

How is 'cooperation' promoted in a 1st-semester English course in the Foreign
Languages program at University of Valle?

Helen Dayana Muñoz J.

Fabian Enrique Rodas L.

Tutora: Sol Colmenares

Universidad del Valle

Abstract

This work investigates the promotion of cooperation in a 1st-semester English course within the Foreign Languages program at the University of Valle. The research questions explore the strategies employed to foster cooperation, the characteristics of cooperative learning conducive to communicative competence development, and the methodologies applied in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) virtual classroom. The methodology involves a case study with class observations, student interviews, and document analysis, including the examination of the class syllabus.

The findings reveal that students can also be engaged in group tasks and virtual discussions, demonstrated enhanced communicative competence. The teacher's use of familiar topics facilitated student connection, encouraging the expression of experiences and opinions. Task-based learning emerged as a methodology promoting cooperation, providing students the opportunity to collaborate and assist each other in task completion. Cooperation, conceptualized as small-group work involving knowledge exchange and idea sharing, resulted in the creation of language pieces, fostering constant communication and improving language skills.

This study underscores the importance of cooperation in language learning, emphasizing its role in developing communicative competence and enriching the overall learning experience in the EFL virtual classroom.

Key words: cooperative learning, communicative competence, language skills development, task-based learning, foreign Languages program, language learning.

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1. Introduction

Helen Keller once said, "Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much." For many years, working together has been a common practice, and it is an essential skill of every human being, even if we think that we can do everything individually. However, this skill is often not well reinforced in schools or even in our daily group work in life, and we have to take into account that being together does not mean working together.

In the context of foreign language learning, group work adds to the development of students' communicative competence because it involves negotiating meaning while carrying out different activities in the classroom. In this research, we aim to understand how 'cooperation' is promoted throughout a case study in a 1st-semester English course in the Foreign Languages program at University of Valle.

In order to conduct this research, non-participant observations, surveys and interviews were used to collect information. Additionally, studies from Savignon (2006), Zhang (2010), Johnson, Johnson, & Smith (2013), and J. Thousand (1994) were used as references because of their contribution to the development of cooperative learning and communicative competence research.

The theoretical concepts that support this research are cooperative language, and communicative language teaching. This study case is developed in 3 sections. In the first section, we provide the reader with previous studies from the local, national, and international level regarding the use of cooperative learning in the classroom, and the development of communicative competence. In the second section, we address the theoretical concepts that support the study concerning what cooperative learning is, and the development of communicative competence in the classroom. In the third section, data collected from non-participant observations, and interviews will be presented, and analyzed. Finally, the results from the study will be presented, and analyzed accordingly, in order to draw conclusions.

2. Research problem

Teaching a language is a process that has changed over time due to technology, among other aspects and this implies that teachers must adjust to these changes to be able to teach in the best way they can. One aspect that is not much explored in the literature is group work, despite its valuable contribution to foreign language teaching and learning processes. When it comes to the classroom setting, the teacher takes the role of the leader, but having a leader doesn't guarantee effective group work and development of the communicative competence in students that are learning English.

This skill is often taken for granted while students are in groups. We, as teachers, believe that there is nothing wrong with making groups in class but it is essential that we make sure that students are truly working together and it isn't just some of them doing all the work to make the group succeed. Johnson and Johnson (1999) state that

Placing socially unskilled students in a group, and telling them to cooperate does not guarantee that they have the ability to do it so effectively because humans are not born instinctively knowing how to interact effectively with others, and this does not magically appear when those abilities are needed. (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p. 71)

While we believe that humans can work together instinctively from very young ages, they might not know how to do it effectively so that every member contributes and works toward achieving a common goal. Students must not only get to know, and trust each other but also, they must have good communication, acceptance, and support each other, and resolve conflict constructively (J. Thousand A. V., 1994, p. 4). However, in our context, it is common that group work is developed dividing it into the members of a group to be done individually and sometimes carrying out good group work is taken for granted in the academic setting. This could frequently lead to activities or projects not being done properly, enhanced or finished in the classroom making sure that every member of the group has learned and contributed as much as the others.

We believe that group work can help develop the English communicative competence, however in Colombia, it is a complicated process because of the implementation of traditional teaching approaches that keep students from improving their English communication skills. Savignon (2006) states that by encouraging the students to ask for information, to seek clarification, to use circumlocution and whatever other linguistic and non-linguistic resources they could muster to negotiate to mean, to stick to the communicative task at hand, teachers were invariably leading-learners to take risks, to speak in other than memorized patterns (Savignon, 2006, p. 209).

However, it is important to enhance this learning process with different activities that involve interaction among classmates and cooperation since students in the Foreign Languages program are to eventually teach at schools and put into use what they have learned at University. Becoming familiar with this way of working in the classroom and recognizing the benefits it brings to both of us, as teachers of foreign languages, and the students we guide will allow them to improve their teaching practices as they approach this knowledge. The recognition of the importance of cooperative work in teaching leads us to formulate the following research questions in this study:

How is 'cooperation' promoted in a 1st-semester English course in the Foreign Languages program at University of Valle? How is cooperation conceptualized in English language teaching? What are cooperative learning characteristics that might help develop communicative competence?

3. Research questions

This research aims to answer:

Primary question

- How is ‘cooperation’ promoted in a 1st-semester English course in the Foreign Languages program at University of Valle?

Secondary questions

- How is cooperation conceptualized in English language teaching?
- What are cooperative learning characteristics that might help develop communicative competence?
- What methodologies promote cooperative learning in the EFL classroom and why is it important to promote it?

4. Aims

Aim

- Explain how ‘cooperation’ is promoted in a 1st-semester English course in the Foreign Languages program at University of Valle.

Objectives

- Identify how cooperation is conceptualized in English Language teaching.
- Identify the cooperative learning characteristics that might help develop communicative competence.
- Identify the methodologies that promote cooperative learning in the EFL classroom and the importance of promoting cooperative work.

5. Justification

As it was mentioned before, this case study aims to understand cooperation in the classroom while fostering communicative competence through the English teaching process at the University of Valle in the first semesters of the Foreign Language program.

Moreover, this study attempts to show that cooperative learning can provide a framework to develop valuable communication skills that can be used beyond the classroom setting. Certainly, there are various studies addressing cooperation, however, we attempt to highlight the fact that group work is often taken for granted, and this may cause it not to be developed properly. Also, through cooperative work at University, in this case, students are immersed in a learning environment in which they can develop relevant social skills that might bring benefits to their learning, not only in their academic life now but also in their future life.

Johnson and Johnson (1999) state that cooperative learning can provide students with greater learning as they are more meaningfully and actively involved in their learning process. In this way, they mention, that students achieve higher-level reasoning, improve their productivity and responsibility with assigned work, along with willingness to keep on working and complete even more difficult tasks.

These benefits also go beyond learning. Cooperative work helps students with better psychological health and social competence. When students work together, they tend to increase their self-confidence and resiliency to cope with the difficulties they come across while working on a task. Students also learn group skills, how to communicate effectively and understand other's perspectives (Johnson & Johnson 1999).

Zhang (2010) argues that cooperative learning promotes productivity, achievement and more opportunities for communication when compared with traditional learning. Also, cooperative activities can offer a relaxed climate in the classroom that can help students feel more comfortable communicating with their classmates and participating in class which can lead, not only to developing academic language, but also social language (Zhang, 2010).

Additionally, as students are learning in the courses they take in the Foreign Languages program, being involved in cooperative learning will expose them to teaching skills that they may use to complement students' learning processes and can put them into practice once they graduate and start working at either public or private schools. We believe that teachers tend to reproduce certain behaviors and practices which they themselves experienced when learning the English language. These behaviors and practices can be taken eventually to their future workplace, and their students might find those practices helpful and beneficial to their learning.

