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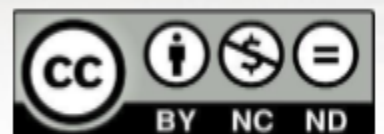
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FOSTERING STUDENT'S AUTONOMY THROUGH A COLLABORATIVE READING
PROJECT

**The Implementation of a Collaborative Reading Project to Foster Autonomy in
Students from the Extension Course English VI at the PIA Program**

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Abstract

This study is an action research project carried out with extension course students at PIA program from Universidad de Antioquia; a public university with its main Campus in Sevilla, Medellín. The aim of this project was to foster students' autonomy by the implementation of a collaborative reading project. Actions consisted of the development of a reading project carried out through an organized chronogram activity. Data collection instruments included a teacher journal, a self-assessment format and one focus group interview with the learners. Findings showed that developing a collaborative reading project can be beneficial for students.

***Key words:* reading, autonomy, collaborative learning.**

Título del proyecto en español: Implementación de un proyecto de lectura colaborativo para fomentar la autonomía en estudiantes del nivel 7 del curso de extensión del programa PIA

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Degree Requirement

This action research project is submitted as a requirement for the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English-French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellín, Colombia. The research was conducted at Programa de extension PIA level VII from August 2021 to November 2022. This project reports my experience as a teacher- researcher in this extension course in order to improve my teaching practice.

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Acknowledgments

This acknowledgment is especially directed to my family who was the pillar of this achievement, to the people that I found along the way, who taught me and accompanied me in this process of growing and learning. A special acknowledgment of the obstacles that helped me understand that human strength is within us.

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Preface

This action research is conducted to fulfill the requirements of the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Language (English-French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia in Medellín, Colombia. The purpose of this study was to implement a collaborative reading project in order to foster student's autonomy. The participants were 18 students between 17 and 61-years-old from the PIA extension course at Universidad de Antioquia. This paper is mainly aimed at educators, who play a very important role in trying to improve the teaching practices and learning experience in the area of English.

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Context description

El Programa de Inglés para Adultos, PIA is an extension program from the University of Antioquia designed to teach English to adults based on communicative competence. The PIA (Programa de Inglés para Adultos) coordination seeks to develop language skills based on communicative tasks. The program principles state the importance of collaborative work and a reflexive attitude towards the language and the culture. It is essential to highlight that this program has a cost, and it varies depending on the number of hours per week, the covid-19 contingency discount, or the special prices for the university employees.

The PIA program still does not have an educational project since it is still in construction, and the school council has not approved it yet. However, they have an established formation purpose: the program seeks to develop the communicative competence in their students, in the English language in such a way, so they can interact coherently and with clarity in their social, personal and academic tasks, through written and oral texts. Besides, the program pretends to foment collaborative work and a reflexive attitude towards the texts, language, foreign culture, and their own culture.

As a general objective, the program plans to contribute to developing the student's communicative competence to express coherently and with clarity in an oral and written way in English, in situations in their personal, social, and academic lives. The program adopts a communicative task-based teaching and learning approach that aligns with the fundamental principles of the sociocultural perspective. This approach allows proposing

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English learning activities that develop listening, speaking, reading and writing skills such as observation, analysis of situations, role-playing games, construction of mind maps—reading and discussing authentic oral and written texts: articles from the Internet, magazines, newspapers, documentaries, videos, music and movies.

The courses were built to be carried out in a face-to-face modality. Still, due to the government's provisions for the years 2021 and 2022, the course is being offered dynamized from virtuality or blended in as a consequence of the health contingency. The face-to-face classes are developed on campuses Medellín center and north, Envigado, Carmen de Viboral, and Santa Fe de Antioquia.

They have several groups organized on different schedules on weekdays and on Saturdays from eight to twelve, other groups from twelve to four, and the rest on Sundays from eight to twelve. The schedule for this specific group is on Mondays and Wednesdays from six pm to eight pm, corresponding to level seven. The course comprises 18 students, eleven women, and seven men. Their native language is Spanish. Most of the students are University employees and are between 17 and 61 years old. Currently, they are facing the course in the virtual modality.

