

How can Cooperative Learning lead EFL Sixth Graders to use English Orally?

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November 2016

Abstract

This action research project was developed with 31 EFL sixth graders at a private school in Colombia. It aimed to analyze if cooperative learning could lead students to use English orally. The jigsaw was used for 3 weeks with different stories. Data gathered were from class observations, students' self-evaluations and surveys, and a teacher journal. Findings showed that students used English in different ways and they felt more comfortable. Factors helping them were adopting new roles, using Spanish before English for comprehension and production, and having direct teacher and university advisor intervention to check understanding and to encourage use English. Difficulties were related to increased noise and an unequal distribution of material in larger groups.

Keywords: Cooperative Learning, EFL Sixth Graders, Using English Orally

Degree Requirement

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

Acknowledgments

First, I thank God for his love and unlimited blessing and his unconditional support. I would then like to thank my family and friends who have given me support throughout this project. In addition, I would also like to thank the teachers from the School of Languages at the University of Antioquia for their contribution in my training as a teacher and as a person. A special thanks to my two advisors, they always trusted me and my abilities. Finally, special gratitude goes out to the I.E. Colegio Divino Salvador, its commitment to this research and to all who participated in it.

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Preface

This report is the product of an action research project I completed as part of my undergraduate teaching practicum in English as a foreign language in Colombia. As a full-time EFL teacher for the past six years at Colegio Divino Salvador in Medellin, I explored how I could improve instruction in one of my grade six classes. I knew that my sixth graders were learning English similar to other subjects at the school. Lessons were mainly teacher-centered with an emphasis on students acquiring subject knowledge. I was concerned that they were learning grammar, but they were not having enough opportunities to use English in order to give personal information, express ideas and feelings, and share points of view orally. With such a situation, I thought that integrating cooperative learning strategies in the lessons might help students to participate orally in class, work together, and feel more comfortable when using English and participating. Therefore, the goal of my action research project became my sixth graders' oral use of English by implementing cooperative learning strategies in our English class.

Description of the Context

Colegio Divino Salvador is a private, Catholic primary-secondary school located in the central-eastern sector of Medellin in Colombia. This middle-size school has a population of 724 students from kindergarten to grade eleven. There are fewer girls than boys at the school, as there are other all-girls schools in the middle-class neighborhood of Buenos Aires. In my grade six class with 31 students, there were 25 boys and only 6 girls. They were all between 10 and 11 years old and Hispanic, with Spanish as their native language. They studied English as a foreign language six hours a week with two-hour classes on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays. In terms of English they had basic knowledge, and they were motivated towards learning it. In class, most of them liked to participate and they preferred to work in groups. Learning resources included a teacher and student book –Skyrocket written by Sarah Conway and published by Richmond in 2014. The books have topic units with activities to develop vocabulary, and the four skills, listening, reading, writing and speaking. I used this material to design the unit “Lifesaving Jobs” for my month-long action research project. In addition, I decided to integrate and adapt the suggested curriculum standards for grade 6, from Colombia Bilingue¹ (2016), which refers to an A2 level.

As the sixth grade teacher-researcher in this project, I was interested in finding out if cooperative learning strategies would lead students to use English orally using these standards and performance indicators in the English class.

¹ These standards are suggested by the Ministry of Education for Grades 6 to 11 in public educational institutions in Colombia.

Statement of Problem

I have been a teacher at the Colegio Divino Salvador of Medellin since 2010 and, as of that time I recognized that the standards of the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR) have brought changes in language learning, teaching and assessment around the world. This is because the standards take into account student needs, not only from the grammatical aspect, but also from its close relationship with the sociolinguistic features of communication. Furthermore, such guidelines have great influence on educational institutions and in many cases become one of the basic tools which guide the processes of second language acquisition. The school where this research project was carried out takes the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as a guide to classify English students' level and as a reference to develop the school syllabus. For sixth grade learners the CEFR suggests an A2.2 level. This means students should be able to understand sentences and frequent expressions related to their daily routine. The previous, to communicate and exchange information in a simple and direct manner, taking into accounts their immediate environment and needs.

Nevertheless, although the school wants to follow that CEFR guidelines, which suggest that a foreign language should be taught by developing the four skills, I reflected on my teaching practice and I realized that in this school there is priority to develop student reading and writing skills rather than listening and speaking skills. It means, that we tend to use more class time teaching grammar through reading and writing activities as proposed by the book, rather than implementing speaking and listening tasks. We tend to leave class participation to students who always want to participate or have a better level than most. This affects the majority of the sixth graders, who show many difficulties when they express their ideas orally and feel embarrassed to participate. This is why, I set out to establish communicative spaces in the second language

where students could adopt and assume different roles while working in groups. This implied the use of cooperative learning strategies, where students would interact and help each other reciprocally, to carry out the proposed tasks. Through CL strategies allows all students to feel more comfortable when they participate in English, and at the same time, become more involved in their own process of language acquisition. Therefore, this research project attempts to show how cooperative learning strategies can lead students to use English in an EFL class.