That is another reason why we believe that it is important to see how teachers from the Foreign Languages program mobilize the concept of cooperation while fostering communicative competence since their students will be affected by it now and they might reproduce those practices later in their teaching careers. Finally, we also consider that it is important to know how to properly instruct and conduct cooperative work in the classroom in order to maximize the students' learning outcome and that they get to see the importance of learning how to work with others in a way that benefits everyone.

6. Literature review

In this section of the study, we addressed the literature work we found concerning communicative competence and the use of cooperative learning in different institutions in the local, national and international context. We mentioned what these studies focused on, what the researchers did and what they concluded from their work.

At University of Valle we found some studies that took into account the development of communicative competence and the implementation of cooperative learning in the classroom; however, they did not focus on those aspects exclusively. First, we will address Velasco and Montaña (2019) who conducted a qualitative study case study at the public school Institución Libardo Madrid Valderrama with 21 students from Cali, aged between 15 to 18 years old, in 10th grade. In order to gather data, a total of 4 class observations were done, each lasting 2 hours, they also used field notes, interviews, surveys and open conversations so that they could get familiar with students' likes and dislikes, what they were interested in, the context in which they lived, their motivations, and types of activities they liked to do during the English class. They triangulated the information gathered taking into account aspects like motivation, methodology and foreign language usage. Their objective was to design, implement and evaluate a didactic sequence in order to improve the communicative competence in an English as a foreign language class.

In their findings, Velasco and Montaña argue that the development of the communicative competence through the didactic unit they created, along with workshops and pedagogical tools they made, improved significantly, going from zero communication in English in the classroom to questions, answers and comments from the students in the group. They also mention that cooperative learning was a good strategy to improve interaction between students, and for them to complement and create knowledge among themselves, having their teacher more as a guide and mediator than an instructor.

Second, Gómez, Hernández and Faustino (2014) carried out a research project with a mixed approach, meaning they used both the qualitative and quantitative approach. The research design was framed around a pre-experimental, and action research design, with 10 students from University of Valle in the course “Francés con propósitos generales y académicos II,” which focuses on the development of communicative competence. The objective was to design, implement and evaluate a didactic sequence that benefitted the oral production, framed around the communicative approach. Students in this course were young adults from different majors, aged under 30 years old. The data collection methods used were field notes, surveys, interviews and class observations which lasted from two to two hours and a half that were done for two months, twice or three times per month. All of this helped identify the teacher and students’ contexts and perceptions, keep track of activities and attitudes in the classroom and students interests and expectations.

In their findings, they mentioned that implementing cooperative learning and activities that favor interaction, generated a safe environment in which students could work closer and help each other. This could help them realize and identify common mistakes in their learning. The development of communicative tasks, and the use of cooperative learning along with other factors could influence in a positive way the process of learning a foreign language.

Furthermore, in a national context, we also found two investigations that develop cooperative learning through action research. Firstly, a research that presents a description between cooperative learning and communicative competence: Prieto, (2012). This study aims to report an improvement of English using Cooperative learning strategies with eleven students from a school in Bogotá. The investigation design was action-research, and the tools used to collect information were field notes, student and teacher surveys, interviews, and audiotapes recording. Also, the participants were fifty-three students

between ages from fourteen to seventeen years old. Findings showed that in the first classes students wanted to work with the same group, but as cooperative strategies were implemented in the sessions, there was a change of attitude towards group work and speaking.

Finally, Prieto claimed that based on the results gathered, there are five factors necessary to work with cooperative learning in the classroom: first, small groups are required; second, different levels of ability have to be considered; third, it is a good practice to establish the group's rules according to each activity; fourth, it is important to work on one skill for each stage; and finally, it is important to evaluate students' performance (Prieto, 2012, p. 85).

Secondly, Caicedo, (2015) conducted a research that aims to revise the effectiveness in social performance through cooperative learning strategies and enrich their academic writing level in English with students from seventh grade at a Colombian public school in Bogota.

The investigation design was action-research, and the tools used to collect information were observations, questionnaires, lesson plans, and field notes. Also, the participants were eight students organized in two groups. Students had 3 sessions about CL strategies but, only in the first session students wanted to get involved in their roles as organizers, relationers, observers and recorders. Then, those roles vanished in the next sessions, and only the second group was able to work together. Also, there were some limitations as time was not enough for students to understand their role, time was not enough. Although the project had those limitations, Caicedo claimed that it is important to know what the first impressions from students, and teachers about the CL strategies are, and that it is necessary to have time to implement not only CL, but other approaches. In this way, all the skills can be benefitted. (Caicedo, 2015, p. 32).

In the international context, revising some of the studies that have been conducted, regarding cooperative learning and the communicative competence we will address two studies. The first one, carried out by Manrique (2016) was a quantitative study following an applied research methodology at Universidad Católica los Ángeles de Chimbote in Peru with 20 students in a basic English course. The objective was to determine the effects of cooperative learning strategies on improving students' oral expression in English. Class observations were done and there was a pre and post-test in order to verify students' progression in oral expression before and after implementing cooperative learning strategies. Students' expression level was measured before and after the implementation of the proposal so that differences between the two phases could be established, and in order to determine if the proposal had helped students. The analysis of the data was done by using the statistics software SPSS.

In her findings, Manrique established that according to the pre-test, most of the students had not developed their oral expression to the degree that is expected in a basic English level. After the proposal, which was centered around cooperative learning strategies, the post-test showed that students' oral expression improved considerably. Manrique argues that nearly 68,75% of the students improved their level, compared to the results obtained from the pre-test. Manrique also mentions that students learned to use more vocabulary, pronounce better and improved their speaking skills.

The second international study considered was that of Turrión and Ovejero (2013) who conducted a study in order to provide evidence about if cooperative learning has positive effects in the improvement of academic performance concerning foreign language learning in primary school students from third and fourth grade. Students, aged from 9 to 11 years old, were from three different schools located in the provinces of Palencia and Soria in Spain. The total number of students was 40, divided into two

experimental groups and one control group. It is important to mention that two of the schools were located in urban areas and one of them in a rural area. The experimental groups implemented cooperative learning while in the control group classes were given as regular and students worked individually. Pre-tests and post-test were used to check academic performance in English, as well as periodic interviews with the teachers to corroborate the implementation of cooperative learning and supervise the progress made.

In their quantitative findings, they identified that after the intervention there was an improvement in the three groups, especially in one of the experimental groups, where there was a very noticeable improvement. They mentioned that it was difficult to establish consistent differences between the groups due to their heterogeneity and that according to the results in the post-test it was difficult to state that there was a direct relation between the improvement in English performance and cooperative learning in the three groups. However, they argued that in the experimental groups, the differences between students' performance were not as drastic as the ones in the control group, which had more evident disparities among the students.

Finally, they added that regarding the qualitative results of the study, the teachers and students involved, could notice an improvement in the classroom environment, there was a perception of more motivation among the students which led to higher participation and integration which enriched the participants' school life.

7. Conceptual framework

In order to provide the monograph with the appropriate academic grounds and concepts that will be addressed throughout the paper, some key theories and concepts were reviewed and are presented in this section as a theoretical guide for the work developed in this research study. They are pertinent to the study because they will help us identify how similar the class practices at University of Valle are in contrast with how these theories and concepts are presented in the literature and how they are promoted, implemented and conceptualized in the learning context. Those learning theories and concepts are: cooperative learning, communicative competence and virtual learning, given the environment in which the data will be collected.

