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COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND SOCIAL SKILLS IN A FOURTH-GRADE CLASS

Breaking the Learners' Social Barriers and Improving their English Learning Process through the
Use of Cooperative Learning Strategies

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Abstract

This action research project aimed to analyze how cooperative learning strategies affect fourth-grade students' English learning process at a public institution in Medellín, Colombia. The participants were 26 Colombian and 2 Ecuadorian students whose ages ranged between 8 and 10. The actions of this project were divided into two main parts: the cooperative learning strategies and the social skill development activities. The data was collected through journal entries, students' class reflections, students' drawings, students' surveys, and advisor's visit comments. Findings suggest that this action plan: a) had a positive impact on students' perception of cooperation, b) achieved the five elements of cooperation according to Johnson (2009), c) benefited students' English learning, cooperative work knowledge, and social skill development, d) faced some difficulties with classroom situations in terms of students' relationships, and a student condition, e) created a fun school scenario for learning the English language, and f) developed some students' social skills concerning social interaction, social communication, emotional communication, and the creation of consensus.

Key Words: *cooperative work, cooperative strategies, social skills, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence.*

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Degree Requirements

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

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Preface

Following my bachelor's degree obligations, I was assigned as a pre-service teacher to INEM Guillermo Echavarría Misas elementary school site of INEM José Félix de Restrepo, where I worked with group 4-1 observing the English classes, implementing English lessons, and conducting an action research project in this classroom.

During the English class observations, I realized that working individually was an everyday situation for the students of this course; however, when they had the opportunity to socialize or work together, they were attentive and collaborative. Moreover, when I started implementing my English classes, we worked in groups and pairs, and I noticed that although they were content with peer work, they were lacking awareness of how group work functions.

That is the reason why this action research project aims to explore cooperative work strategies and social skills development as a means in the English learning process. Hoping the students learn English language skills, the importance of working with someone else, and the aspects to pay attention to when working cooperatively.

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Context Description

INEM José Félix de Restrepo is a public school located in Medellín, Colombia.

According to school manual on coexistence, as a mission, the school aims to educate students in preschool, elementary school, high school, and technical education following integral education, environmental preservation teaching, and the four pillars of Education for the 21st Century: Learning to know, learning to do, learning to live, and learning to be (Delors, 2001, as cited in Rodrigues, 2021). Furthermore, as a vision, it aspires to be recognized as a high-quality school that promotes investigation in the learning process and forms autonomous, critical, creative, and democratic students. This school has two sites, one for secondary school and fifth grade, and another one for preschool and elementary school from first grade to fourth grade.

The first site is the main one located on Las Vegas avenue. It has 3,200 students, mainly from social strata 1, 2, and 3, and it has many facilities such as classrooms with technological devices, computer rooms, auditoriums, laboratories, and a sports area. Moreover, this main site is surrounded by one public and one private university, one hospital, one mall, and two residential buildings. The other site is INEM Guillermo Echavarría Misas, which became the site for elementary school in 2003. It has 15 teachers, one coordinator, and more than 300 students. It has six classrooms, one computer room, one courtyard, and two restrooms. This site is surrounded by a park, some restaurants, and some residential buildings.

The fourth-grade class to be observed takes place at INEM Guillermo Echavarría Misas site; it consists of 26 Colombian and 2 Ecuadorian students: 12 female and 16 male (G. Varelas, interview #1, May 18th, 2022). Their ages range between 8 and 10. Most of them live in Medellín city, and some live in Bello. Regarding students' interests, most of them like to play and meet with their friends and family. Concerning class activities, most of the students find listening and writing activities enjoyable and reading and speaking activities unenjoyable. Moreover, students

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prefer working in pairs or groups rather than working alone. Finally, students consider they have a low English level, but their attitude towards the language is very positive (Students' survey #1).

The teacher that leads this class has 30 years of experience teaching elementary schools in rural and urban areas. She graduated from a bachelor's degree program in children's education at Universidad de San Buenaventura, and a master's degree program in affective processes and sexual education at Universidad Industrial de Santander (G. Varelas, interview #2, September 26th, 2022). This teacher follows a constructivist approach, but she thinks it is necessary to involve all the approaches in her practice, even the traditional ones while considering the students' active role. For her teaching strategies, she believes that students need to be in charge of their learning process; therefore, she starts with students' knowledge to create new knowledge. In terms of assessment, the teacher considers students' work, participation, and self-evaluation, and she uses rubrics to assess them (G. Varelas, interview #1, May 18th, 2022). Moreover, students are graded with letters and not with a numeral scale, the codes are BJ for low development, B for basic development, A for high development, and S for superior development.

