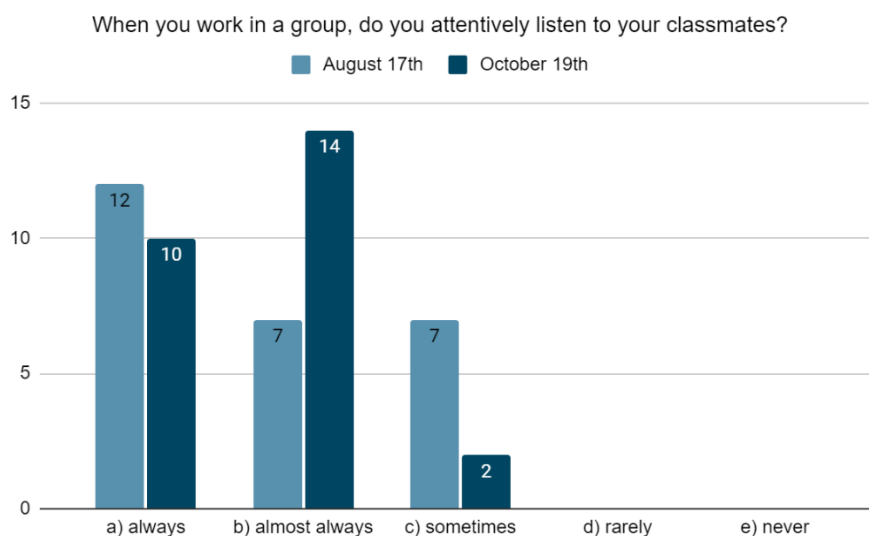
The exploration of interpersonal skills and community building in the group context revealed both positive and negative responses. On the positive side, there was a notable improvement in students' attentive listening to their peers, as evidenced in the surveys. Before the implementation, when being asked about how often they paid attention to their classmates when working in groups, 46% of the students selected *always*, 27% selected *almost always*, and 27% opted for the *sometimes* option. After the implementation, 38% of the students answered *always*, 54% *almost always*, and 8% *sometimes* (see Figure 1). Ideas expressed by the students in the focus group such as “we can communicate and help each other”, and “(...) because after that [the implementation of CL activities] we could agree more easily” support this improvement in communication and cooperation after the implementation. However, five times in my journal

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entries, I expressed how some students still preferred working alone over assigned groups, highlighting a persistent resistance to cooperative dynamics.

Figure 1

Students' level of attentive listening in class.



Regarding community building, the survey indicated that while the majority felt confident expressing their ideas in groups (62%), a significant percentage (38%) remained uncertain, showing no marked improvement over time. This complex interplay between positive and negative responses suggests the need for an adaptable approach to foster social skills and community building within the group setting.

Positive interdependence, a fundamental element in CL, emphasizes the crucial perception students should have of their collective reliance on one another to achieve a common goal (Jolliffe, 2007). Similarly, individual accountability highlights that each member must contribute significantly to the group's success, and their actions must be visible and assessable by other group members (Slavin, 1983). The exploration of these factors within the group setting revealed a complex interplay of both challenges and unexpected instances of cooperation.

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Negative instances, documented in the journal, depicted scenarios where one student assumed most of the workload, while others seemed disengaged or preferred working alone. This pattern was further highlighted in the focus group, where a student expressed dissatisfaction, stating: "I did not like it because my friends never helped me; they started to play, they disappeared, and I had to do almost all the work". Such instances underscored that positive interdependence and individual accountability were not uniformly observed in the classroom.

However, amidst these challenges, there were noteworthy counterbalances. It is evident in the video recording of the last CL implementation that most groups cooperated as expected, showcasing some positive interdependence and individual accountability. Unexpectedly, the focus group responses unveiled a more optimistic perspective, with students acknowledging the benefits of working together. When asked about the different ways in which group activities influenced their English learning, statements like "Positively, because they [the classmates] can help you, and if you do not understand, you can tell someone who does, and then you can learn and speak in a very *gringo* way" and "By collaborating, because we could understand more, and if someone did not understand, the other could explain" provided glimpses into these two elements experienced by certain students. Furthermore, the final survey results added another layer of positivity, 16 out of 26 students responded positively to questions related to active participation and attentive listening to classmates during group tasks, indicating a collective effort to accomplish shared objectives.