- Cooperative learning

It is important to differentiate cooperative learning from collaborative learning since both might seem to be similar, and they could be misinterpreted. Collaborative learning, according to Davidson & Major (2014) focuses on working with each other, yet not together as it happens in cooperative learning. The definitions of collaborative learning in the literature most often describe the importance not only of students working together in groups, but also of the group working together with the teacher in an effort to develop knowledge, thus shifting the nature of authority in the classroom. (Davidson & Major, 2014, p.21)

In collaborative learning, students would be able to divide the task at hand, and work on it in order to put all the pieces together at the end, once it has been completed. They still work as a group, but they are not interdependent or work jointly, as in the case of cooperative learning. Davidson & Major (2014) state that one of the goals of collaborative learning is having students take responsibility for their learning, and

working with each other. In this case, students are responsible for learning even when the teacher is away, and they are able to construct knowledge together.

Cooperative learning, in contrast, focuses on students working together, and in groups in order to reach a specific goal or accomplish a learning task. There is a definition: “The instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own, and each other’s learning” Johnson, Johnson, & Smith (2013, pp. 3)

Johnson, et al. (2013) stated that “assigning students to groups, and telling them to work together does not result in cooperative efforts” because the process could lead to competition or individualistic work. So, to achieve it, Johnson & Johnson (as cited in Johnson et al., 2013) argue that some conditions must be met, those conditions being positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, social skills, and group processing.

Positive interdependence deals with the fact that students are connected with one another, and that they will succeed if the rest does as well. Individual accountability has to do with every group member having responsibility for completing his or her part of the work, and facilitating the work of other group members. Promotive interaction refers to students helping each other, praising each other’s work, and encouraging classmates to make great efforts in order to learn. Social skills are to be included since students must interact with their classmates, and work together towards a common goal, and in order to do so there must be effective communication through social skills.

Finally, group processing deals with revising, and examine the various processes that follow the development of an academic task, and identifying how effective they are so that the group's learning can be improved or maximized. (Johnson, et al, 2013, pp. 5-6).

Moreover, instructors need to help students focus on the continuous improvement of the quality of the processes they are using to learn. This can be done by asking them to describe what member actions are helpful, and unhelpful to ensure that all group members are making progress, efficient work relationships are being maintained, and decisions about what behaviors to continue or change are made. Knowing the effectiveness of the group members is key (Thousand, 1994, p. 4). Similarly, Kagan & Kagan (1998) also propose four attributes of cooperative learning, which they gave the acronym PIES that stands for positive interdependence, individual accountability, equal participation, and simultaneous interaction.

Furthermore, other characteristics of cooperative learning mentioned by Zhang (2010) include the fact that students who are involved in it can reach higher levels of achievement than students who do not, they get along better with their peers, higher self-esteem, and even a deeper level of retention, and understanding of the topics studied. Zhang (2010) addresses four benefits of cooperative language learning. The first one being that the chances of input, and output are increased due to the division of classes into smaller groups in which students have more chances to speak, and interact with their classmates, opposed to whole class approaches in which all the students are to participate after sometimes waiting for their turn for some minutes. The second one refers to the creation of an effective climate in the classroom, which deals with students not feeling too anxious or scared to communicate with the entire class. In this way, they have the opportunity to first discuss with a smaller group, and get better prepared for presenting ideas to the whole class if needed. Having this time to prepare in the discussion with the group could help students feel at ease in class, and more motivated to share with everyone in the class.

The third benefit mentioned is that the variety of language functions increases because students need to interact with their group, and those interactions can go from requesting information to clarifying, suggesting, negotiating meaning, disagreeing, among others. All of these functions provide students with opportunities to practice and learn the language as they work with their group. The fourth benefit stated by Zhang is that students' responsibility and independence is fostered. This could happen since individual accountability, as it was mentioned by Johnson et al. (2013), is present in cooperative learning, and students are all accountable for the successful completion of the learning task, and contributing, meaning that everyone is to work as much as their partners in order not to fail, and achieve the learning goal.

Johnson et al. (2013) addressed an important point to include in this monograph due to the University setting in which it will be developed. They explained that over 168 studies were done, comparing the efficacy of cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning. According to the results of these studies, students who were involved in cooperative learning could reach higher individual achievement. Another point they highlighted was that the results showed that the quality of relationships at University is better when cooperative learning takes place since positive interpersonal relationships are promoted, and students perceive more social support personally, and academically. This is also important since academic success does not always guarantee that students do not drop out or lose interest later on in the next semesters. Finally, Johnson et al. (2013) point out that cooperative learning also promotes better psychological health, students become more socially skilled, they have a more positive attitude toward learning, and they are capable of forming, initiating, and maintaining meaningful interpersonal relationships.

This allows us to see that the implementation of cooperative language learning not only brings benefits to developing better language skills but also helps students improve at a personal level, feel better, and more engaged or motivated to continue learning, and developing themselves. It is also important to point out that Johnson, Johnson, & Smith (as cited in Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2013) explained that there are three options in which cooperative learning can be established in the university classroom.

The first one is called “Formal cooperative learning,” in which students work together for a specific amount of time. It can be one class only or during various weeks, in order to achieve a learning goal, and carry out tasks, and assignments such as a report, solving a problem, etc. According to Johnson et al. (2013) in this type of cooperative learning, teachers already have made some pre instructional decisions, they explain to students what they are to do and what positive interdependence is, they monitor, and intervene in the groups to help with the task or the group’s interpersonal skills, and they assess students, and help them understand how their groups work. The second way they describe is “Informal cooperative learning,” which groups students for shorter periods of time during a class, it could be a couple of minutes to a maximum of one class only. Students in those groups are to engage in focused conversations before, and after a lecture takes place, and three minute or less discussion throughout the lecture. In this way, teachers can ensure that students are following the material that is worked in class, that they summarize the information, integrate it, and also explain it. The last option they outline to carry out cooperative learning is called “Cooperative base groups.” In this particular option, students are together for very extended periods of time that can be for even more than a year. In Cooperative base groups, students support and influence each other throughout their academic life so that they work hard and are able make progress cognitively and socially, improving their learning process.

- Communicative competence and language teaching

When talking about communicative language teaching, Savignon states that “the essence of CLT is the engagement of learners in communication to allow them to develop their communicative competence.” (Savignon, 2006, pp. 673) Communicative language teaching can also be described as the use of real-life situations in the classroom that prompt students to communicate with one another (Brandl, 2008). Nowadays, many teachers agree on the fact that students could learn better by being immersed in situations that are meaningful to them, and in which they are able to communicate as they would in any situation in real life.

Hymes (1971, as cited in Brandl, 2008) states that CLT is based on the theory that establishes communication as the fundamental, and first function of a language, in addition to its goal being the development of the communicative competence. Savignon (2018) argues that knowing grammatical structures is not the only factor that speakers need, and that different norms of how the language is used, and its appropriateness in different situations are also very important factors to take into account. To provide an example, Savignon (2018) mentions a teacher of French at the University of Illinois, who after having spent time practicing spontaneous communication in the classroom, saw that the communicative competence was positively developed. Students who were exposed to this spontaneous communication could use French better, in a range of different communicative tasks, than those who were taught with drills that reinforced specific patterns. During the time that students were involved in constant communicative situations, even when making mistakes regarding grammar or pronunciation, they could eventually perform better, and communicate more effectively.