The evaluation of PIA is made quantitatively with a qualification of 0.0 to 5.0 being three (3.0) the minimum passing grades and with six evaluative moments. Three of them are denominated as the follow-up, that includes participation, coming to classes, classes exercises; the partial evaluation which is in the middle of the course; the final evaluation that summarizes all the topics studied inside the course, and the main task that corresponds to a video activity created by the students. Each one of these evaluative moments has a 20 % percent of the entire grade.

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The course teacher is Sergio Andres Urrego, and he has been working for the program for some years now. He graduated from the University of Antioquia in the translation program. He has worked in different programs in the school of languages and outside of it, such as advisor of the multiliteracies project, English teacher at el politecnico Jaime Isaza Cadavid, translator, etc . Currently, he is working in the literacy program at the university of Antioquia, and he is studying a specialization in English education.

Statement of the problem

During the observation period in the English extension course at PIA, I realized that the cooperating teacher was constantly open to promoting group work and group interaction. However, students were reluctant to participate in activities that implied collaborative work. Hence, to clarify this situation, I had to explore the student's interests in the type of interactions they preferred and the abilities or topics they would like to work on. The group was composed of eighteen students, eleven women, and seven men, between seventeen and sixty-one years old. They are part of the English extension course in the PIA program.

This course used to be carried out in a face-to-face scenario. However, due to Covid-19 circumstances, it's been held in a temporary virtual environment. Students seem to cope with this modality because they seem comfortable. Although Students, in general, have a good relationship with the teacher, they do not have the chance to work in groups.

After analyzing observations, it was brought to my attention that students have never worked in groups or pairs. I also realized that students have never interacted among

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them. The cooperating teacher was constantly inviting students to take advantage of collaborative work. However, students were not enthusiastic, they never gave a reason why they wanted to work individually but it was deeply evident they lacked the motivation to work in groups.

“When they finally choose a book, he gives them thirty minutes to read but before he asks them if they want to work alone or in pairs. One student answered that it was better alone.” (Journal Entry 3, 12/09/2021.)

“The teacher asks if they prefer doing it in groups or individually, immediately they answer they want it individually.” (Journal Entry 4, 26/09/2021)

The first action necessary to have a more expansive vision of the issue was to implement an exploratory survey in which students could reflect on the reasons why they did not enjoy working in a collaborative group. That way, I could determine which could be the best possible actions to implement to foster group work. The exploration of this problem led to improving teacher and student practices. Some of the results found in this exploratory survey proved that students were interested in working in groups. This can be evidenced in the student's answers to the survey:

“When we work in teams, we can socialize a little bit more and interact with others, that way we can solve doubts and we learn from each other” (exploratory survey, October 11, 2021).

Also, students expressed in the same survey their desire to practice and learn English through reading activities. To the question: What activities would you like to include in the class to promote interaction with classmates and teachers? students

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answered: “to promote interaction with the group and the teachers with more reading activities” (exploratory survey, October 11, 2021).

According to the students' answers to the exploratory survey and based on the observations I conducted, I believe that encouraging students to work collaboratively might improve their performance in language learning skills, and also foster students' independence in their educational process. I also believe that working collaboratively might improve students' participation because it can create and promote confidence in their performance. Moreover, considering their desire to include reading practices in their class, encouraged me to propose a reading project. This type of practice not only develops language skills, but also can foster students' autonomy since the process of reading and the types of activities it implies promote independent work. Taking into account the previous reasons, I decided to state the following research question: How can the implementation of a collaborative reading project foster autonomy in students from the extension course English VII at the PIA program?

General objective:

- To establish to what extent the implementation of a collaborative project can foster students' autonomy.

Specific objectives:

- To determine how collaborative reading activities can foster students' autonomy.

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- To monitor how the use of reading strategies facilitates students' interaction with the readings and their peers.
- To explore students' challenges and gains of their collaborative reading project.

Theoretical framework

The intention of developing a collaborative reading project that can foster students' autonomy is based on the necessity of students to work collaboratively, and improve their capacity to work independently. A well-structured and organized reading schedule can help students and certainly the teacher to improve their teaching practices, and it can have an impact on the way students interact among themselves since working in groups has been a challenge inside the classroom.