Theoretical Background

In order to address the subject of this research project, it was important to analyze how the General Law of Education (Law 115 of 1994), influenced the Colombian National Bilingualism Program and in turn, how it guided the teaching-learning process in the Colombian school system. I will also address the concept of cooperative learning and its benefits on the learning a foreign language. The theoretical foundations of some of the strategies used in the classroom such as, think-pair-share, numbered heads and jigsaw activities will also be discussed.

As stated in Article 21 from the General Law of Education (Law 115 of 1994), all schools must offer students the opportunity to learn a foreign language as of primary school. Thus, the Ministry of Education of Colombia used the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as a point of reference for the Colombian National Bilingualism Program.

This was done in order to set goals and performance standards for all school learners and to allow teachers to develop their syllabus accordingly. This can be found in Guide 22 “Basic Standards of a foreign language competences: English”, Where it refers that the national bilingualism program has a main goal to become citizens able to communicate in the English language, to involve the country in universal communication programs, global economy and the

opening culture processes regarding international standards. This purpose requires a structure plan to develop the communicative competence along to the educational system.

It was necessary to establish a common language that measure the levels in which the language could go ahead trough the different stages of the educational process. Indeed, Colombia chose the MCER as a measure in the English teaching process which describes the Colombian's student level. See Appendix A

Therefore, the objectives of the program to be implemented with the sixth grade students are as follows:

Students' Basic Learning Rights

- Participates in a very short conversation.
- Describes the basic characteristics of people, things, and places.
- Understands the topic and general information of a short and simple text.
- Answers questions related to “what, who and when” after reading or listening to a short and simple text.
- Writes basic information in pre-established forms.

Suggested Performance Indicators (Doing and Being)

- Participates actively in the activities.
- Makes a short list and simple sentences about the stories.
- Exchanges information related to the stories.
- Completes a form with information about the stories.

Since the educational entities adopted the foreign language teaching standards from the Common European framework, which involved the application of the four basic language skills, I will focus this research project on the speaking skill. This is due to the fact that it is one of the

basic components of foreign language learning. Brown (1994) states that “learners produce the sounds, stress patterns, rhythmic structures, and intonations of the language; using grammar structures accurately; selecting appropriate and understandable vocabulary and topics according to the students’ level and needs” (p. 5). Furthermore, Thornbury defines speaking as follows:

...a natural integral part of the person’s daily life. In other words, it is an activity which is carried out by both ordinary and specialized people to do their basic functions according to their specific needs. Attempting to illustrate the process of speaking fluently in foreign language, he claims that speaking is a complex skill that involves in addition to the knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation a command of skills and another type of knowledge. (In Zohra, 2013, p. 8)

There is a relationship between both authors when they argue that people acquire speaking skills taking into account their needs and interest. As a result, they start to acquire vocabulary, structures, and pronunciation. In terms of teaching, teachers play an important role in developing the speaking skills. We are called upon to promote oral activities that allow students to acknowledge the importance of language use, and to understand the goals they should achieve through the implementation of such activities. Furthermore, teachers should be aware that speaking also involves grammatical aspects, vocabulary and pronunciation according to the students’ level of English as proposed in our context by the CEFR.

Cooperative Learning

Many authors have studied and broadened the information on the cooperative learning method. They have also applied it in many educational scenarios revealing the findings and conclusions of such research. In this study, I employed it as a method to foster speaking skills in the classroom.

Johnson (2001) defines cooperative learning as a successful teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. Artz & Newman (1990) define cooperative learning as small groups of learners working together as a team to solve a problem, complete a task, or accomplish a common goal. Cooperative learning strategies have been shown to improve academic performance (Slavin, 1990), to lead to greater motivation to learn (Garibaldi, 1979 in Kagan 1986), to increase time on-task (Cohen 1988), to improve self-esteem (Johnson and Johnson, 1989) and to lead to more positive social behaviors (Lloyd, 1988). According to Kagan (1995), cooperative learning promotes language acquisition by providing comprehensible input in developmentally appropriate ways and in a supportive and motivating environment. (As cited in Prieto, 2007, p. 77)

As a teacher who has been on duty for a period of twelve years, I find the previous theory relevant, its spaces of interaction it promote collective learning of a subject. Additionally, I believe that it is through human relationships where significant learning spaces become evident since peer processes are supported and critical thinking is developed. In the strict sense of learning, in this case, peer interaction leads to a more permanent use of the language and to the grasping of new vocabulary.