Moreover, Savignon (2018) states that CLT is rather than a method, an approach which considers that language, identity, and social behavior go hand in hand. Therefore, those three different aspects are not to be separated from one another. Another important point that Savignon (2006) makes is that CLT is not only about face-to-face communication. She argues that either in writing or reading activities that prompt students to communicate with each other, and engage in expressing, negotiating, and interpreting meaning, we can see the principles of communicative language learning. She also adds that “the goals of CLT depend on learner needs in a given context.

Furthermore, while group or pair work ought not to be considered essential in CLT, and might be inappropriate in some contexts, it has been found to be helpful in some of them since more opportunities for communication are provided and motivation could increase as well (Savignon, 2006). It has been identified that communicative language teaching stems from a multidisciplinary perspective, including sociology, linguistics, psychology, anthropology, and educational research. In CLT, the participation of learners in communicative events that promote the functionality of language has been the main focus; all of this can be done thanks to the creation, and implementation of programs, and methodologies that prioritize functional language ability (Savignon, 2006).

JC Richards (2006) argues that the communicative competence includes some aspects of language knowledge such as knowing how to use language according to diverse purposes, and functions, how to adjust our language depending on the setting, and the people involved, how to maintain communication when faced with limitations in our own language, and having the knowledge to produce, and understand different kinds of texts. Many years ago, language learning was considered to be the result of drills, repetition of patterns and mechanical processes that focused much more on form and avoided mistakes.

However, in more recent years, language learning is viewed as the result of processes that involve interaction between learners, and users of the language, negotiation of meaning, collaborative creation of meaning, the creation of meaningful interaction through language, experimenting saying things in different ways, developing one's own communicative competence by paying attention, incorporating new forms and learning from feedback that is received when using the language (JC Richards, 2006).

The sociolinguist Berns (1990, as cited in Savignon, 2006, pp. 211) states that “a definition of a communicative competence appropriate for a given group of learners should reflect sociocultural contexts of language use.” She also presents eight important tenets of CLT, those tenets are:

1. Language teaching is primarily based totally on a view of language as communication. That is, language is visible as a social device which speakers, and writers use to make meaning; we talk approximately something to a person for a few purpose, both orally and in writing.
2. Diversity is recognized and acknowledged as a part of language improvement and use in 2nd language newbies and users.
3. A learner's competence is considered in relative, not absolute, terms of correctness.
4. More than one variety of a language is recognized as a model for learning and teaching.
5. Culture is visible to play an instrumental position in shaping speakers' communicative competence, each of their first, and subsequent languages.

6. No single methodology or fixed set of techniques is prescribed.

7. Language use is recognized as serving the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual functions, as defined by Halliday (1978) and is related to the development of learners' competence in each.

8. Sauvignon states that "It is essential that learners be engaged in doing things with language, that is, that they use language for a variety of purposes, in all phases of learning. Learner expectations and attitudes have increasingly come to be recognized for their role in advancing or impeding curricular change." (Sauvignon, 2006, p. 211).

Finally, Sauvignon (2006) explains that the communicative language learning conception of language use and language learning, considering it to be holistic, interactive, and learner-oriented will only move forward depending on the ability of teachers, policy makers, and applied linguists to jointly work in order to better the policies and language teaching practices in a much bigger cultural context. Communicative competence and language learning are then often understood as prioritizing communication among learners in, as meaningful situation as possible, for them to develop their communicative competence. In addition to this, it is important not to forget that as learners engage in communication, there are social aspects that go hand in hand with it and that should be taken into account when negotiating and creating meaning through language interaction.

- E-learning - Distance learning

Naidu (2006) explains that E-learning has to do with the usage of communications technology, and networked information with the purposes of teaching and learning. The author mentions that other terms like online learning, virtual learning, distributed learning, network, and web-based learning are also used. Also Naidu (2006) affirms that:

The term e-learning comprises a lot more than online learning, virtual learning, distributed learning, networked or web-based learning. As the letter “e” in e-learning stands for the word “electronic”, e-learning would incorporate all educational activities that are carried out by individuals or groups working online or offline, and synchronously or asynchronously via networked or standalone computers, and other electronic devices. (Naidu, 2006, pp. 1)

Due to COVID-19, in 2020, schools and universities saw themselves forced to change from in-person classes to virtual classes. Making such a drastic change, and considering the short period of time in which it was made, it was a situation that both students and teachers were not prepared for. Also, some students could not continue with their classes for some time because of a lack of electronic devices or stable, and fast enough internet connections to carry on with academic activities virtually. In addition, computer literacy played an important role once the only option to continue with academic activities was through virtual classes.

Shifat (2020, p. 102) argues that” The rapid transition to online learning has made the teachers, and students wholly dependent on technological devices to cope with academic activities in education.” Not being familiar with different platforms and tools that technology, and the internet can provide, hindered some students, and teachers’ ability to adapt to a different kind of learning, and teaching. Tayebinik, and Puteh (2013)

maintain that distance education through computer technology happens while teachers, and students are separated, which affects e-learners from interacting with the community in which they are learning. They argue that the feeling of not belonging to a community could disturb the enhancement of emotions, and feelings among students, and teachers. Although, according to Lu, and Chin (as cited in Tayebinik, and Puteh 2013) e-learning or distance learning could have some benefits such as immediate communication, learning at one's own pace, and using technology facilitators like video conferencing, distance learning has shown that feeling isolated tends to happen (Tayebinik, and Puteh, 2013). Some of the problems that are found in distance learning, that are mentioned by Delialioglu, and Yildirim, (as cited in Tayebinik, and Puteh, 2013) are hardware, and software limitations, time constraints, money, and pedagogical problems, too.

In addition to these constraints, Tayebinik, and Puteh (2013) assert that when complementary aspects to verbal communication such as facial expression, body language and eye contact are absent, one's brain finds difficulties communicating, and there is potential likelihood for misinterpretation. Given that many teachers at universities, and schools in Colombia are using video conferencing software like Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Google Meets, and that not all the students have a camera or turn it on while in class, this can affect effective communication between teachers, and students, again leading to possible misunderstandings.

Rovai and Jordan (2004) state that according to research, not all students and faculty can properly adapt to online courses. Collins (1999) mentions that in distance education, students and teachers react with different emotions to new educational technologies, Abrahamson (1998) argues that students need to be independent and self-regulated, and Marino (2000) says that some students can experience difficulties adapting

to courses, managing time, staying motivated. Sinkora, and Carroll (as cited in Rovai & Jordan, 2004) argue that students in online higher education are less satisfied with online courses as opposed to regular in-person courses. Students' level of satisfaction and engagement with courses are likely to either cause them to drop out or feel motivated to continue and finish their studies. Hara and Kling (2001, p.68) conducted a study with online students, finding that "students reported confusion, anxiety and frustration due to the perceived lack of prompt or clear feedback from the instructor and from ambiguous instructions on the course website and in e-mail messages from the instructor."

8. Methodology

In order to carry out this study, we implemented a case study methodology which can be used in different situations to contribute to our understanding and knowledge of certain group, individual, and social related phenomena, among others, as stated by Yin (2003). Álvarez Álvarez & San Fabián Maroto (2012) point out some basic characteristics of case studies that differentiate them from research methods. These features include that case studies disclose relationships between a situation in particular and its context, that they focus on not only relationships but also interactions. Case studies also use multiple sources of evidence and they reflect the peculiarity and particularity of situations through descriptions and that they are holistic since researchers try to evidence reality by taking a deep look into it and then offer a bigger picture of the case reflecting its complexity.

Yin (2003) also asserts that "the case study as a research strategy comprises an all- encompassing method – covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis" (Yin,2003, p. 14). We selected this particular method since we focused the study on one specific first semester English class in the Foreign Languages program at University of Valle and because it allows to collect a

significant amount of data from different sources in order to analyze this case in particular and help us understand and give answer to our research question in this study.