In relation to the English course, it is aligned with the institutional book *called Estrategias De Mejoramiento de Componentes Curriculares* which contains the English learning goals for each grade (journal entry #16, September 12th, 2022). The classes consist of two academic hours: around 100 minutes weekly. The teacher who gives the course does not have the academic preparation to teach English, therefore she does not have a good level of the language. As a support for the English class, she uses another English book different from the institutional book and visual supports such as images and videos. Additionally, the students do not have more English classes besides those at school. Finally, The English classroom is provided with a whiteboard, a desk, chairs, a big Smart TV, and a computer with an internet connection.

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Statement of the Problem

To start with, the first aspect to be mentioned here is the teacher's preparation for giving the English classes. As it was highlighted in the context description, the teacher of this fourth-grade classroom does not have the English language knowledge to give this class. Although she tried to prepare her classes and used different materials to enrich the lessons, her lack of ability to pronounce the language plays an important role in students' learning process because they are not acquiring English vocabulary with the corresponding phonology.

Also, during the first observation I did in this group, something called my attention. The second aspect that I noticed was the fact that students were working individually all the time, and the teacher did not promote group work or students' interaction. Therefore, I went back to those days in Elementary and High School where I was on my own, doing all the different tasks alone, only with the instructions, and partial support of my teachers. Contrary, when I entered the university, most of the activities and work we had to do were in groups or pairs. Of course, in the beginning, I struggled with this teaching/learning strategy; however, through my instance at the university and all the peers I had to work with, I learned to work with others to the point I enjoyed the group assignments a lot. Thus, when I remembered all the individual work I had to do at school and all the learning opportunities I missed because I did not work with someone else, I felt sad for the students of this group.

In line with the last paragraph, the first time I implemented a class in this group, I used group work strategies (journal entry #4, March 7th, 2022). In the initial activity we worked in groups of five students, and then we worked in pairs. In the time of the different group work activities, I observed that students were happy because they could do the tasks with their friends and closer classmates; however, there was a disciplinary problem in terms of students' attention since they were playing and not doing the assignments. Therefore, during another

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implementation, I assigned the members of the groups to control the disciplinary issue, but it did not work completely because some students were uncomfortable since they were not working with someone close to them. Thus, they did not do the assignment with the same motivation and dedication as they usually do. Here, I perceived a third aspect to pay attention to, students did not know how to work with someone else if they did not know her/him.

With these three aspects in mind, I started to reflect on how I could help these students to improve their English learning process. First, I considered that the aspect of teacher preparation could be tackled with the knowledge I got during my professional development in the foreign language teaching program and the implementation I would give through the school year. Then, I looked at the two aspects left, and I realized that they could be joined and tackled together. Thus, I decided to work with the use of cooperative learning strategies and the development of social skills to improve the students' English learning process. In this point, it is important to mention that I conclude that it is better to work cooperatively and not collaboratively because of students' age.

Furthermore, in a class along with my advisor and my two classmates, I understood the value of teaching my students to work together, supporting each other, and taking advantage of their differences. As it is known, Colombia has been a country permeated by violence in all social areas; however, the current government is appealing to all armed groups to build peace and give up violence. Also, nowadays society is giving a step toward reconciliation and unity among Colombian citizens. Keeping this in mind, I think this project is a seed that will be planted in the students of this course through the use of cooperative learning, and social skills development, and it will blossom in the future building citizens who understand the importance of working and growing together.

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Theoretical Framework

As this project draws on the use of cooperative learning and social skills development, this theoretical framework presents the concepts that support this study. The first section explores Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal development. The second section introduces the definition of Cooperative Learning as well as its components and main concepts. The third section presents social intelligence. Finally, the fourth section shows and explains some activities that will be carried out in this project for promoting cooperation.

The Zone of Proximal Development

The Zone of Proximal Development or ZPD emerged from the Sociocultural Theory by Lev Vygotsky. In this theory, according to Silalahi (2019) development is a social process in which children first learn from interaction and collaboration with others. Therefore, children develop language skills and learn new concepts when they interact (Mooney, 2013, as cited in Silalahi, 2019). In that order of ideas, ZPD is defined according to Vygotsky (1978, p. 86, as cited in Silalahi, 2019, p. 174) as "the distance between the actual developmental level and the level of potential development under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" which means that everyone is in a ZPD where they have some knowledge about something and need interaction with someone else who has more knowledge to learn it and continue to the next ZPD. That is the reason why interaction is essential when we are learning something, and here is where Cooperative Learning comes to take place.