Collaborative work

According to Klinger & Vaughn (1998) collaborative work is defined as the process of working actively and cooperatively, looking for achieving common learning goals. "Collaboration is a philosophy of interaction and personal lifestyle where individuals are responsible for their actions, including learning and respecting the abilities and contributions of their peers" (Marjan, 2011, P 18).

According to Marjan (2011), collaborative work promotes students' productivity, more caring, supportive and committed relationships, better psychological health, social competence, and self-esteem. Jonhsons (1994) cited by Marja (2011) mentions the results of working collaboratively, he argues that it creates positive interdependence, promotive interaction, group work achieving goals, and effectiveness.

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Moreover, Vygotsky (1978) argues that “communication is a social practice”. For that reason, students develop their greatest potential working in the community. The exchange of ideas, methodologies, strategies, arguments, opinions, roles, etc., require collective negotiation. Thus, collaborative work can bring countless benefits, not only in the learning process but also in the social manifestations of learners. We could even consider working collaboratively as a useful peer assessing method.

Autonomy

The definition of autonomy from a student's perception is based on what they do beyond class responsibilities. It involves peer work, and also a critical approach, referring to developing a higher level of autonomy needing to include a critical vision about the learner's reflection on their own learning strategies and styles. It involves taking charge of their own learning. According to Diaz. (2014), it is difficult to define the concept of autonomy since it includes freedom and self-government, and it also implies responsibility for the individual's performance. However, she defines autonomy as “the competence to develop as a self-determined, socially responsible, and critically aware participant in an educational environment (Jimenez, 2007).

According to Frodden & Cardona (2001), it is key to promoting the teacher's view on autonomy outside and inside the classroom. Teachers should follow some principles to achieve students' autonomy. Some of those principles include promoting group work without generating inner competition, and allowing students to participate in the selection of content, and materials activities. Another important principle is collective assessment which is implemented inside the classroom with the students' perceptions. This gives students a sense of self-responsibility, and also the self-production of tasks and materials.

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When talking about teachers' beliefs and how their practices can influence students' autonomy, Frodden & Cardona (2001) in their research study state the reproduction of educational methodologies. They mention that educators reproduce what they have been taught, which is one of the reasons why it is important to make educators aware of the influence of their practices, which includes autonomy practices. They also mentioned that an autonomous learner is the one who takes charge of their own learning processes, and who looks for information and learning opportunities on their own.

These authors argue that learners need to determine the direction of their own learning, that's why they need some individual principles, strategies, and techniques such as learning through collaborative and group work. Avoiding competition, and individual participation, collective decisions are required to foster learners' autonomy. Learners need to reflect on their own learning style and strategies, participate in the selection of materials, content and activities, and assess themselves and their peers.

From these perceptions we can state that autonomy has an important connection with collaborative work as Little,p 11 (2004) argues that “ our psychological autonomy derives from social interdependence”. He states that social interaction with teachers and peers is vital for the accomplishment of learner autonomy. According to this author, autonomy is an indispensable skill for achieving social functions in an independent way. Some of the abilities required to measure the level of autonomy are willingness, confidence, and motivation.

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Another author states that the most important characteristic of autonomy is based on the learner taking “the significant responsibility for their learning over and above responding instruction” Boud, (1998). which means the learner's impulse or motivation to go deeper into the academic field, goes beyond the simple instruction imparted by the instructor, it means the learner must have a bigger motivation to continue expanding his/her own learning process interest.

Candy (1991) goes a little further with the definition of autonomy since she states six principles: 1) an autonomous learner should have freedom of choice. 2) an autonomous learner can develop goals and plans independently of pressure from others. 3) an autonomous learner has a capacity for reflection. 4) an autonomous learner has the will and the capacity to “fearlessly and resolutely carry into practice, and through to completion, plans of action without having to depend on others for encouragement and reassurance. 5) an autonomous learner can exercise self-mastery; and 6) has a personal concept of themselves as being autonomous.

Reading

According to Bondanza & Treewater (1998), reading is not a mechanical process but an action that demands enrollment from the reader. A reader needs to interpret what the author wants to express. According to Grabe, (2009), the reader must have the background knowledge to understand and create new knowledge and new comprehension, and depending on the complexity of the reading, some strategies are required. Some of these strategies are reading selectively according to goals, rereading as appropriate, identifying important information, making guesses about unknown words and building interpretations of the text as they read.