Moreover, Yin (2003) argues that when in research, if investigators do not have much control over the events taking place and a contemporary phenomenon inside a real-life context is the focus, a case study is preferred. Yin (2003) also points out that when “how” and “why” questions are asked, such as ours, which is “How is ‘cooperation’ mobilized promoted in a 1st-semester English course in the Foreign Languages program at University of Valle?” A case study is preferred. Stake (2005, as cited in Álvarez Álvarez & San Fabián Maroto, 2012) notes that there are three types of case studies according to their end. These three are the collective, which selects multiple cases for the study, the instrumental, which aims at building a theory using a set of specific situations, and the last is the intrinsic, which refers to a case with its own particularities and the study aims at better understanding one concrete case that is of interest.

The present research study is inscribed in an intrinsic case study for the reason that it is based on a case with its own particularities given its University context with a specific class. It is also of our particular interest to identify how cooperative work and learning is promoted in a first semester English class, and we aim at a better understanding this case in concrete.

Álvarez Álvarez & San Fabián Maroto (2012) assert that case study research follows phases that are widely accepted. Considering Pérez Serrano (1994) and Martínez Bonafé (1990) they differentiate between three phases. The first is called “Fase preactiva” and it has to do with the aim of the study, which in this case is to “Explain how ‘cooperation’ is promoted in a 1st-semester English course in the Foreign Languages program at University of Valle”. The epistemological fundamentals of the case, which for

us are cooperative learning, the development of the communicative competence and distance learning.

Also, the research question, in this case is “How is ‘cooperation’ promoted in a 1st-semester English course in the Foreign Languages program at University of Valle?”. The resources needed, given the Covid-19 pandemic, relied much on the access to the internet, a computer and microphone and text processing software along with video conferencing tools. Finally, the size of the study and an approximate timing for it, which for us was only one first-semester class in the Foreign Languages program during one semester at University of Valle.

The second phase is called “Fase interactiva”. This phase has to do with the field work and development of the study. This phase can bring about some difficulties regarding having enough time to do all the necessary work, the amount of evidence can be big and difficult to narrow down and empathizing with the group can sometimes be difficult. During this phase, the researchers use different sources of evidence in order to collect the information needed for the study. In our case, the data collection methods include documentation, interviews and direct observations. The field work that we did for this case study was not in person but in virtual classes due to the pandemic as it was previously mentioned.

The third phase is called “Fase postactiva”. In this phase, the final report about the case is written and in it one can find critical reflections considering the case study. To write the final report or conclusion of the study, we used the data analysis of the class observations, interviews and documentation. This analysis was done with class observations by matching and identifying seven categories created from the observations with the five conditions needed for cooperative learning to occur, proposed by Johnsons et al (2013). The first and second interviews were also contrasted with said categories.

And, the documentation, which was the course's syllabus, was contrasted with the evidence gathered from the class observations. Some of the difficulties noted in this phase have to do with keeping collected data confidential, limited time to write the final report of the study and spreading the results of it in different communities and the media.

- Data collection methods

In Yin (2003) six different sources of data evidence are mentioned for case studies. These six sources are documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation and physical artifacts. None of the previous sources of data is considered at an advantage over the others but rather, they are all complementary and including as many as possible can help carry out a good case study (Yin, R, K, 2003)

- Documentation

When collecting data for this case study, we used documentation, implemented interviews and did direct observations. The document that was included as part of the data collected for this case study is the course syllabus for the English 1 class in the Foreign Languages program. According to Yin (2003), the main purpose of including documentation is to corroborate and amplify evidence collected from other sources used in the case. For this study, the course syllabus can serve as a source of data which might be reflected a mirror in of the information collected through the other sources implemented of evidence and corroborate that what happened during the classes goes went according to what had been previously planned and designed for them in order for the course's objectives to be fulfilled. While some information might not be reflected in other collected data or even be contradictory, it can certainly enrich our study and help us understanding it better.

- Interviews

Considering interviews, they were done at the beginning of the term; the second, and final interviews, were done at the end of the semester. The first class that students had was on February 8th and the interviews started approximately two weeks afterwards, on February 19th. The total number of students who volunteered were 10 but eventually only 8 could do the first interview and then only 7 could do the second interview due to some difficulties and availability that the others had.

The total number of students in this English 1 course was 18. The second interviews, which were done at the end of the semester, happened from October 29th to November 5th. The first interview had 11 questions and the second interview had 10. We decided to have one at the beginning and another at the end so that we could take into account the perceptions of students at the beginning and at the end of the term both perspectives of students, their initial and final one, once the semester finished so that we could see if their answers changed once they completed their first English course in the program and how they changed.

The questions that were included in the interview were created by us primarily taking into account the use of group work, cooperative work in the class so that we could see how cooperation was promoted. Other questions related to students' perceptions, difficulties and relationships with their classmates were also included given that all the classes during this semester were virtual and such information could also provide interesting information to our study. All interviews that we did, had to be were done through virtual meetings on meetings on Google Meet Platform, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This allowed us to record each interview and eventually write the transcription for all of them, in order to be able to analyze them later on. The interviews were recorded with students' permission.

Yin (2003) maintains that when interviews are part of a case study, they are often of an open-ended nature and in a conversational way with friendly or non-threatening questions, which allow respondents to provide their opinions about events and facts related to specific matters. Most of the questions we asked students were open-ended since they could not answer them by only saying yes or no, and if they could, they were asked to justify their answer by explaining why it was yes or no. Yin affirms that “Overall, interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs” (Yin, 2003, pp. 92). It is also important to remember that interviews are to be considered verbal reports and that this data should be corroborated with information collected from other sources (Yin, 2003).

- Class observation

The last data collection method was direct observations of the classes for this first semester English class. We must highlight the fact that all the classes that were observed from February 2021 to October 2021 were virtual classes due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Classes were given through the use of video conferencing platforms such as Google Meet and Zoom’s breakout rooms, which is a tool that allows teachers to create secondary rooms in a video call and assign groups of students to them so that they work together without being heard or seen by their classmates. The teacher in charge of the class provided us with the meeting’s link so that we could join the classes and carry out the observations.

Before the semester started, we contacted the teacher who was going to be in charge of this English 1 course, in order to get permission to join the classes and collect the information we needed for this study. The teacher was informed of what we were going to be doing and kindly agreed to let us observe the classes. As it was mentioned before, classes started on February 8th and started the observation process from this day.

The total number of classes observed was 51 until October 2021 from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. While these were not all the classes students had during the semester, they account for most of them with the exception of final exam classes and classes at the end of the semester for students to present a personal a project in which they had to talk about themselves. Students worked on this project throughout the whole semester with the help and guidance of the teacher by checking their progress and writing for the final creation of a video. The teacher provided students with example project videos from other students she had in the past and also with tools they could use in order to make and edit their video.

Direct observation takes place by making a field visit where the case study is happening. These observations can go from formal to more casual activities in order to collect data. Formal observations can include the effects of certain behaviors during a period of time and these could be from meetings, classrooms, factory work and other similar situations. Informal observation could occur when they are done while other data is being collected, for instance, while doing interviews, one might observe the condition of the place where the interview takes place if it is relevant to the case study (Yin, 2003).

The direct observations we did were evidenced in a [digital document](#) which consists of a table with three columns in which the activities that were done in the class were written down, separated by the time the happened. In the third column, different descriptions were written down according to the type of interaction or specific actions that happened during the class, these were also identified with different colors and then grouped into seven different categories. These categories were Tools, Students' work, Interaction, Assignments, Mother language use, Teacher guidance and Students' assistance. We matched these categories with the five conditions proposed by Johnson et al. (2013) so that cooperative learning can be achieved in the classroom.