As expressed by Johnson et al. (1991), cooperative Learning has basic principles which promote learning levels during group work sessions, they are:

Positive Interdependence

Students perceive that they need each other in order to complete the group's task, "sink or swim together". Teachers may structure positive interdependence by establishing mutual

goals (learn and make sure all other group members learn), joint rewards (if all group members achieve above the criteria, each will receive bonus points), shared resources (one paper for each group or each member receives part of the required information), and assigned roles (summarizer, encourager of participation, elaborator).

Face-to-Face Promotive Interaction

Students promote each other's learning by helping, sharing, and encouraging efforts to learn. Students explain, discuss, and teach what they know to classmates. Teachers structure the groups so that students sit knee-to-knee and talk through each aspect of the assignment.

Individual Accountability

Each student's performance is frequently assessed and the results are given to the group and the individual. Teachers may structure individual accountability by giving an individual test to each student or randomly selecting one group member to give the answer.

Interpersonal and Small Group Skills

Groups cannot function effectively if students do not have and use the needed social skills. Teachers teach these skills as purposefully and precisely as academic skills.

Collaborative skills include leadership, decision-making, trust-building, communication, and conflict-management skills.

Group Processing

Groups need specific time to discuss how well they are achieving their goals and maintaining effective working relationships among members. Teachers structure group processing by assigning such tasks as (a) list at least three member actions that helped the

group be successful and (b) list one action that could be added to make the group even more successful tomorrow. Teachers also monitor the groups and give feedback on how well the groups are working together to the groups and the class as a whole.

These principles allow students to socialize with each other and the teacher, as active participants of the learning-teaching process. They involve students in more than language learning. These principles lead students to use the L2 with more confidence. The latter is supported by Johnson et al. (2000) who state that cooperative learning offers benefits which beyond enhanced L2 acquisition. These benefits include increased self-esteem, greater liking for school, enhanced inter-ethnicities, and improved complex thinking.

Taking into account the previous advantages of CL, I implemented the following activities included within this method, such as jigsaw, think-pair-share and numbered heads. These activities enable students to practice the particular skill, speaking, they also reveal development and improvement process of the skill.

Kagan (1994) proposed the following strategies, which I implemented throughout my project.

Jigsaw. Groups with five students are set up. Each group member is assigned some unique material to learn and then to teach to his group members. To help in student learning across the class by working on the same sub-section they then get together to decide what is important and how to teach it. After they practice in these "expert" groups the original groups' regroup and students teach each other. (Wood, p. 17) Tests or assessment follows.

Think-Pair-Share. Involves a three step cooperative structure. During the first step individuals think silently about a question posed by the instructor. Individuals pair up

during the second step and exchange thoughts. In the third step, the pairs share their responses with other pairs, other teams, or the entire group.

Numbered Heads Together (Kagan). A team of four is established. Each member is given numbers of 1, 2, 3, and 4. Questions are asked to the group. Groups work together to answer the question so that they can all verbally answer the question. Teacher calls out a number (two) and each two is asked to give the answer. All the theory gathered here will serve as the starting point for an action-research plan in the classroom that will yield certain outcomes, offering the possibility to correlate them with the findings produced in researches and studies on similar issues from other authors.

Research Question

How can cooperative learning lead sixth grade EFL students to use English orally?

General Objective

To guide students to use oral English through the implementation of cooperative learning strategies.

Specific Objectives

- To implement CL strategies (think-pair-share; numbered heads, jigsaw) to develop oral skills in sixth grade EFL
- To determine how CL strategies promote oral skills in a sixth grade EFL.
- To identify other potential benefits promoted by CL

Action Plan

Considering the general and specific objectives I identified for this research project; I used a series of action strategies with my EFL students:

- (a) All activities conducted in this research project not only involved cooperative Learning but they were aligned with the school syllabus. For the period in which the project took place I used Unit 3 “Lifesaving Jobs”. This enabled me to continue the use the book Skyrocket, written by Sarah Conway and published by Richmond in 2014. Additionally, there was special emphasis on the standards set forth by the Colombian Bilingualism Program.
- (b) For each of the three jigsaw activities, I organized students into heterogeneous groups with different language abilities and overall performance in class.
- (c) Work groups were formed taking into account students' skills for the further execution of the activities mentioned previously.
- (d) I used a different jigsaw activity, at least once a week, during the three-week period. The jigsaw activity was developed in our two-hour class period every Friday at the school. Initially, I organized expert groups, during this time I expected students to become familiarized with their part of the story. I would also scaffold students’ learning by giving them comprehension questions. The intention was to help them identify the main idea and details of their part of the story. After having the expert groups ready they went to their base groups so that each student would share their part of the story with the others.
- (e) I developed an information gap activity to be included in the reading material for students.
- (f) At the end of the week, the cooperative activity "jigsaw" was carried out and the oral use of English was successfully promoted. This was done after the process of creating the expert and base groups. Students then performed activities from a reading related to the unit's theme. This became the most important day for data collection; my practicum advisor was present as a class observer. Together, we carried out the students' self-assessment, through a

form that inquired about the five basic principles of cooperative learning. Finally, I wrote my pedagogical reflections once the lessons ended.