Cooperative Learning

Regarding Sharan's (1987, p. 21, as cited in Davidson & Major, 2014, p.12) definition of cooperative learning "cooperative learning encompasses a wide range of strategies for promoting academic learning through peer cooperation and communication". Using cooperative learning strategies is a way of nurturing the classroom because as it was stated by Mahbuba (2022) it

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“helps each student to have more ownership over their education, this learning structure actively engages students in the learning process” (p. 65). Moreover, peer interaction is a tool to enhance young learners’ values, attitudes, psychological well-being, behaviors, and perspective on their selves and their environment (Mahbuba, 2022, p. 63-64). However, to work with others is not the only condition to work cooperatively and effectively, we need to consider the essential elements of cooperative learning.

Essential Elements of Cooperation

According to Johnson (2009) “there are five components that need to be taken into account to have effective cooperation. Those essential elements are positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, the appropriate use of social skills, and group processing” (p. 366).

Positive Interdependence. This component is understood like “divisions of labor, mutual identity, environmental spaces, and simulations involving fantasy situations” (Johnson, 1992, as cited in Johnson, 2009, p. 367).

Individual Accountability. It is assumed such as those “Feelings of responsibility for (a) completing one's share of the work and (b) facilitating the work of other group members” (Johnson, 2009, p. 368).

Promotive Interaction. Johnson (2009) stated “promotive interaction occurs as individuals encourage and facilitate each other's efforts to accomplish the group's goals” (p. 368).

Group Processing. According to Johnson (2009), this element is developed “when group members (a) reflect on which member actions were helpful and unhelpful and (b) make decisions about which actions to continue or change” (p. 369).

The Appropriate Use of Social Skills. What this segment explains to us is that “unskilled group members cannot cooperate effectively. Effective cooperation is based on skilled

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teamwork as well as on-task work. Students, therefore, must be taught the interpersonal and small group skills needed for high-quality cooperation and be motivated to use them” (Johnson, 2009, p. 369).

Social Intelligence

In accordance with the above, we need to talk about how learners need to be guided to develop their social intelligence. First, based on Sadiku’s (2019) definition of Social Intelligence “it is about understanding your environment and having a positive influence on your social interactions” (p. 214). Moreover, it handles with the way in which humans deal with complex social situations, such as politics, romance, family relationships, quarrels, and collaboration (Sadiku, 2019, p. 214).

“The concept of social intelligence was introduced in 1920 by American psychologist Edward Thorndike” (Sadiku, 2019, p. 214), and it is linked to the theory of multiple intelligences by Howard Gardner. Gardner (2003, as cited in Behjat, 2012, p. 352) claimed that “as a species, individuals possess not single “g” intelligence but a set of autonomous intelligences”, for Gardner, there are eight intelligences: Logical-Mathematical, Linguistic, Spatial, Musical, Bodily-Kinesthetic, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, and Naturalist (Brualdi, 1996, p. 1).

When it comes to talking about Social Intelligence, we go into the Interpersonal and Intrapersonal intelligences. According to Sadiku (2019) “intrapersonal intelligence causes one to distinguish their different feelings and have a better understanding of their self, and interpersonal intelligence enables a person to understand others’ feelings and intentions and can make successful relationships with others” (p. 352).

Elements of Social Intelligence

In line with Sadiku (2019) there are six main elements of social intelligence “verbal fluency and conversational skills; knowledge of social roles, rules, and scripts; effective listening

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skills; understanding what makes other people tick; role-playing and social self-efficacy; and impression management skills” (p. 215). Following these aspects, people can acquire the characteristics that will make them socially intelligent to cooperate effectively as it was explained in the essential element of cooperation called The Appropriate Use of Social Skills.

Learners’ Characteristics for Cooperation

Johnson (2009) asserted that the learners who composed the group to work cooperatively must “[...] coordinate efforts to achieve mutual goals, participants must (a) get to know and trust each other, (b) communicate accurately and unambiguously, (c) accept and support each other, and (d) resolve conflicts constructively” (p. 369). That is the reason why it is crucial to work on students’ development of social skills, therefore when they work together, they cooperate effectively.

Activities to Promote Cooperation

In the vein of fostering cooperative work, this project will contemplate three different strategies which are jigsaw, running dictation, and posters.

Jigsaw

“The idea behind the Jigsaw technique is this: Just as in a Jigsaw puzzle, each piece- each student’s part- is essential for the completion and full understanding of the final product” (Zadiyatunnisa, n.d). In this project, the jigsaw activity will be carried out in groups of four or five students, and it will be adapted to students’ age and English level using drawings and simple words and expressions instead of complex sentences.