These conditions are: positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, social skills and group processing. Their work was included in our study since not only did they define cooperative learning, but also reviewed the theoretical roots of cooperative learning and analyzed research conducted at a university to show how cooperation has been tested and validated at that level of education, characteristics that coincide with the context of this research study.

The matching of conditions and categories was done in the following way:

Social skills: Tools, Interaction and Mother language use. They were matched together since students could interact with each other and the teacher while they worked together through the use of class tools like videos, images and texts. This interaction mostly happened in English but students sometimes used their mother language, too.

Positive interdependence: Students' work and Assignments. They were matched together because while students were working jointly on tasks, they depended on each other to complete them effectively and could only do it if their partners did as well.

Individual accountability: Students' work and Assignments. They were matched together since each student was responsible for completing his or her share of the work needed for the tasks they had to work on together or the assignments given by the teacher.

Promotive interaction: Mother language use and Students' assistance. These were matched because students encouraged and helped each other clarify activities in their mother language while they completed tasks and shared their thoughts and had pair or group discussions.

Group processing: Teacher guidance. This category was matched with group processing since it deals with going over class practices that are then revised and examined with the teacher in order to see how effective they are so that learning can be improved.

9. Results and discussion

In order to analyze the data collected for this study we consider the five conditions proposed by Johnson et al. (2013) to achieve cooperative learning in the classroom. In their work, they define cooperative learning, its theoretical roots and the internal group dynamics that make cooperation work, which can only develop under a set of conditions. These conditions are positive: interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, social skills and group processing. Let us remember that positive interdependence deals with students being connected with one another, and that they will succeed when completing a task if the rest succeeds as well. Individual accountability has to do with every group member having responsibility for completing his or her part of the work, and facilitating the work of other group members. Promotive interaction refers to students helping each other, praising each other's work, and encouraging classmates to make great efforts in order to learn. Social skills refer to students interacting with their classmates, and working together toward a common goal, and in order to do so there must be effective communication through social skills. Group processing has to do with revising, and examining the different processes that students are putting to work, and identifying how effective they are so that the group learning can be improved or maximized. (Johnson, et al, 2013, p. 5-6).

- **Class observations analysis:**

We start by identifying these conditions in the classes we observed. However, the conditions were matched with categories of analysis. Here we will present some of the reasons that led to the establishment of these relationships.

Social skills: Tools, Interaction and Mother language use. These conditions and categories were matched since students could interact with each other and the teacher, while they developed group work through the use of class resources like videos, images and texts. This interaction mostly happened in English but students sometimes used their mother language, too.

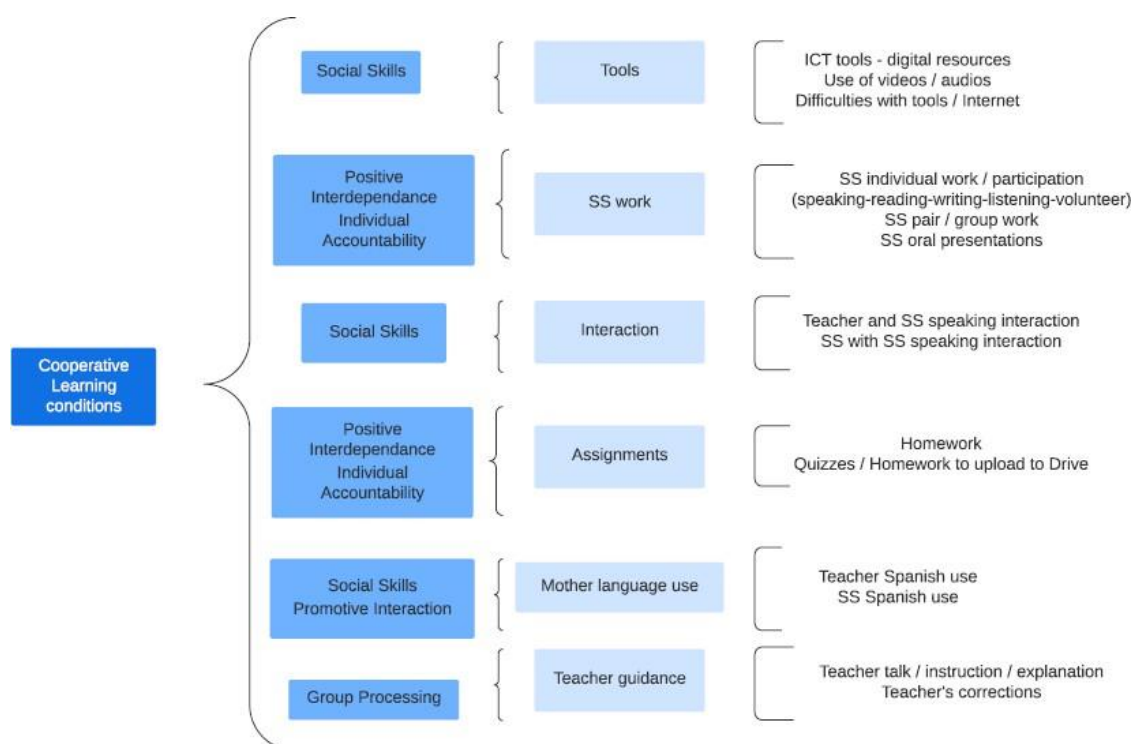
Positive interdependence: Students' work and Assignments. They were matched because while students were working jointly on tasks, they depended on each other to complete them effectively and could only do it if their partners did as well.

Individual accountability: Students' work and Assignments. They were matched together since each student was responsible for completing his or her share of the work needed for the tasks they had to work on together or the assignments given by the teacher.

Promotive interaction: Mother language use and Students' assistance. These were matched because students encouraged and helped each other clarify activities in their mother language while they completed tasks and shared their thoughts and had pair or group discussions.

Group processing: Teacher guidance. This category was matched with group processing since it deals with going over class practices that are then revised and examined with the teacher in order to see how effective they are so that learning can be improved.

CONDITIONS - CATEGORIES



1. Positive interdependence:

The first condition we are going to consider is *positive interdependence*. Johnson & Johnson (1992, as cited in Johnson et al., 2013) note that this condition has to do with the perception of one being connected with others to the point where one success is only achievable if the others are also successful and everyone's work benefits the group. We could see that in many of the class group/pair activities students were working together in order to complete a task and that they would only succeed if their partners did as well. During the semester we observed 51 classes and we evidenced in our observations a total of 25 activities in groups or pairs. Students were able to work together by using breakout rooms on Zoom, which are secondary rooms created in a Zoom video call and students could be moved to those rooms for them to work in pairs or with a group of people, or via Google Meet, which is a similar video call App, but the teacher usually preferred Zoom due to the possibility of creating rooms for students in the same video call. These activities presented variations, such as:

Working together to present a dialogue to the class or send as homework or a quiz.

Working together to get information needed to complete an activity.

Working together to practice their oral production by discussing, sharing ideas and answers.

Working together to present a dialogue to the class or send as homework or quiz:

We took 3 examples from different classes. These classes were sessions number 12, 19 and 23.

In class 12, students were working in groups of three, they had to create a dialogue asking and giving directions and record it to upload it as homework. Students had to use a map they had made before in class to illustrate how to get to the University from their home and vocabulary they had studied in class. They had 40 minutes to complete this activity. The teacher also joined the students to check how they were doing and answered questions they had. Students helped each other create the questions they were going to ask and the possible answers to those questions along with the vocabulary about the topic.