(g) In order to collect the data related to the goal of leading students to use English orally, I decided to use the following techniques: ongoing personal reflections about using cooperative learning strategies during speaking activities in the English class, students' initial and final survey, whole-class brief discussions, and individual and group-based feedback cards (every Friday). I also used my advisor's observations and reflections regarding the project objectives.

This action plan allowed me to collect, consider and cross reference the data that was gathered. From there I was able to determinate the effectiveness of the project (see appendix B-Data Collection Plan).

Development of Actions

At the begining of the unit, the students completed a survey to explain the issues that were surfacing in the lessons regarding the oral use of English. During the course of the unit's development, the themes proposed by the institution's syllabus were planned and executed through the implementation of cooperative learning activities such as the think-pair-share, numbered heads and jigsaw. The jigsaw activity was specifically carried out at the end of each session of the week as the main methodological strategy. This is where the triangulation of my reflections, the individual and group-based assessments from students concerning the work they did, and the observations and reflections of my cooperating teacher finally enabled me to analyze, find, and define the outcomes of this research.

Once the unit was finished and the cooperative activities were implemented, the students completed another survey using some items from the one they had previously taken at the start of

the unit, solely related to the use of English. Now, the purpose of the survey was to determine the changes in students' perceptions regarding their feelings and their participation using the English language.

Analysis and Data Interpretation

For a month I collected information about my action- research questions from the different sources. I implemented a students' survey before starting the unit in which I gathered information about how often they participated in English class, how they felt, their perceptions about English and the English class. This first resource gave me a diagnosis, I then read all my journals and my university advisor observations to categorize the information and find the patterns within the information, related to the use of English with the implementation of CL activities. I also took into account the answers given by students in their self-assessment forms and their discussions about how well they did at the end of each lesson.

After systematizing the data, the process of organizing and identifying categories began, based on the factors that were relevant and repetitive all along the three jigsaw activities. Furthermore, a report was written regarding the resulting topics from the entire data collection which contained the most important categories. Finally, looking to validate the information, I followed the advice from Burns (1999) and we held a session to validate the results considering the reflection on three types of different data with the purpose of comparing the information and finding common ground. Ultimately the information was shared and validated with students.

Findings

After having analyzed the data I collected from my teacher journal, my advisor's class observation forms, field notes, the students' self-evaluation forms, and class discussions, I found 4 main categories. They were: 1. Different ways students used English orally. 2. Students'

positive perceptions about how well they used English. 3. Factors that helped students use English. 4. Factors that setback student use of English. 5. Student's perceived benefits of CL.

1. Different Ways Students used English

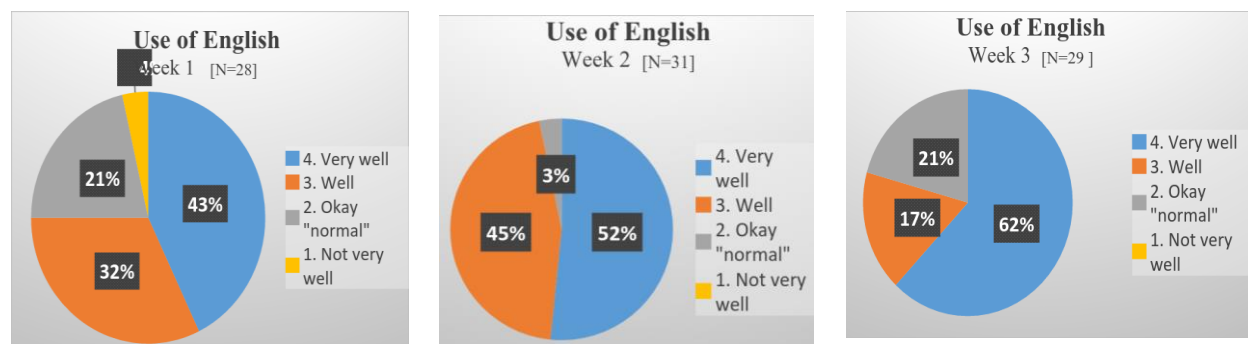
My advisor and I were able to identify several ways in which students used English during the expert groups. During the first jigsaw, my advisor wrote that students read together, but that they also supported each other with language needs.