Running Dictation

Following Milne (2014), in the running dictation activity:

The students are then grouped in pairs. One of them is the ‘writer’ or ‘scribe’ and the other the ‘runner’. The ‘runner’ goes to the dictation, reads, and remembers as much as

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possible, and then returns to the 'writer' who listens and writes down what is said. This cycle continues until the dictation is complete. (p. 2)

In this study, the running dictation activity will be developed in big groups and using drawings and simple sentences according to the students' age and English level.

Poster

This is an activity in which students present their ideas with drawings and simple words. It has been used for many times mostly in individual work; however, it can be used as a tool for cooperative work where students need to divide the different labors and work as a group. In this activity, students will work in a group of three choosing a presenter, a designer, and a writer. They will work in the development of social abilities such as decision making, voice tone, and body language.

Research Question

The research question that guides this study is: How to improve a fourth-grade students' English learning process using cooperative learning at a public institution in Medellín?

Objectives

General Objective

- To analyze how the use of cooperative learning affects fourth-grade students' English learning process at a public institution in Medellín, Colombia.

Specific Objectives

- To identify the benefits and difficulties of cooperative learning in a fourth-grade classroom in a public institution of Medellín, Colombia.
- To determine the effectiveness of cooperative learning in the language learning process of fourth-grade students in a public institution of Medellín, Colombia.

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Action Plan

This action plan will be developed during the second school semester of 2022, and it is intended to be done in 12 weeks from August 1st to November 21st. This project considers two main sections to achieve the students' social intelligence development and implement the cooperative learning strategies.

The first step to be carried out is to divide the last semester and the new one by setting some class rules and presenting the project to the students. In this presentation, students will understand the nature of the coming class activities and some main concepts that will be tackled in the whole plan. Then, for the social intelligence skill development, this study will explore some of the activities suggested in the book call 101 Ways to Teach Children Social Skills (Lawrence, 2004) in which students develop skills for making friends, emotional communication, self-awareness, empathy, social communication, social interaction, and creating consensus.

In line with these social skills development activities, students will work together in pairs, groups of 3 or more, and the whole group. Besides, they will go through some cooperative learning strategies such as a jigsaw activity, running dictation, and a poster design activity. During these activities, students can understand how cooperative work functions and put into practice the social skills learned in the different class implementations.

To gather information in this action research project, four different data collecting instruments will be used: journals, students' drawings, students' class reflection, and survey to the students.

To better understand this action plan, the next chart shows all the actions programmed for this project. (See Appendix C)

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Development of Actions

As it was mentioned before, this action plan was intended to be done in twelve weeks, therefore all the different activities could be developed. However, the real time that this project had was 8 weeks since there were some institutional activities such as tests and teachers' meetings that reduced the weeks.

This plan started on August 1st as it was said. In this first implementation students set some class rules and the pre-service teacher explained the plan to develop the action research project, so that students started to get familiar with the key words to be used. During the second implementation, students went through the definition of cooperation in the different scenarios of their lives emphasizing the school place.

Then, students began to develop their social skills through some activities performed in class; however, not all the activities could be done because of the time. Something positive is that in the subject called *Ética y Valores* the cooperating teacher was working on cooperation (journal entry #15, August 29th, 2022); therefore, they were talking about some social skills to be developed that matched with this project. Thus, although students could not tackle all the activities planned for the pre-service teacher, they could reinforce some concepts in the subject directed by the cooperating teacher and complement their knowledge and development of the social skills.

Regarding the cooperative activities, only two of them could be implemented, the jigsaw activity and the running dictation. Sadly, the poster activity could not be done since in October and November students missed many classes because of holidays and vacation time.

Finally, all the data collection instruments could be deployed. The students' drawings were collected twice, once in the second implementation, and the other one in the last class. Besides, the survey, as planned, was carried out in the last class successfully with 24 of the 28

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students of the course. Nevertheless, the number of entries for the journal and the students' class reflection were less, only 8 and 5 respectively.

Data Collection Instruments

In contemplation of answering the research question of the action research project, four data collection techniques were implemented.

Journal

An entry to this instrument was written after each implementation to keep track of students' learning process, interaction, behavior, and perspective of cooperation. It was composed of two main parts: the descriptive one and the reflective one.

Students' Drawings

To better understand students' definitions of cooperation, they were asked to do a drawing about cooperation with a short description. This instrument was carried out twice, at the beginning and the end of the project; therefore, the two drawings could be compared and see how students' definitions have changed with the different activities of the action plan.