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López Velásquez & Giraldo, (2011) agree that readers need to make connections between the text and the previous knowledge so they can assimilate information from the text and they can create inferential data. This process is known as world knowledge, and it means making connections between the individual world and the information from the text.

In order to develop an effective reading project, some reading strategies will be used for this pedagogical exercise. Grabe, (1991) insists that a good reader needs different input until they find an appropriate strategy that makes the learning process an unconscious process. And, research indicates that learners with active participation in the before, during, and after reading activities, engage and assure a good reading process. Rodriguez, (2017). Before reading, students connect their knowledge with their previous knowledge; during reading, they understand important and specific information; and after reading they make analysis and reflections.

Action plan

In order to answer the research question established in this project, two main actions are going to be carried out from August to October. The main one is the promotion of a collaborative reading project in the thirteen sessions of class. Each session has a different reading task, including vocabulary activities, reading-aloud spaces, audio reading, and graphic organizers, among others. The second action is to develop a reflection space where students can manifest their thoughts and perceptions about the collaborative reading project to foster their level of autonomy. Students will work in groups with a specific reading activity that they will work on during the whole course, in each session students will have a

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different activity such as a vocabulary exploration, a graphic organizer for summarizing their stories, and a reflection space for narrating their thoughts in the project.

Development of actions

The actions implemented for this project started in August of 2022. I began by telling students a little about the intention, the strategies, and the length of the reading project. We established with the cooperating teacher that I would be in charge of the first part of the class with my reading project. I described to students some of the activities we would use during the course. I started by dividing groups and establishing a reading routine in which students could start getting familiar with the activities. In every class, I began by saying hi to students and explaining the day's corresponding activities. One of the first activities I did was to provide students with reading strategies so they could choose the ones they preferred and make arrangements in their groups.

When students had already established a reading routine, and when their reading material was established, I started implementing some of the fundamental activities I had planned for the reading project. To start, I asked them to do a vocabulary activity that consisted in summarizing what they had read so far in a short presentation. With the group, they had to explain the context of their stories, describe their main characters, explore essential vocabulary, and recognize some grammatical tenses, and structures. Students had the chance to present their work and received a grade for it.

The following action was the building and organization of a graphic organizer, in which students could continue summarizing their stories. Also, one of the objectives of this activity was to make information more understandable for their peers. All of these activities

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were carried out in groups. They always had the freedom to choose the strategies that they preferred, and they also had the chance to select the roles inside their groups.

The last action was implementing a focus group interview which was highly important since I consider that students' perceptions guide teachers to perform and improve their practices. So, I allowed them to express their experiences and opinions about the reading project. The main topics to observe in the focus group interview were the learning strategies used by students in the project, to determine if they could observe some changes in their level of autonomy, and the perception they had of collaborative work.

Findings and interpretations

This research exercise intended to foster students' autonomy through a collaborative reading project in a group of adult students of an extension English course. To analyze the data collected in this action research, I cross-checked the three data collection instruments: the journal entries collected during the entire course with reflective information and class reports, the self-assessment format made with the intention of knowing student's impressions about the reading project, the collaborative work and their perceptions on autonomy improvement; and finally the focus group interview in which students would have the opportunity to express their opinions about the project.

To analyze the data, I started by going through each journal, reading attentively, and then establishing categories in main concepts; second, the self-assessment format was applied, and analyzed and it was contrasted with the main concepts found in the journal entries. Third, the focus group interview was applied, transcribed, analyzed, and compared with the previously mentioned data collection methods. To triangulate the information, I

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established a recurrence chart to determine the categories and subcategories taken from the data collection methods and the literature review. Then I continue to determine the main categories based on data collection methods, and I established the level of recurrence among the categories and the data collection information. At the end of the triangulation, I came up with the following three main categories: Student's autonomy, collaborative work challenges and advantages, and reading project benefits and challenges.