“I observed that students, sitting in a small group near me, participated actively reading the text aloud... they helped each other with word meaning and pronunciation...” (Advisor class observation, April 8, 2016) As I monitored students during this class, I also noticed that “students in various expert groups in the class; participated working together reading the memorandum aloud and together underlining the Wh [*answers to the*] questions in the text... and then they socialized their words [*information*]” (Teacher journal, April 8, 2016). In the third class with the jigsaw activity, my advisor identified students not only read together, but they used routine classroom expressions in English and provided more detail with a classmate's answer to a comprehension question “... I observed ...students use English to read the story aloud, ask and answer the comprehension questions, ask for vocabulary, ask for the meaning of a phrase, add detail to a classmate's information” (Advisor class observation May 4, 2016). As students used English to talk about the stories, they had positive perceptions about the help and language support from their group members. “Today everything was good because we helped each other.” (Students' Group Self- evaluation form, April, 8, 2016) “I like the class because when I make a mistake my classmates corrected me and they helped me when I didn't know words in English.” (Students' Group Self- evaluation form, April 21, 2016). “The group work

was okay; everybody supported each other and improved". (Students' Group Self- evaluation form, May 04th)²

2. Students' Positive Perceptions about How Well They Used English

More students showed a tendency to assess themselves in a positive way with how well they used English during the three jigsaw activities. Those students who reported that they used English "very well" on the self-evaluation forms showed an increase over the three weeks. Comparing the first week to the third, there was an increase in the number of students (6, 19 %) with these positive perceptions. Also, (2, 4%) who thought they used English "not very well" with the first jigsaw changed their perceptions into more positive ones during the second and third jigsaw. I also noticed this increase in my journal. "...it was also evident the way they increasingly used English to express their ideas..." (Teacher journal, May 04, 2016) The following charts, illustrate the previous findings.



3. Factors Helping Students Use English More

Three factors emerged which led students to use English orally during the expert and base groups. They were, students taking on new roles themselves, students resorting to use Spanish for comprehension and production of the stories before English, and the teacher and university advisor directly intervening during the jigsaw activities.

² I translated student's perceptions.

3.1 Students adopting roles during jigsaws. Although I did not assign roles for students during the expert and base group work, one clear role I observed a few students adopt themselves was that of a leader. "... I was surprised [*to see*] how some students led the groups, assuming a fundamental role in the rest of students' process." (Teacher journal, April 8, 2016) Moreover, one of the girls in an expert group used a variety of strategies in order to get her group members to participate by reading aloud together, assuming the role of a leader. Initially, this girl assigned which group members would read what, and when, encouraged a reluctant group member to participate and read a sentence from the story, and later, to get her attention and ask her to read again, and to praise another group member after he read. Also, this self-nominated leader signaled to the others when the activity had finished.

St 1: Let's read

St 1: No, first

St 2: You

St 1: you should read until one point

St 2: no

St 3: The boy begins to read in English.

St 1: Good

As the activity continues, the girl says:

St 1: Student 1 points to the girl's text and asks her to read.

St 1: You must try it.

St 2: Yet, it just a point. [Student 2 points to the period at the end of the sentence.]

St 3: You, where did you finish? [Starts to read the next sentence.]

St 2: [The girl is looking around the class and appears distracted. She is not following what the boy reads in her text.]

St 1: [Student 1 calls the attention of the girl.]

St 2: [The girl reads the next sentence. I notice that she has difficulty reading, especially with how the words are pronounced.]

St 1: [She reads the next sentence quite well. Her pronunciation is quite good.]

St 2: It looks like the school started on fire because of the electronic devices. [The girl uses Spanish to show her understanding of the text with the other two students. Then she reads the next sentence. As she reads, she stops before the word –went-, and student 3 who is standing up, points to her text.]

St 3: went [He pronounces the word for her.]

St 2: went [Student 2 repeats the word and continues reading the sentence.]

St 1: [She points to the sentence in Student 2 text.]

St 2: That's ok [Student 2 tries to translate the sentence she read.]

St 1: We already finished and let's call the teacher

(Advisor class observation, April 8, 2016)

The same day one student said "I liked worked with my classmates and taught them"

(Students' Group Self- evaluation form, April 8, 2016)

I also saw that some students took on the role of a leader in various expert groups during the jigsaws, and they got students to work by assigning different 'duties' for them to do.

It was interesting to see how each of them assumed a role inside the team[s] and some of them led...assigned each member a task, like looking for words in the dictionary or

getting *[them]* to start answering the questions that each paragraph had. (Teacher journal, April 21, 2016)

3.2 Students using spanish before english. It was common to see that students used Spanish before English during the three jigsaw activities. In my journal, I reflected on how Spanish helped them to understand the stories and new vocabulary, and later, to be able to talk about them with their group members.