Students' Survey

This data collection technique was conducted at the end of the project. It was necessary to understand students' perceptions of the project in terms of cooperation, social skills development, and the English learning process. It was anonymous. (See appendix B)

Students' Class Reflection

The students' class reflection was implemented at the end of some classes. It was essential to know how students felt during the class, what they believe they learned, and what ways of cooperation they identified in class. It was anonymous. (See appendix D)

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Data Analysis

According to Johnson (2008) triangulation is looking at the same thing from different perspectives to better understand all the aspects of that thing. In that order of ideas, it is necessary to get information from various sources to comprehend what you are looking at, or in this case, it is essential to better answer the research question.

The different perspectives to be analyzed in this action plan are gathered from the four data collection instruments used: journals, students' drawings, students' survey, and students' class reflection. Besides, given that the advisor of this project did a visit to observe and comment on the pre-service performance, and she took some notes about the class, this visit will be taken into consideration when triangulation takes place.

Findings and Interpretations

In the direction of better organizing, the information gathered from all the sources would be categorized and framed according to the elements of cooperation (Johnson, 2009), students' perception on cooperation, benefits and difficulties of cooperative work, the effects that cooperative work has in students' learning process, and the different aspects of the social skills developed during this project.

Students' Perception on Cooperation

In general terms, students have a positive opinion of cooperative work. In the students' class reflections, they wrote that they liked the classes and felt happy because they worked in groups (students' class reflection, September 19th, 2022). Also, it is notorious that most enjoy working together because they asked for it in class (journal entry #20, November 2nd, 2022). Although at the beginning of the project most of the students understood cooperation as those actions they did to help their families in the households tasks: "*help my mom with the dishes*",

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“help to sweep” (students’ drawings, August 8th, 2022); at the end of this project, students were able to link this term with their school place: *“lend things”*, *“explain something to my classmates”*, *“help the peer to do a better assignment”* (students’ drawings, November 2nd, 2022). Besides, they associated cooperation with some social skills: *“say sorry”*, *“ask favors respectfully”* (students’ drawings, November 2nd, 2022).

Elements of Cooperation

Concerning the positive interdependence element of cooperative learning, students could develop this element when forming groups and dividing labor. In the advisor’s words: *“they seem to be thinking about what each one has to do to contribute to the team work: doing homework, finding out information or simply behaving while working with others”* (advisor’s comment on journal entries #18 and #20, November 21st, 2022). Also, they identify these aspects when reflecting on the class, to the question about how they cooperate in class, they answered: *“drawing”*, *“listening”* *“coloring”* *“doing my part of the job”* (students’ class reflection, September 26th, October 3rd, 2022), which reflects that they divided the job to be done for class activities and help their groups with what they were assigned. The latter is also related to the Individual Accountability element because students felt responsible for their role in completing the group assignment; they think that when working in groups, each member helps with what she/he is better at (students’ survey #2).

With the above, we will start to talk about how students accomplished the third element of cooperation, Promotive Interaction. The students of this project could start to think about their group and themselves as a whole when performing a task; a clear example is when doing the Running Dictation activity, the students who finished first got involved in their classmates’ labor to do a better job (journal entry #18, September 26th, 2022). Besides, the advisor could notice this when she commented: *“They seem to understand that they need to help other classmates so the*

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group work activities are accomplished; this means they are able to share purposes or objectives” (advisor’s visit comments, October 26th, 2022), she refers to the students when doing the Jigsaw activity. Her comments are significant because they show that students can encourage and help their group members labor to achieve that activity goal.

Finally, regarding the Group Processing element of cooperative work, students could understand the classmates they work better with. In one of the pair class activities, students could find a pair very fast without the pre-service teacher’s help which could be a sign that they are more conscious about the classmates they enjoy working with (journal entry #18, September 26th, 2022). Moreover, during the jigsaw activity, students could assess their class performance by grading their work (journal entry #19, October 3rd, 2022).

Cooperative Work Benefits

According to students’ reflections on the class, this project had a key benefit: learning. In the different class reflections, students mentioned that they not only learned how to work with their classmates but also English and social skills. The most common answers about English were vocabulary: “school objects” (students’ class reflection, August 22nd, August 29th, September 19th, 2022), “nature vocabulary” “colors” (students’ class reflection, September 26th, October 3rd, 2022); and the English writing skill: “to write in English”, “to write English words” (students’ class reflection, September 19th, October 3rd, 2022). About the social skills, they gave diverse answers: “*to value someone else’s work*”, “*body language*” (students’ class reflection, August 29th, 2022), “*to share and be kind*” (students’ class reflection, September 19th, 2022), “*empathy*”, “*to be respectful, kind, attentive*” (students’ class reflection, October 3rd, 2022).