Finally, an unexpected finding from video recordings highlighted a form of cooperation between students in different groups. While cooperation within groups was limited, a noticeable pattern emerged where students who actively engaged within their groups extended support to one another across different groups. This unexpected cooperative behavior between group

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members from distinct groups implies a potential framework for developing positive interdependence beyond immediate team boundaries.

Working Together as a Motivating Strategy

Evidence of students' motivation towards learning English was observed across all five data collection tools. However, as explained in the previous paragraphs, cooperative learning as theoretically proposed did not take place in this context. The findings in this section will be attributed to an amalgamation of group dynamics and contextualized activities that fit better in the Collaborative Learning approach.

The Importance of Contextualized Collaborative Activities for Increasing Motivation

A clear contrast appeared when examining classes that sparked motivation compared to those that evinced disinterest. Four entries in the journal portrayed the implementation of contextualized collaborative activities in which the students' preferences and needs, observed throughout the academic year, were considered. The *stop* game, which contemplated the students' preference to play and their interest in learning new vocabulary; a cultural crossword intertwined with music that included their favorite singers and music genres; and a class about technological inventions that involved those devices present in their daily life, all elicited enthusiasm and active participation. The video recordings mirrored this sentiment, capturing images of students singing, dancing, and laughing, proof of the transformative impact of contextualized collaborative activities.

Conversely, demotivation became evident when implementing non-contextualized activities as described in a journal entry in which I expressed how one of my classes faced issues of complexity, unclear roles, and lack of contextualization as it was supposed to address different cultures of the world without any comparison with the Colombian context, and without

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considering the students' unfamiliarity and lack of prior contact with those cultures. The random group selection in that class only increased students' sense of disapproval towards the activity.

This contrast in motivation underscores the crucial impact of collaborative activities and contextual relevance.

A Noisy Class does not Necessarily Mean a Demotivated Class

My initial journal reflections suggested a widespread sense of demotivation among students, with a notable entry on July 27th expressing concern about their indifferent attitude. Throughout the implementation, based on the always agitated classroom environment, my general perception leaned towards students being demotivated. However, even though my journal entry from August 29th portrayed a noisy class where the students were discussing their things and not adhering to the proposed tasks, the video recording of the very same class provided a revelation: those seemingly off-topic discussions were, in fact, fervent engagements about the activities assigned, challenging my initial perception, and revealing active participation and genuine interest from the students in the assigned activities.

It is noticeable that in the focus group, seven out of 10 students expressed that they enjoyed the collaborative activities and felt good participating in them precisely because they were in groups, allowing them to share with their friends and collaborate on tasks. Surprisingly, one of them even remembered a collaborative activity developed in the first semester which was related to typical Colombian food. This student expressed that he enjoyed the activity because it was in groups. Similarly, another student affirmed that her favorite class was the one in which they had to guess the names of different famous singers. She said she liked it because it was fun, and it was in groups. Yet, a lone dissenting voice revealed the persistent challenge of some students feeling left out, doing all the work alone.