Student's autonomy

When I finished analyzing the information collected, I realized that the impact on students' autonomy was not completely the result expected in terms of promoting independent work. Taking into consideration the literature that supports this study where students can demonstrate a level of autonomy with different attitudes such as doing independent work outside the classroom or reflecting on their own learning styles and strategies, I can say that some students did not demonstrate these attitudes. This situation could be reflected in the vocabulary activities implemented during the project. For this activity, students had the chance to choose the appropriate learning strategies such as audiotext which was listening to the story while following the reading, and creating sentences to put vocabulary into practice. While working in groups, I could observe something positive in terms of building agreements to work collaboratively such as assigning roles, which was an independent action determined by them. However, when they needed to make the decision on how to present their vocabulary activity, they did not make decisions different from the example that was given to them. This means they did not make any independent decisions for this specific activity. This can be evidenced in my reflection on the vocabulary activity:

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“In the end I could tell that they worked with responsibility and committed themselves with the activity, especially because I had the chance to observe them doing the activity. However, I can not say that students made independent decisions as I was expecting to.”

(Journal entry #7, September 12, 2022)

On the other hand, some actions were made to make students participate in the involvement of class decisions, such as letting students participate in the selection of material, resources, and content and making them part of the actions established in class, with the intention of making students feel responsible for their learning process. Students could also make decisions about the grading activities as observed in journal entry five: “Making students involved in taking decisions such as for example the activities that can be graded, I think is a plus in the classrooms. I consider this can give students a sense of belonging, and make them more responsible in their learning processes. (Journal entry #5, September 5, 2022) and also about the time they were required to work, as evidenced in the journal reflections: “I consider it was important to ask students if they needed more time to continue working, because from my point of view, they can feel that their opinion is being taken into consideration. Especially adult students, from what I have observed, they like to be active in their learning process, even in the skills they want to work on.” (Journal entry 6, September 7, 2022)

To continue analyzing the level of autonomy achieved by students, in the group interview students manifested the perception they had about another characteristic of autonomy level, which is “self and peer assessment” Frodden & Cardona (2001). Students recognized the benefits of working with others as a way to correct themselves: “listening to others helps you to improve your own mistakes.” “The partner tells me, don't make

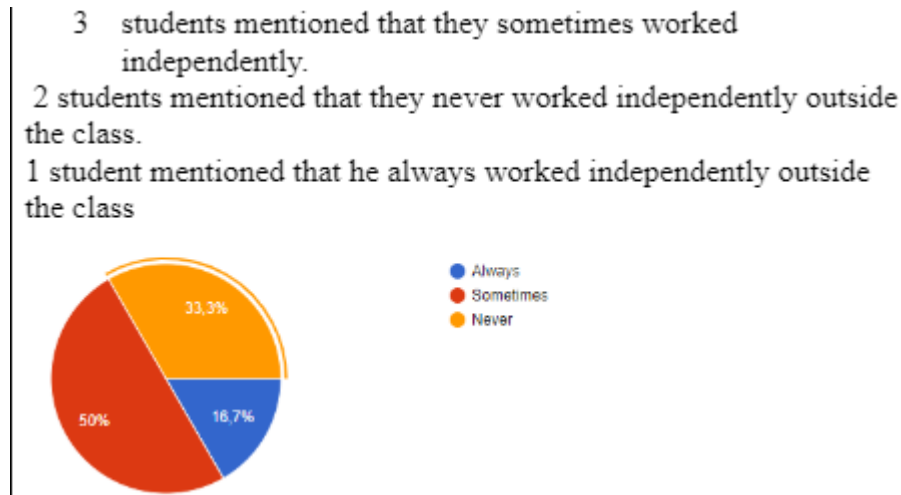
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mistakes.” I made a mistake and my partner tells me how to improve” (focus group interview, September 26, 2022) They also manifested the challenges they faced, and they could overcome “The reading was a bit difficult but we help each other” (focus group interview, September 26, 2022). The analysis that I can make from the learner's responses is connected with the idea of some authors that manifest that Learning through collaboration and group work rather than competition and individual participation and taking decisions collectively Frodden & Cardona (2001) is an important characteristic of autonomy level. Students develop a higher level of autonomy while working in groups, they get several benefits like correcting their own mistakes, and helping each other with the difficulties found in their learning processes.

Thanks to the focus group interview I could also identify that one student considered she didn't increase her autonomy level in the reading project, “In my case I didn't increase my autonomy level with the reading but I want to improve my reading skills with other books and with other readings because I think it's important to have the habit to read.” (Focus group interview, September 26, 2022) However, she became aware of the importance of increasing her reading level. From that perspective, I can establish that she reflected on strategies for her own learning process which makes an advance and improvement.