In addition, cooperative work was beneficial because students started to understand that things such as games can also be pedagogical tools. During a pair activity that took place in class on September 26th, 2022, students needed to put some words in the corresponding images;

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therefore, some pairs were playing to decide which member wrote the word because both knew the answer (journal entry #18, September 26th, 2022).

Cooperative Work Difficulties

Cooperative work could be a complex strategy to be used when there are students who have some conditions in the classroom. In the case of this project, there was a student diagnosed with autism, so his relationship with his classmates and the cooperative activities was very different. He faced some difficulties when forming groups because he wanted to work alone (journal entry #4, March 7th, 2022), and in some situations, the student felt bad and cried; an example of this is when he wanted to use a chair to work with his group, but there was a backpack there, thus the student started to cry and did not want to do the task anymore (journal entry #15, August 29th, 2022).

Another difficulty is students' relationships; sometimes, external situations are presented to students, and when it comes to doing the cooperative class activities, they do not feel comfortable working with some classmates or can even end up in a fight. During a class implementation, two students did not want to work together because before the class, they had a fight in which one of them threw something on his classmate's head, which created a discussion that ended up generating a complicated position to work together in class (journal entry #15, August 29, 2022). Also, in other activities, some students expressed that they did not want to work with a specific student because he or she was rude. That is why teachers must have the appropriate skills to act as a mediator.

The last difficulty to be mentioned is that not all students like cooperative work. This does not mean that they are not able to do it, but they feel better when they work individually; some students communicated: "I do not like to work with a friend" (students' class reflection, October 3rd, 2022), "I do not like to work in pairs. That person always wanted to do what I wanted to do,

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and when I corrected her, she never accepted it” (students’ survey #2). Besides, not all the students could connect with some classmates’ ways of working (journal entry #18, September 26th, 2022).

Effect of Cooperative Work on The English Learning Process

With respect to how cooperative work affects the students’ English learning process, they enjoyed it much more. Students highlighted that they had much fun during this project and that they loved the cooperative work strategies; in students’ words: *“I have fun”* (students’ class reflection, August 22nd, 2022), *“teacher Mariana gives enjoyable classes”*, *“the activities were cool”* (students’ survey #2). This is very important because one of the crucial aspects to having meaningful classes is that students can feel comfortable and enjoy them.

Moreover, for students, cooperative work has become a learning strategy in which they have fun and learn a lot. Most students think they learn English easily when working in pairs and groups (students’ survey #2). Besides, the advisor’s visit comments support the statement that students developed an ability to take ownership of working with others and learn something, *“they understand it is a good way to learn and that it can be used and implemented for all subjects and for different aspects of life as well”* (advisor’s visit comments, October 26th, 2022).

Social Skills

Students could achieve most of the social skills planned for this project, developing social interaction, social communication, emotional communication, and creating consensus. Most of them believe that after all the class activities, they can listen respectfully and carefully to their peers, respect turns to speak, use an appropriate voice tone when talking with their classmates, recognize and identify the positive characteristic of their classmates, support their classmates, and apologize when necessary (students’ survey #2).

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During class implementations, it was notorious how students developed their social skills. In an activity in which they were asked to make decisions as a group, some students struggled to negotiate and support their group members' opinions; however, they could face the issue by expressing their feelings, making peace, and solving the problem by taking roles (journal entry #15, August 29th, 2022). This development can also be evidenced in students' reflection on the class; they identified that during class, they were: "*being silent and respecting turns to speak*" (students' class reflection, August 22nd, 2022), "*respecting my classmates' opinions*" (students' class reflection, August 29th, 2022), and "*making other people feel comfortable*" (students' class reflection, October 3rd, 2022). With this, it can be said that students could notice the social skills they were using during their class performance.

Conclusions

This action research project aimed to a) analyze how the use of cooperative learning affects fourth-grade students' English learning process, b) identify the benefits and difficulties of cooperative learning in a fourth-grade classroom, and c) determine the effectiveness of cooperative learning in the language learning process of fourth-grade students, in a public institution of Medellín, Colombia. Moreover, as described before, this project not only dealt with cooperative work but also with students' social skill development.

First, this project ends with a favorable image. Students enjoyed how cooperative work went through their English learning process, creating a fun place of learning where they could improve their language knowledge accompanied by their friends and classmates. As students were working individually in their other subjects, they could compare that with their cooperative learning work in the English class. The latter is enrichment because students could: first, be more

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aware of the different ways of learning and what is better for them; and second, value their classmate's role in their learning process.