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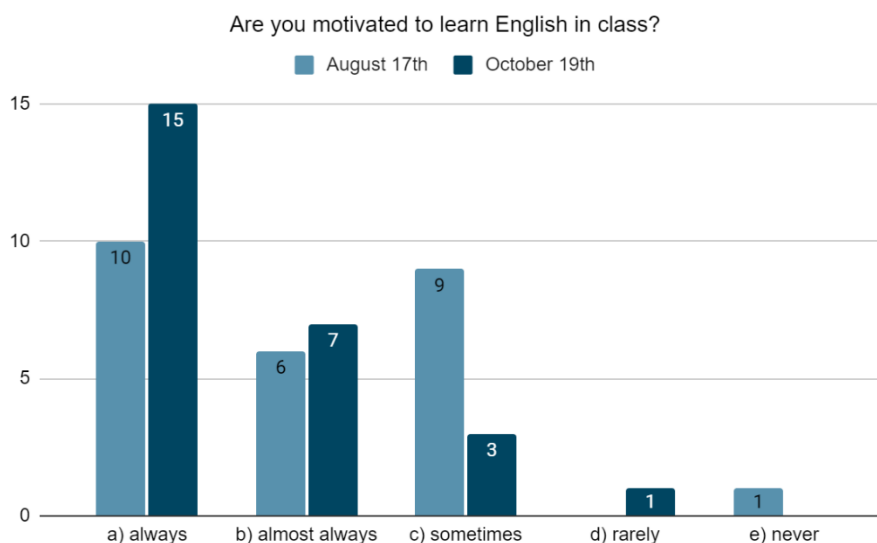
The CT interview provided a dual perspective, capturing the coexistence of increased interest and curiosity alongside a rise in indiscipline and lack of attention. The teacher expressed that the students were very interested and curious towards the class, but they were a little more restless, they talked too much, and their indiscipline and inattention in class were evident. This testimony highlights a complex context in which motivation increased hand in hand with students' indiscipline.

The Effects of Collaborative Activities in Students' Emotions

The survey and the focus group showcase the positive impact of collaborative activities on students' emotions. For instance, in the survey, when asked whether they felt motivated to learn English in class, the responses demonstrated a significant increase in motivation. In August, the positive responses of *always* and *almost always* accounted for 62% of the surveyed students. In contrast, these options increased to 85% in October, indicating a notable shift in their enthusiasm for learning English (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Students' level of motivation towards learning English in class.



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The focus group echoed this transformation. When asked about how collaborative activities had affected the dynamics of the classroom, one student said, "Positively. We got excited". This quote is relevant as it implies that collaborative activities transformed students' emotions. Moreover, to the question "Do you feel more motivated to learn English after working in a group? Why?", One student responded positively, expressing that the process of learning English sparked a desire for further learning. This testimony clearly demonstrates engagement and persistence in learning; elements described by Ushioda, (2014, as cited in Alshenqeti, 2018) as evidence of motivation.

Conclusions and Suggestions

This action research was aimed to explore the effectiveness of Cooperative Learning in increasing fifth graders' motivation towards English learning. The implementation uncovered diverse outcomes: As rewards failed to engage students effectively, random grouping faced resistance, and role assignment highlighted a need for clearer guidelines; a shift towards a more collaborative approach emerged in response to these challenges. Moreover, despite the gains in interpersonal skills and community building, evident in enhanced attentive listening and heightened peer communication, the inclination of certain students towards individual learning, and the limited confidence of some others in expressing ideas within groups, highlighted the importance of adopting a flexible approach tailored to students' needs for better nurturing interpersonal skills and fostering community building effectively. Similarly, although positive interdependence and individual accountability were not consistently observed, positive instances such as the unexpected support among students from distinct groups, inferred potential frameworks for further development of these aspects across diverse group settings.

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Furthermore, the implementation of collaborative and contextualized activities showcased significant improvements in students' motivation towards English learning. Specifically, these collaborative activities noticeably amplified students' enthusiasm for the class, evoking excitement, and a strong desire for further engagement in the learning process. Conversely, students seemed demotivated when the activities were individual or non-contextualized. In this regard, evidence highlighted a noteworthy divergence from the assumption that a noisy class directly signifies a demotivated class. Instead, in this context, it became evident that within a noisy environment, motivation and classroom indiscipline may coexist.

Finally, when aiming to increase students' motivation through a group work approach, be it cooperative or collaborative, educators and researchers should prioritize flexibility in instructional methodologies. Rather than being strictly tight to a particular methodology, a flexible approach that aligns with the students' context is crucial for obtaining better results. Moreover, even though motivation and indiscipline may coexist in a classroom environment, it is recommended to plan strategies aimed at preventing the escalation of students' disruptive behavior.