Now, analyzing the results found in the self-assessment format, we can identify several aspects. First of all, the answers received from the question made to students, to identify if they did independent work outside the classroom, it can be stated that it was something occasionally in most of the students as can be evidenced in the statistical graphic:

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We can analyze from here that not all students worked independently outside the class. Some students mentioned in the reflection space of the self-assessment format that even if they were interested in continuing reading outside class time, they didn't have the time. As it was also stated in the group focus interview "In my case I have few time but it's very important and necessary for the reading activities" (focus group interview, September 26, 2022).

To sum up, although the expectation for students to improve their autonomy level by making decisions in their own learning process was not the one expected, it could be evidenced by some improvement in the arrangement of roles inside their groups, the waking up of interest for the reading activities, and considerable interest in independent reading.

Collaborative work benefits and challenges

The implementation of the collaborative work project brought several results as are going to be mentioned in the next paragraphs. This main category is going to be treated in two classifications or subcategories: benefits and challenges of collaborative work.

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Benefits.

As it was explained in the statement of the problem, one of the objectives of this research study was to implement a collaborative project. This implementation with the intention of creating an enriching environment where students could help each other, and foster their level of autonomy while working in groups. Therefore, the first action required was to create a reading routine with the arrangement of groups. Since day one of this reading routine, I noticed the good environment that was created by students, they got responsible for their groups, and started to assign roles. “ I had the chance to visit group by group. And I saw something amazing, students coupled up very well to their groups. The four groups used different strategies” (Journal entry #3, August 29, 2022) As stated in the observation, students were able to couple up, and make decisions together.

According to the self-assessment format, students were asked if they were willing to work in groups on the reading project. Three students answered positively, and three students said that sometimes. It is evident that they worked in groups most of the time. However there might be a possible explanation for why some of these students said they just did it sometimes since in the focus group interview one student manifested it was not always positive to work in groups, but we will analyze this in detail in the challenges passage.

To continue analyzing the benefits of a collaborative group, based on the focus group interview, several students manifested positive aspects about group work and how beneficial can it be for self and peer correction, this can be evidenced in the transcription of the focus group interview; “ I like to work in groups because we have much time to talk and more, because we have been working online and not in a classroom, and

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it's important to talk and more obviously to learn another language. I think it's very important to work in groups and I liked it. I like my group obviously" (focus group interview, September 26, 2022). This student manifests two important aspects in his reflection, the first one is the opportunity to speak and socialize with their peers. And the second one it's the virtual scenario, which can be counterproductive in a second language learning environment.

Another student manifests the following opinion: "the group work, I think that the work in the little groups help to learn English because the partner tells me, don't make mistakes. I have a mistake and my partner tells me how to improve" (focus group interview, September 26, 2022). This student mentions one of the important aspects of this research study; peer correction. This is one of the positive results that we can find from collaborative work, and it was evidenced in this research study as a consequence of the reading project. "In my group, we have a good relationship or good work. We were very productive. The reading was a bit difficult but we helped each other so it's a good exercise for teamwork: I have good partners" (focus group interview, September 26, 2022) The last student could also identify collaborative work as a benefit for his learning process, especially because he considers his group members as a support for the challenges faced in the project.

Several benefits could be evidenced as a consequence of working collaboratively, like socialization inside the groups, peer correction, and more opportunities for participation but the most evident benefit established by the students was the possibility of helping each other. This reflection can be supported by the reflections I made in the class observations: "From the observations that I have made about working in groups, I consider the time has been very productive because students have the chance to divide work, help

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among them and learn from one another. I have also noticed that they feel more confident when they have a partner covering their back, it can be reflected in something they don't know how to pronounce, something they don't know the meaning of, etc"(journal entry #9, September 1, 2022).

Challenges.