... they use Spanish and English, ... may be they use Spanish to understand better what they are reading as a way to comprehend the text and feel comfortable reporting the reading in English, but, I also, wondered that when they socialized the questions with all the class they used English..., so I thought that students' needs were supported by their mother tongue to express their ideas in English after. (Teacher journal, April 8, 2016)

In another class, I noticed that students continued to use Spanish for these purposes, but I also recognized their effort to only use English when I was monitoring them. "...The necessity to understand what the text says in Spanish is still visible; they do it to be able to retell the story to their classmates... whenever I walked by each group they were speaking in English." (Teacher journal, April 21, 2016) Although I saw both tendencies repeated with the last jigsaw, I also recognized that there were students who wanted to use more English. I mentioned: "there was evidence that students resorted to Spanish to accomplish a better understanding and to speak inside the group... However, more teams preferred using English over Spanish." (Teacher journal, May 04, 2016) My university advisor added,

Concerning the second question, I noticed that only two students in the small group were able to participate by sharing their answers in English. This was possible only after they had written them in Spanish. I saw the expert student first give his idea in Spanish and

then in English... one girl shared her idea in Spanish... (Advisor observation chart, April 08, 2016)

3.3 Direct intervention by the teacher and advisor. The teacher directly intervened during the process while monitoring the expert and base groups work, orienting their work with direct questions to give indirect feedback.

T: What are you doing here? Did you read together?

Ss: Yes

T: Ah, okay. Did you understand any words? Remember, read and identify who, how...

St 2: [She says she had difficulty understanding, but finally understood the text. She gave the teacher an idea of what she thought the text was about.] (Advisor observation class, April 08, 2016)

Furthermore, she helped them better understand the reading, answering questions, checking their comprehension about the text, by encouraging them to use English and share ideas from the different parts they read. This claim is shown in the following transcriptions during the third jigsaw.

T: ...What happened in this part of the story?

Ss: Firefighter drove. [She gestures drive.] The firefighter rescue the baby.

T: What do you think? [Taps a boy's shoulder –Sebastian in the small group.]

St: The firefighter kissed ...

T: Who kissed the firefighter?

St: The mom.

St: She drove a baby.

T: She drove a baby or a car?

St: She drove a car.

T: Yes.

T: You. [You point to Student.]

T: Everybody listen! Everybody, you have to explain the story to another group. [You quickly address the class and tell them what to do.]

T: Where did she go? Everybody, we are going to read again. [You say this to the five students.]

St: **[Reads a part of the story.]**

T: She drove quickly to the fire. She drove the car quickly.

[While you repeat this idea a few times, you use gestures for meaning.]

T: Yes, but where did she go? [You point to another student.]

St: The wife drove quickly to the fire. She got him firefighter

T: Him or firefighter? [You tell the student to use one.]

St: She got firefighter... She took this picture.

T: Now, can you please help them organize their ideas in English.

(Advisor observation class, May 04, 2016)

My university advisor also intervened helping them ask and answer comprehension questions with oral recall of the short story:

... I asked one student to read a question and another student to answer it. When the answer was complete, I asked the other students what they heard. A few students tried to repeat the information in their own words. When it was difficult for one student to do this, I asked the student to repeat his answer and then I asked the other student to repeat after him. I continued to work this way with this small group. One student asked a

question and another gave an answer, and the other students repeated the idea. After the students' questions were answered with information from the story, I asked that one student try and recall the information in that part of the text. (Advisor observation class, April 21, 2016)

4. Factors that Setback Students Use of English

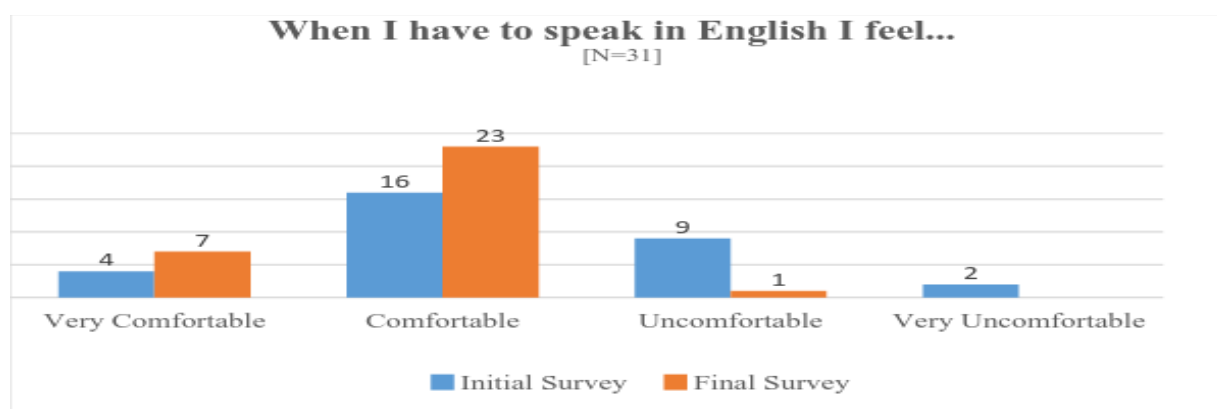
The major setbacks in student's use of English were the increase in noise and the unequal distribution of materials in large groups in the expert and base groups. It was difficult for them to listen to each other due to the engagement in the activity. My advisor highlighted this issue in all the sessions with the jigsaw as a CL activity, "There is a lot of noise in the classroom which makes it difficult to hear what a person says." (Advisor observation class, April 08, 2016); "In another small group that I observed, each student gives ideas orally about their part of the story but it is difficult to hear them due to the noise. (Advisor observation class, April 21, 2016) "The student continues to talk in English but I can't hear due to the noise." (Advisor class observation, May 04, 2016). This difficulty made some lose concentration in their work, I mentioned "the noise is considerable... and some team members lose concentration." (Teacher journal, May 04, 2016) One student also pointed out, "I didn't like it because my classmates made a lot of noise and they didn't allow us to concentrate well" (Students' Group Self- evaluation form, April 8, 2016)