Reflection

This practicum experience has completely been an emotional rollercoaster. Initially, I embarked on this journey with confidence, being aware that it would be a great challenge, but thinking that I possessed the necessary skills and domain of the theory for facing it. I never imagined that teaching children would be such frustrating and stressful, but at the same time so rewarding and enjoyable.

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The first difficulty I faced was dealing with such a large group; 37 students between nine and 11 years old turned out to be overwhelming to me. The largest group that I ever had was a 30-adult group, with which discipline was not an issue. Conversely, in the fifth grade of Los Santos Ángeles Custodios, discipline was one of the biggest challenges. I realized that catching the attention of those children for almost two hours was a task worthy of admiration for someone who could accomplish it.

I regret not having had a proper period of observations, I consider that the absence of those spaces negatively affected my role as a teacher and researcher as I had to manage a context in which I did not have any experience. I also lacked the opportunity to learn from my CT or other teachers from the institution. Instead of having those moments for learning through observations, I had to learn by teaching from the very beginning.

During the second semester, I assumed the challenge of increasing the students' motivation towards learning English through CL activities. Planning a class became stressful as I got anxious when I thought that regardless of the good activities I planned, they would not work because the students would probably not allow me to teach them. I reached a point of despair in which I did not want to go to the practicum site anymore. However, after some reflection, I realized that I was probably misjudging the context; I thought that a noisy classroom was evidence of my failure as a teacher and as a researcher. I might have forgotten that they were children full of energy and happiness who run, scream, play, and discuss in class. I did not consider that they wanted to have fun and laugh, not to remain seated in class writing meaningless words for them. Fortunately, when I realized that, I was able to recover my passion and motivation for continuing teaching in that school.

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I do not pretend to romanticize indiscipline; I know that I could have exerted better classroom management if I had had more experience with children. Nevertheless, I do want to advise future teachers not to give up when facing a noisy classroom; I suggest listening to all your students' voices and trying to understand them. At the end of this process, I honestly believe that I managed to listen to some voices to whom I will always be thankful because I learned from them, and they helped me grow as a teacher, as a researcher, as a student, and as a person.

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Appendix

Motivation and Interpersonal Skills Survey to the Students:

Parte 1: Habilidades Interpersonales

1. ¿Cómo te sientes al trabajar en grupo en clase de inglés?

- a) Me gusta mucho.
- b) Me gusta.
- c) No me gusta ni me disgusta.
- d) No me gusta.
- e) No me gusta para nada.

2. Cuando trabajas en grupo, ¿le prestas atención a tus compañeros?

- a) Siempre
- b) Casi siempre
- c) A veces
- d) Casi nunca
- e) Nunca

3. ¿Te sientes cómodo(a) expresando tus propias ideas en un grupo?

- a) Sí, siempre.
- b) Sí, la mayoría de las veces.
- c) A veces sí, a veces no.
- d) No, raramente.
- e) No, nunca

Parte 2: Motivación hacia el Curso de Inglés

4. ¿Te sientes motivado(a) para aprender inglés en clase?

- a) Siempre.
- b) Casi siempre.
- c) A veces.
- d) Casi nunca.
- e) Nunca

5. ¿Crees que las actividades grupales en clase de inglés te ayudan a entender mejor el idioma?

- a) Siempre.
- b) Casi siempre.
- c) A veces.
- d) Casi nunca.
- e) Nunca

6. Imagina que puedes elegir entre trabajar solo(a) o en grupo en clase de inglés. ¿Cuál prefieres?

- a) Trabajar solo(a).
- b) Trabajar en grupo.
- c) cualquiera de las dos

7. Cuando trabajas en equipo, ¿qué tipo de rol asumes?

- a) Dejo que los demás hagan el resto.
- b) Me encargo de todo.
- c) Participo y escucho a mis compañeros para juntos realizar la tarea.
- d) A veces ayudo, pero a veces me distraigo y hago otras cosas.

Otro: _____