When talking about challenges three main aspects were exposed in this research study. The first one was the time constraint, some students manifested the time restriction as an obstacle to enjoying the benefits of collaborative work as evidenced in the focus group interview: "And the time is a few times and maybe for that not all the people we could participate in the activity, sometimes only watching. The other partners sometimes only watch one of us" (focus group interview, September 26, 2022). Time in general was a limitation for students since they always claimed not to have enough to finish their activities or to socialize the readings with their peers, and they manifested through the development of the course, as stated in the reflection of the journal: "When I started passing by the groups, they manifested a lot of concern, because they thought they would not have the time to finish the activity. Based on the concerns they manifested I decided to change the schedule, I consider there is no point in rushing up students just to make them produce" (journal #6, September 7, 2022).

The second challenge evidenced in this research study was lack of participation from some members of the group, this unconformity was manifested especially by students in the focus group interview: "I don't like to work in groups or I prefer to work in pairs because I felt sometimes only two or three people work at the time, I don't know the responsibility it's not same in all group and I prefer work in pairs specifically this activity."

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(Focus group interview, September 26, 2022). And as a consequence of the lack of responsibility from some members of the groups, it results in, the lack of participation as mentioned by one student in the following opinion “And the time is few and maybe for that not all the people we could participate in the activity, sometimes only watching. The other partners sometimes only watch one of us. Share the screen with the reading but the other people only watch.” (Focus group interview, September 26, 2022)

It can be analyzed from all this evidence that there were more benefits than challenges. I can state that the many benefits found in the collaborative work project start from the interaction with peers, opportunities for socializing, helping each other, and peer correction. Definitely, there was a positive impact from working collaboratively.

Reading project benefits and challenges.

The implementation of the reading project also brought benefits and challenges that could be analyzed in the development of this research study.

Benefits.

The first positive consequence of the reading project was the increasing awareness about the importance of acquiring a reading habit. Students manifested the necessity to keep on with the reading to continue improving in their learning process. According to the answers expressed by students, the importance of reading, and the motivation from this reading project: “it motivates me to read and look up for unknown words in the dictionary to better understand the text”” it created the interest for improving reading skills in the future” (self-assessment format, September 26, 2022). They also mentioned that their interest in reading exercises continued outside the classroom, and they considered they

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could do different reading activities to continue improving: "I want to improve my reading skills with other books and with other readings because I think it's important to have the habit to read" (focus group interview, September 26, 2022).

The second major positive influence caused by the reading project was the learning of new vocabulary. This benefit was highlighted by students as much as in the self-assessment format as in the focus group interview "I think that the readings are always very important to learn another language because you learn vocabulary" "I was coming and going again to the reading, and I think you do learn reading English because you learn new vocabulary" "the most interesting for me was looking for new vocabulary" (focus group interview, September 26, 2022). These students agree on how beneficial it can be for their learning processes to explore, and identify new vocabulary. This evidence demonstrates that students received a positive impact in terms of vocabulary acquisition.

This same characteristic of learning new vocabulary could also be observed in the self-assessment format. Students had the chance to manifest their experiences with the reading project, and they manifested some important opinions to analyze: "it motivates (the reading project) me to read more and look for unknown words in the dictionary to better understand the text" "I learned some new vocabulary words" "it is an activity that enriches vocabulary" (self-assessment format, September 26,2022) As mentioned before, we can evidenced the positive impact of the reading project when it comes to vocabulary. However, some students could have experienced an opposite perception of vocabulary activities, but we will analyze in detail the challenges of the reading project.

Continuing with the benefits, the importance of this reading project in the development of English skills was evident. Improving language abilities is a task that can

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be stimulated with different activities that are not necessarily the main focus. I could identify from the implementation of this reading project that students enjoyed activities like the audio reading, summarizing their stories, and practicing pronunciation with their peers. Even though this result was not an objective of this research study, it was a consequence, and it can be evidenced in the student's manifestations. "I consider that this is a very good exercise for all skills, even the fact of working in groups, and being able of reading aloud makes pronounce a little bit better" (focus group interview, September 26,2022).

To finish the analysis of benefits of the reading project, it is important to mention the students' interest in reading topics. As the previous characteristic, this was not either an objective of this research study. However, a couple of students manifested the motivation they had with the topics chosen because they were topics of their interest: "I like to read and to finish the story. I like stories about aliens because before I believed in aliens." From my point of view, I enjoyed it because I was reading something about the same author that was in part my interest" (focus group, September, 26,2022). It was very evident that student's motivation in the reading project can increase when they have topics of interest inside the reading activities, and coincidentally this happened for some students. This makes us reflect on our pedagogical practices that when we consider putting a reading activity into practice, we could have students' preferences into consideration.