Second, findings suggest that this action plan strongly impacted on students' interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence. Students developed some social skills that will be a potent tool when working with others in the future. Now students have a better understanding of how social communication and interaction improve when they respect turns to speak, use an appropriate voice tone, or listen carefully to their peers. Also, about the emotional communication when they cheer up their classmates or can apologize. Furthermore, students began to be conscious of their learning process, being able to self-assess not only their English skills but also their social skills and the way in which they cooperate.

Third, regarding the English learning process, most of the topics planned for this project could be covered. Besides, all the students got passing grades since they performed well both orally and written in the different class activities. Their good performance is proof that pair and group activities were an excellent method for students to support each other and improve their English language learning process.

Fourth, this project also presented some limitations. The situation with the diagnosed students and the students' confrontation is crucial to consider when performing cooperative class activities. It is necessary to evaluate the students' situations to see how effective it would be to work together; also, in terms of students' possible conditions, teachers need to be aware of how the class strategies could affect students' comfort. Besides, to foster students' value of sharing and helping their classmates for the rest of their school life, it is essential to continue working in cooperation and their social skill development in their other school subjects.

Finally, the use of cooperative work to improve students' English learning process helped students to grow linguistically, personality, and motivationally. This project developed important

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bases for students' future relationships with their peers in and out of their learning process, as well as metacognitive skills to understand better how they learned and how to value their performance.

To build a better understanding, as this project was held only with the young learners of this course, I suggest implementing cooperative work in younger and older students to see the effects it might have on them.

Reflection

It would be naïve to say that we as teachers can change a whole society; however, I genuinely believe that we can plant a set of seeds that will eventually blossom. When I first arrived at this project, I was afraid of how I could face this significant experience because being a teacher is not easy but being a teacher-researcher is more than challenging; at least, that is what I thought at that moment. I have some teaching experiences, and sometimes I imagined when I was doing my practicum, how I would teach, what I would wear, and how I would speak to my students; however, that moment of my life was beyond any fantasy.

This action research project was a rewarding experience. The warm welcome that the cooperating teacher and the young learners had for this project is indescribable; they filled out this experience with love, patience, and comprehension. Their willingness to be part of this adventure was fulfilling, the cooperating teacher was able to break her beliefs and help me with the diverse activities; also, the students created a great school environment with their kindness, respect, and creativity.

I cannot be more thankful because this was a new living experience for the cooperating teacher, the students, and me. I discovered myself through this project, facing my beliefs as a teacher and human being. I cannot say that it was easy to confront my fear of teaching a large

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group in a public institution and to arrive to change the class dynamics of this group and teacher. Nevertheless, I am gratified with my decision to show these lovely people that we can learn and grow with others.

This project was the seed that I planted in the students and the cooperating teacher of this course, hoping that they understand that we are here to work together, support our peers, take advantage of our differences, and walk forwards as a society. If you are here, thank you for reading this paper. I encourage you to plant your seed by promoting cooperative work in your classroom and developing your students' social skills, and thus start to build a society in which all of us are valued.

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Appendices**Appendix A****Interviews transcripts****Interview #1 to Cooperative Teacher Gloria Varelas****ENTREVISTA**

Tema: enfoque/orientación pedagógica, metodología y creencias de la docente.

Esta entrevista está dirigida a la docente Gloria Stella Varelas Puerta del grado 4°-1 de la I.E INEM José Félix de Restrepo. El objetivo es indagar en la metodología y estrategias usadas en clase, así como las creencias educativas que tiene la docente en su práctica. La entrevista consiste en 1 pregunta cerrada y 11 preguntas abiertas las cuales tomarán alrededor de 30 minutos para ser resueltas en su totalidad. Las preguntas serán dadas de manera escrita y la docente podrá responder de la misma forma para así tener más tiempo de reflexionar acerca de sus respuestas. Finalmente, se deja en claro que la información aquí recolectada será sólo para uso académico en los cursos *Práctica I* y *Seminario Integrado I*. A continuación, se encuentran las preguntas.

1. Por favor seleccione el rango de edad en el que se encuentra:

- a. 20 - 29
- b. 30 - 39
- c. 40 - 49
- d. 50 en adelante

G: d

2. ¿Cuál es su nivel educativo?

G: Professional. I studied a bachelor's degree program in children's education at Universidad de San Buenaventura

3. ¿Cuál es su experiencia laboral en el campo educativo?

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G: I have 30 years of experience teaching elementary schools in rural and urban areas

4. ¿Cuál o cuáles son las corrientes pedagógicas que utiliza a la hora de enseñar a niños y niñas?

G: I think it is necessary to use different approaches, and take the best for them, but always thinking that students need to be active in their learning process and be autonomous.