The unequal distribution of materials related to the parts of the story was another difficulty that was found. During the jigsaw activities there were two different situations that came up. First, there were two groups with the same part of the story in the expert group. Since the number of members in the group were larger than the parts of the story, when they came together in the base groups students' participation became difficult. My advisor wrote in her

fields “one student has the same part as another student. He does not participate until you come to the group in order to check student’s comprehension of the story again.” (Advisor observation class, May 04, 2016) Second, in the base groups there was always one same part of the story and another missing. This implied that the students in the base groups did not have one of the parts and the work associated to it. Therefore, this situation made them lose concentration in the activity. “When I go to see another group, I notice that they did not have the piece of the story with the bomb and explosion...” (Advisor observation class, April 21, 2016)

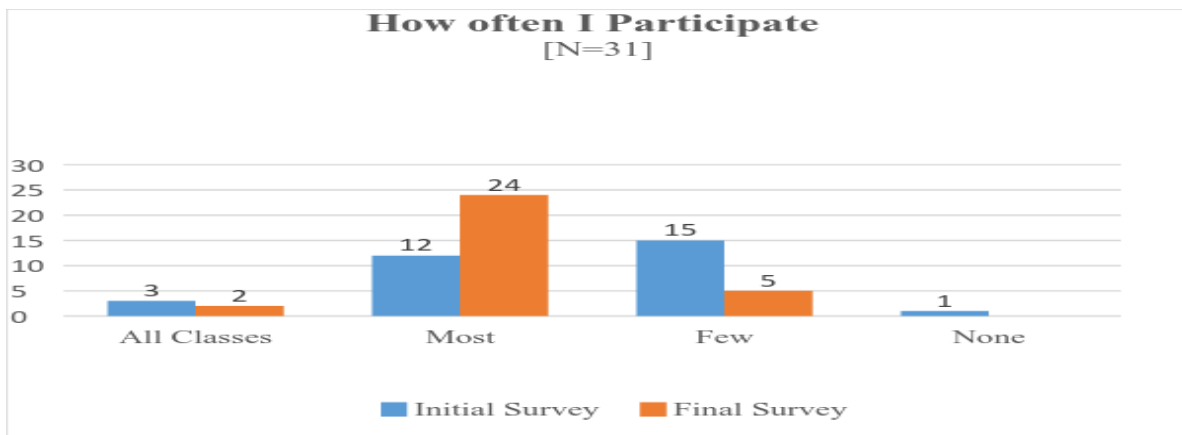
5. Student’s Perceptions about the Benefits of CL

According to the open-ended surveys answered by the students, the results showed that student’s perception about CL allowed them to feel more comfortable to speak English after implementation of the strategy. From my perspective, I also recognized that students seemed to feel better about using English during the jigsaw activities in the class. In my journal, I wrote that, “...in the last jigsaw exercise as a cooperative learning activity students seemed *[to be]* more comfortable” (Teacher journal, May 4, 2016). The following table shows the evolution in the degree of comfort experienced by the students from the initial survey to the final survey.



Another element perceived by students while using CL was their participation in English. To this respect, I pointed out in my journal, “In the last jigsaw exercise, during the CL activity, students looked more fluent when speaking in English” (Teacher journal, May 04, 2016). One of

the students wrote “ We improved a lot because we participated”³ (Students’ Group Self-evaluation form, April 21, 2016) and my advisor highlighted that “ I think the jigsaw as your CL strategy enabled students to interact with each other and use English... to share information and ideas in the English class”. (Advisor’s class observation, May 04: 2016). The following table shows the evolution in the degree of participation experienced by the students from the initial survey to the final survey.



In the last survey, students suggested what would be interesting in future CL activities.

The following students’ perceptions were gathered from Advisor observation class,

- St: Why do I like it? I like to do work in groups and that we get ideas, and no one judges us.
- St 3: Every one contributes something to understand the whole story. We need to be precise as we can. We speak about the story in English.
- St 5: Yes. I am using more English. I am learning pronunciation, vocabulary, and how to write. The best in English is to analyze.