To conclude with the reading project benefits, I can state that several positive influences can result from the implementation of a reading project, such as the increasing awareness of reading, learning new vocabulary, improving in all English skills, and the motivation for reading topics of interest. Some of these benefits were an objective of the reading activities of this research study but some others were a consequence.

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Challenges.

The challenges of the reading project were somehow more specific and they are connected with two main characteristics. The length of the readings and the lack of reading habits. According to students, the length of the reading was not in proportion to the time they had for making the activities. Normally, students had in the thirteen sessions of the reading project, twenty minutes to work in groups, and develop the reading activities. They constantly manifested that there was not enough time to develop the activities for the length of the stories, worth noting that each reading activity for each group was two pages long: "it's hard to keep the story thread in such long readings" (focus group interview, September, 26, 2022). Not only was this manifested in the focus group but also in the reflections from the journals "when I started passing by the groups, they manifested a lot of concern because they thought they would not have the time to finish the activity. Based on the concerns they manifested I decided to change the schedule" (Journal entry # September 7, 2022).

Subsequently, another challenge observed in the reading project was the lack of reading habits. This analysis was only evidenced in the last session of the course when students had the chance to reflect on their own practices and styles. They realized that in our educational system we normally do not learn or do not establish reading routines, not even inside the classroom: "I think the reading culture is difficult in our country, I don't know, maybe in schools the teachers don't motivate us to read more. And to have this reading so long because it was so long was a challenge" (focus group interview, September 26, 2022). This challenge was basically a criticism of our educational system and it takes out the gaps that can have a consequence in our learning processes.

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In summary, it was evidenced in this research study that a collaborative reading project can foster students' autonomy from different perspectives. First of all, encouraging students to divide into group work, promoting self and peer correction, and learning vocabulary. However, we found challenges that need to be studied in detail.

Conclusions

This action research was carried out with the intention of fostering autonomy through a collaborative reading project. The results evidenced that there were some benefits from different perspectives, in the implementation of a collaborative reading project. The first positive results can be found in the benefits evidenced in students with the collaborative work, students demonstrated a higher level of participation, promoting collaboration among them, and fostering self and peer correction.

Additionally, the possibility of giving students options with different learning strategies, gave them the chance to foster independent work, assign roles inside their groups considering what was best for their learning processes, and having the possibilities to take decisions inside their groups, and outside of them.

On top of that, students could reflect on their reading habits, and be aware of the benefits they can have from reading activities in their process of learning a second language. This positive result was not something expected from this research exercise, however, it was highly appreciated the fact that students identified a lot of benefits from acquiring a reading habit, and how beneficial can this be for the learning of English.

Nevertheless, there were some obstacles in the implementation of this project like the lack of time, the lack of participation, and responsibility from some members of each

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group, and the level of difficulty with the vocabulary. I consider more time can be required for this type of project.

In conclusion, I strongly suggest the implementation of a collaborative reading project, since it can have a positive effect on students' autonomy, promoting independent work, self and peer collaboration, and collaborative assessment. Moreover, reading habits can be established, and learning through collaboration and making decisions collectively are to name some of the benefits resulting from the implementation of this project.

Reflection

Reflecting on my practicum experience, I can state that it was a very enriching experience. I felt confident and well-received by the cooperating teacher as well as the students. From the first part of the practicum where my only task was being an observer, I could identify that it was a very comfortable group to work with.

In the second part of the practicum where I started to make interventions, I had a lot of ideas and a lot of enthusiasm to put into practice all I have learned before, and especially to implement the reading project just to observe and explore the results that can be extracted from a collaborative group from a reading perspective.

At this point, I consider that being an educator is an important role inside society. We have the responsibility of accompanying students in their learning process but we also need to let them experience their own styles and strategies, always with the intention of looking for benefits in the pedagogical practices.

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To finish with this reflection, I am very grateful to the cooperating teacher who was a great help during this whole process. He helped me to prosecute the project with the knowledge he had about his students. And of course, he gave me the freedom to put my ideas into practice correcting them when necessary.

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