5. ¿Cuál o cuáles estrategias considera que son mejores para la enseñanza a niños y niñas?

G: It is important to start from students' knowledge to create new knowledge.

6. ¿Cuántas y cuántos estudiantes tiene el grado 4°-1?

G: There are 26 students. 12 girls and 16 boys, and 2 of the girls are Ecuadorian.

7. ¿Cómo considera que es su relación con las y los estudiantes del grupo 4°-1?

G: I believe that we have a good relationship. We respect each other.

8. ¿Cuáles son los protocolos que utiliza en clase? (Llamar a lista, escribir la fecha, escribir la agenda, etc)

G: The protocols that I used are to roll the list, write the date, and check students' homework.

9. ¿Por qué considera usted que son importantes estos protocolos?

G: I roll the list to make students aware of the importance of attending class. I use the date as a tool to make students conscious about the time because they can be very lost, and I check students' homework to raise students' responsibility.

10. ¿Qué material utiliza para desarrollar las clases de inglés?

G: A book and images.

11. ¿Por qué utiliza este material para la enseñanza de inglés?

G: Because I do not have a good English level and those materials help me to plan my English classes.

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12. ¿Cuál o cuáles son las herramientas evaluativas que utiliza en clase? (Actividades, asistencia, porcentajes, etc)

G: I use rubrics to assess the student. For the assessment, I consider students' work in the class activities, their participation, and at the end of each term we do a self-evaluation.

Gracias por su tiempo y colaboración.

Interview #2 to Cooperative Teacher Gloria Varelas

¿Cuáles son los estudios de posgrado que usted tiene?

G: I studied a master's degree program called Procesos Afectivos y Educación Sexual at Universidad Industrial de Santander. I am a specialist.

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Appendix B






Students' Surveys

Survey # 1

CUESTIONARIO

1. Años: _____
2. ¿En qué barrio vives? _____
3. ¿Qué te gusta hacer en tu tiempo libre? _____

4. ¿Cómo te sientes con la profesora Gloria?


¿Por qué? _____
5. Me gustan las ACTIVIDADES DE LECTURA:

6. Me gustan las ACTIVIDADES DE ESCRITURA:

7. Me gustan las ACTIVIDADES DE ESCUCHA:

8. Me gustan las ACTIVIDADES DONDE TENGO QUE HABLAR:

9. Me gusta TRABAJAR SOLO O SOLA:

10. Me gusta TRABAJAR EN PAREJAS:

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11. Me gusta TRABAJAR EN GRUPOS:



12. Mi nivel de INGLÉS es:



13. Para mí aprender INGLÉS es:



Survey # 2

CUESTIONARIO

1. Cuando trabajamos en parejas aprendo inglés más fácil.



2. Cuando trabajamos en grupos de 3 o más compañeros aprendo inglés más fácil.



3. Cuando trabajo con mis compañeros podemos ayudar en la actividad con lo que mejor hace cada uno.



4. Cuando trabajo con mis compañeros, nos concentramos en la tarea o actividad y luego conversamos.



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5. Cuando trabajamos en grupo o parejas, nos ayudamos el uno al otro y nos animamos para hacer un buen trabajo.



6. Cuando trabajamos en equipo escucho a mis compañeros respetuosamente.

SÍ	NO
----	----

7. Cuando trabajo con mis compañeros respeto cuando otro está hablando.

SÍ	NO
----	----

8. Cuando trabajamos juntos tomamos las decisiones entre todos.



9. Cuando hicimos el paisaje en grupos de 4 fuimos justos con la nota que nos pusimos como equipo.



10. Respeté las reglas de clase que acordamos al inicio del mes de agosto de 2022

SÍ	NO
----	----

11. Usé un tono de voz adecuado para hablar con los demás compañeros.



12. Escuché con atención y respeté los turnos cuando otros compañeros estaban hablando.



13. Soy capaz de identificar y reconocer las características positivas que tienen mis compañeros.



14. Cuando un compañero está enojado o triste, yo lo ayudo a sentirse mejor, dejándolo tranquilo o ayudándole en los que yo pueda.

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SÍ	NO
----	----

15. Reconozco cuando cometo un error y ofrezco disculpas a los demás.

SÍ	NO
----	----

16. Durante las clases de inglés con la profesora Mariana me sentí:



Aquí puedes escribir un comentario sobre la clase de inglés y/o la profesora Mariana:

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Appendix D**Students' Class Reflection**

EVALUACIÓN DE CLASE

¿Cómo me sentí hoy en clase?



¿Por qué? _____

¿Qué aprendí hoy?	¿Cómo cooperé hoy?
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