³ I translated the student idea that was expressed in the item “Today, we did best at...” in the group self-evaluation form.

- St 2: At first I couldn't talk in English. Now I feel more confident. I understand and know what to say. I can be in groups with different students. I can share with them and work together. I like the activities a lot.
- St 3: I learned more words. I can use English normally now. I mean it is normal now to use English.
- St 4: At first, it was strange. There were lots of words in English. But now, I like it a lot. I have learned a lot.
- St 9: This changed the way I see English and how I learn English. We have to take a risk using English. (Advisor observation class, May 04, 2016)

Conclusions

By developing this action research, I am able to conclude that CL led students to participate and use English orally through the different activities namely think-pair-share, numbered heads and jigsaw with more confidence. Additionally, the reading comprehension texts involved in this process and the variety of its applications for example, reading aloud together, helping each other with the meaning of words, asking comprehension questions, describing parts of the stories and sharing information among students, also contributed to the appropriation and use of English. Furthermore, the use of CL strategies such as the jigsaw allowed students to adopt different roles in class. Mainly those of a leader, where they contributed to the development of new vocabulary, the assignment and distributions of tasks and helped them become more comfortable speaking English in the expert and base groups. This is how they increased their participation in class. This study also evidenced that the progression using English in class is supported by the use of Spanish before English. Their mother tongue helped them to clarify and understand information in the text, through the use of comprehension

questions and by organization of their ideas and then sharing that information with other classmates. Furthermore, the role as teachers was very important because they were directly monitoring and supporting the student process and they constantly created spaces of interaction in the classroom.

The use of this methodology proved to be worth the risk as students found the language more meaningful and purposeful. For futures studies, it is helpful if teachers and students in ELF contexts can reach certain agreement in order to foster improved opportunities to use the language and feel more comfortable when they participate in class. One of such agreements is to respect each other's turns to participate and promote listening so they can learn from each other. It is also it is important bear in mind, the amount of material to be used so that activities may flow without interruption so that student interaction is warranted and there is no loss of concentration and in participation into the base groups.

Reflection

As a practicing teacher, the implementation of this action research opened new possibilities to encourage student participation and use of language in class. Additionally, I feel that use CL as a methodology strengthened human relations among students and promoted collective learning. In turn, CL also made them feel more comfortable using the language and allowed them to participate freely without fear of being judged.

Although the application of this project lasted only three weeks, the current results are evident, both in motivation as well as in performance. They still know that they can contribute to their classmates' progress. As a teacher I feel truly motivated to see the results of these strategies in the long term.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Common European standards

Tabla No. 1

NIVELES SEGÚN EL MARCO COMÚN EUROPEO	NOMBRE COMÚN DEL NIVEL EN COLOMBIA	NIVEL EDUCATIVO EN EL QUE SE ESPERA DESARROLLAR CADA NIVEL DE LENGUA	METAS PARA EL SECTOR EDUCATIVO A 2019
A1	Principiante	Grados 1 a 3	
A2	Básico	Grados 4 a 7	
B1	Pre intermedio	Grados 8 a 11	• Nivel mínimo para el 100% de los egresados de Educación Media.
B2	Intermedio	Educación Superior	• Nivel mínimo para docentes de inglés. • Nivel mínimo para profesionales de otras carreras.
C1	Pre avanzado		• Nivel mínimo para los nuevos egresados de licenciaturas en idiomas.
C2	Avanzado		

Appendix B: Data Collection Plan**Data Collection Plan**

How can cooperative learning strategies lead to oral production in a sixth grade EFL class in Colombia?

From who?	What to collect?	Method?	Where?	When?
Teacher-researcher	1. Ongoing personal reflections about using cooperative learning strategies during speaking activities in the English class. 2. Final project reflection	Teacher journal	At home	Once a week, on the weekend, for one to two hours, during the month of April 2016. One to two weeks after the project is finished.
Students	1. a) Students' attitudes about learning English, speaking in English, group work activities b) Students' perceptions about using cooperative learning strategies for oral production in class c) Students' perceptions about how they worked individually and as a group with the cooperative learning activity/strategy 2. Students' oral participation during collaborative group activities in class (a different group each week).	a) Initial and final survey b) Whole-class brief discussions c) Student individual and group feedback card 2. Student work (record oral production)	In class In class In class 2. In class	At the start of the project, and when it ends. At the end of a lesson with a cooperative learning strategy After using the jigsaw CL strategy (in formal groups) on Fridays each week. 2. Every Friday during April.
Cooperating Teacher	CT's observations and reflections about the use of cooperative learning strategies for oral production in class.	Non-Participant observation with form Informal interview	In class At the school	Once a week Each Tuesday after class in the afternoon
Advisor	Advisor's observations and reflections about the use of cooperating learning strategies for oral production in class.	Non-participant observation with form	In class	Twice during April, second and third week.