In class 19, students watched a video about a person talking and giving personal information about himself and students had to create questions about that person. Then, they were grouped in pairs, in order to ask their partner the questions they created pretending to be an interviewer. To answer the questions, they used the info they understood from the video and that they had discussed. Finally, after rehearsing, they presented their questions and answers to the class as if in a role play.

In class 23, students practiced in pairs a conversation that the teacher had read first, so that they could hear how some words were pronounced and then students had to practice the conversation and create a similar conversation including some vocabulary the teacher had shared with them in a document file. Students worked together and helped

each other so that they practiced the original dialogue and then could create the new conversation, they gave each other suggestions and they corrected each other in order to present their conversation afterward.

Working together to get information needed to complete an activity:

We took 3 instances from classes, they were sessions number 13, 18 and 30. In these activities, students did not have to present their work after they completed it. Instead, they had to complete an activity proposed by the teacher in a certain time.

In class 13, students worked in pairs, each with one version of a New Zealand map. They needed to ask each other questions in order to get the info missing in their map. Students were a little confused at the beginning, but they helped each other understand what they needed to do along the process, asking the right questions, so they could identify the places in their map. The teacher joined the rooms to clarify information and she asked students how they felt after they finished the activity. Students did this activity twice, each with a different partner.

In class 18, students worked in pairs assuming a role, they had to ask each other for directions to get to places in a city map they both had. They started by clarifying what they had to do and then they started asking each other their questions and marking their maps.

In class 30, students were shown some dialogue videos and then they were put in pairs for them to imitate the dialogues. Students switched roles and made sure both practiced. Once they finished, they still continued talking, mostly in English, about what they did during the months they didn't have classes, they were very comfortable asking and sharing anecdotes.

Working together to practice their oral production by discussing, sharing ideas and answers:

For this case we took 3 examples from classes 22, 28 and 50. In class 22, students were organized in groups of 3 or 4 participants. The instruction was to share and discuss their answers to some questions the teacher gave them about a music video of David Bowie. Students helped each other express their ideas and the teacher joined the rooms from time to time to see how students were doing and to check they were discussing in their groups.

In class 28, students completed prompts with their own information using the past continuous tense and then they were organized in pairs, so that they shared the information they completed and asked their classmates extra information about it. As students shared, they also began to feel more comfortable with each other and started to ask out of curiosity to know more about their partner. The teacher entered the rooms and listened to students sharing and asking each other about their information.

In class 50, students practiced speaking in groups by answering questions the teacher created about how their life changed since the Covid-19 pandemic started. They organized themselves and took turns to ask their questions and share answers. They also helped each other express and put together ideas that they had. As they discussed, students started to seem more comfortable and were able to interact more with their classmates after they had asked their first questions.

Throughout the development of these activities, we could see how students worked with one another in order for both, or the group, to succeed at completing the task that was assigned to them whether they had to present it to their classmates afterward or not. In the activities previously described, in which students had to present the result to the class or send it as homework or quiz, students were usually very attentive to their

partner/s and they knew that only through a collective effort they would be able to successfully complete their task and present something that represented the best they could do. They were also very supportive and listened to each other, gave suggestions to their partners and they even made corrections when one of them was more knowledgeable than the other. Students were always very respectful of their peers and they complemented each other's work as they completed each activity. In class 12, for example, students knew that they could only create a good dialogue about giving directions if everyone was asking and answering their questions correctly. Students were able to do it since everyone was equally involved in creating the dialogue and everyone's work benefited the group.

When students did not have to present their work after working collectively, we could still see that they were interested in completing the task successfully and that they worked together in order to do it. In class 13, we could see that when students had their version of a New Zealand map and even if they didn't have to present their questions and answers afterward, they wanted to complete and ask all the questions that were necessary to correctly mark all the places in the map. They needed their partner to ask the correct questions and give the right answers so that they could complete their map and the same would happen the other way around. According to Johnson et al. (2013) in positive interdependence, one's own work benefits others as much as the work of others benefits one's own.

This also happened when students were working in groups or pairs in order to practice their oral production. These were group activities the teacher organized for students to discuss with some partners without the pressure of having to present or complete a specific activity. Although these activities were proposed only with the purpose of providing students with time to practice their oral pronunciation in English, they were very responsible with taking advantage of that time to discuss with their

partners about the topics given in class. They usually made sure that everyone participated in the groups and that they covered most of the task if they did not have the time to do the entire assignment. In class 28, for example, when students had their prompts with their own information, they started working together in pairs sharing their information and asking each other about it. They used all the prompts they had and still continued discussing and asking questions. In these cases, students knew that they had to ask questions for the conversation to continue as much as possible and when they had difficulties, they helped each other organize their ideas, in that way they could carry on with the activity. Brown and Crandall (1994, as cited in Zhang, 2010) argue that in cooperative learning students are in a more relaxed climate and this also increases their motivation. Group work helped students feel more comfortable and relaxed when they had to talk with their classmates, especially for students in their first semester.

2. Individual accountability:

Considering the activities previously described, the second condition, *individual accountability*, was also evidenced. Let us remember that individual accountability has to do with students being responsible for doing their share of the work needed and identifying who in their group needs more help and encouragement, ensuring that they can complete any given task. Also, students were not supposed to just do their classmates' work, everyone was accountable for completing their part (Johnson et al. 2013, p.5).

Take for example, class 37. In this class, students had to watch and create questions for their classmates' one-minute video about a past experience as homework. When they were put in pairs, each student was responsible for having his or her questions ready so that they could start discussing and asking each other. If one student didn't have the questions ready that would have created problems in successfully completing the task for both. Also, when students were not sure if their questions were correct, they helped

each other check and make corrections, assisting in this way the students who needed more help or had difficulties.

In class 23, students practiced in pairs a conversation that the teacher read first for them to get familiar with pronunciation and then students had to practice it and create a similar conversation including some vocabulary that the teacher shared with them. Observation showed that students knew they could not do just their partner's work, or as Johnson states, "they cannot 'hitch-hike on the work of others.'" (Johnson et al. 2013, p.6). they did it together and helped each other so that they could come up with their own conversation. They gave each other suggestions and corrected each other for presenting afterwards their conversation, but work was done together. We could see that sometimes the teacher entered the rooms to make sure that all the members in the group were working on the task. Whenever she noticed they were not interacting much she asked them questions about how their work was going, what they were discussing, and encouraged them to continue working.

3. Promotive interaction:

The third condition we consider is *promotive interaction*. In this case, "students promote each other's success by helping, assisting, supporting, encouraging, and praising each other's efforts to learn" (Johnson et al., 2013, p. 6). During the classes we observed, when students had difficulties or doubts about what they had to do, they either talked to each other or tried to explain in English, but other times they did it in Spanish. Even though students often did it in English, it was a lot easier and faster for them to do it in Spanish. Students sometimes used Spanish to communicate with the teacher and ask her questions, to share in whole class discussions and when they worked in groups, they used it to check, clarify, explain, ask each other questions regarding the activities they had to do. In spite of the fact that Spanish was sometimes used in the classes, the teacher usually

reminded and encouraged students to speak in English all the time. We could see that there were times when students resorted to the use of their mother language in order to help each other, encourage, and praise each other.

In class 33, for example, students were organized in groups of 4 to 5 students and they had to mimic a video they had watched. Before they started mimicking the video, they used Spanish to check if all the group members had the video script ready and to assign everyone a character role from the video so that they could do it in an organized way. They also helped their partners with parts of the video they had not understood very well and compared the script they had to see differences and make any necessary correction.

In class 31, students were organized in pairs and they had to share a text they wrote about how they celebrated a holiday with their families. Before they started sharing what they had written, students used Spanish to make sure they understood what they had to do and decide on the person to start. Then, they read to each other the text they had prepared. Students also asked each other about it, to get as much information as they could and once they had both read their text, they suggested and encouraged each other to continue talking about how the pandemic had been for them back in 2020. We could see that there was promotive interaction in the groups since they often were willing to help, assist and explain to their classmates if they saw someone having difficulties. They also often encourage their classmates to participate in the discussions and share their thoughts. This was sometimes difficult since some students could not always have a stable internet connection so the audio would be cut out or they would leave meetings when they lost connection. Other times, they had problems with their microphone not working, so their classmates could not hear them. Students were often able to sort this type of problem out but it usually interrupted their group work and took some time. However, they usually

tried to join back or informed the teacher through their classmates that they were having internet problems and could not be in class or join back.

4. Social skills:

The fourth condition for cooperation to be developed according to Johnson et al. (2013) is social skills. They state that when working in groups, each participant can contribute to the group work by using interpersonal and small group skills. Among these, they mention decision-making, leadership, trust-building, communication and conflict-management. When students were working together in pairs or groups, we saw that students showed some of these skills. However, they sometimes had difficulties with them and communicating with their peers given the audio and internet problems previously mentioned. Despite those connection problems they sometimes had, students were often able to show those social skills, some more than others.

In class 4, for example, students were organized in groups of three and they had to ask their partners questions related to personal information, family, studies, work, lifestyle, friends, hobbies and free time activities. These questions were previously created by students since they had been assigned as homework. This was only the fourth class students had and they still did not know each other very well. However, when they started working in groups, we saw that one student took the role of the leader and started the discussion with everyone in the group. The student was able to guide and organize the talk so that all the students had their turn and could ask their questions and also share their answers.

In class 15, students were also in groups of three to four and they had to answer 7 questions about the biography of Amelia Earhart, a text they had read twice, once at home and another time in class. Students sometimes switched to Spanish to clarify vocabulary they found in the text. During the group discussion they had to make decisions regarding

what the correct answers were and also communicate or express their ideas and reasons for believing they had the correct answer. We saw that there was also a student in the group assuming the role of the leader, pointing out the questions to be answered, the groups' answers to each question and the next question to be answered. There were also times when students lacked these social skills and when they were working in their groups, there was little communication between the members, which made it difficult to perform the task smoothly. We could see this more often in groups where students did not know each other well, so they knew little about their partners and they did not feel confident to create or maintain a good interaction.

In class 22, for example, students were organized in groups to share their answers to some questions about a music video. The second group we observed limited themselves to answering the questions and shortly after no one continued talking in the group. One student suggested that they continue the discussion but a classmate answered that they had already finished and everyone remained silent after that. The teacher joined the room and asked students why they were not discussing and a student told her that they had finished. This answer surprised the teacher since it did not take them much time to share their answers about the video. Since classes were virtual, students hardly ever saw each other because they did not activate their camera during class unless the teacher asked them to do it. Also, during whole class discussions, student's participation was usually low, except for a few students who were the ones who constantly answered the teacher's questions and shared their thoughts without being asked to do it. We believe that virtual classes made it more difficult for some students to socialize with classmates since they mostly talked to each other only while in class, reducing the time to get to know each other when they were not in class, which could have helped them build closer relationships and feel more confident when interacting.

5. Group processing:

The fifth, and last condition, for cooperation to happen noted by Johnson et al. (2013) is group processing. This condition has to do with the teacher guiding students to better the processes they use to learn and asking students to describe what group actions contribute in a good and bad way to successful group work and relationships, decide what to continue doing or change, make the learning process less complex, getting rid of actions that are not necessary, improving students' abilities when they work together and celebrating their efforts and success in their groups (Johnson et al. 2013).

During the class observations, we could not see this examination of processes happening, after students worked together in groups or pairs. However, the teacher did join the rooms where students were, to check and see how they were working together, what they were doing, and provide help or clarification if students needed it. Also, once students finished a task working together the teacher often praised their work, asked them if they all could finish the task successfully, and how they felt while completing the task. In class 13, for example, when students were asking each other for the locations they needed to mark on their New Zealand map, once they finished doing it, the teacher asked all students how they had felt while doing the activity, because it had been the first time that they did something like that in class.

In class 28, students had six different prompts to complete with their own information using the past continuous and then they were put in pairs to discuss and share how they completed the prompts. During this activity, the teacher joined the separated rooms where students were talking to each other and she observed them, listened to their discussion and checked if a group was having difficulties keeping the discussion going, she would try to help them by asking extra questions. There were other times when the teacher entered the rooms and observed students' work and their oral production;

sometimes, she would make corrections as students talked to each other and other times she would only listen to them and then move on to another room.

From the five conditions mentioned by Johnson et al. (2013), we evidenced that group processing was the one that we saw the least. Even though the teacher checked on students' rooms, asked them if they were able to complete the task they were assigned, and how they felt while working together, these actions did not fully lead to the examination of the processes that students followed during their group work. Most times, once students finished working in groups, they either presented their work or they continued with other activities planned by the teacher for that day. Students were not asked what kind of group actions were beneficial to their work, what type of behaviors or actions needed to be changed or eliminated. We think the teacher did try to improve students' skills when working in groups by grouping them with different classmates. She helped them in their groups whenever they were having difficulties communicating with their peers and made interaction as fluent as possible by helping to build trust between them. However, we saw that assessing these processes in depth was not one of the teacher's priorities after having students work together in either groups or pairs.

Bearing in mind these 5 conditions, we consider that the conceptualization that is built on cooperative language learning has to do with a social process during which students encourage and depend on each other while working in groups. In their groups, each member is responsible for doing their part of the work and, in turn, this work is discussed, shared and latter assessed by the teacher to check how students benefited from group work and how to improve this process.

However, it is important to have a process in which the teacher guides completely every phase of the virtual class as we already verified with the teacher's classes, that means that in a virtual language learning process the commitment is more than the one

we experience in a face-to-face class in which social interaction is different. This aspect is important because this investigation was place in a virtual context and not only was the teacher starting her virtual teaching process but also the students.

- Documentation analysis:

The second source of evidence to which we resorted, was documentation. In this case, the documentation collected was the English 1 course's syllabus proposed by the teacher. In this document, the teacher presents the course's description, justification, objectives, methodology, contents and evaluation. Also, the teacher includes the schedule and bibliography of the course.

As it was mentioned in the methodology, we decided to include the course's syllabus since it can be a mirror of the information collected through other sources of evidence like the class observations or interviews.

The course description states that it gives structure and studies in more detail the communicative competences covered in primary and middle school education that allow students to express in different ways and talk about themselves, their environment and basic personal information about topics like family, work, and school, among others. The description also includes that students will describe people, places, and things and that they will also narrate hypothetical and real events. Throughout the course, students build and negotiate meaning by working on tasks and projects which involve the development of investigative skills and working with their peers. The course is justified by its importance in the learning process of future foreign languages teachers. Three reasons are mentioned in the syllabus: The first is that the course is a space for students to identify and get familiar with formal aspects of the English language and English-speaking cultures. The second is that the course seeks to promote beginning listening

comprehension and writing tasks. And the third is that the course brings students closer to appreciate literature in a second language.

The objectives in the syllabus were organized in a table, showing the four skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking. For all the skills, there were different descriptors and conditions which describe what students were going to be able to do and how they were going to do it.

- Listening:

Let us start by considering the listening skill. Some of the objectives include understanding and following simple instructions, relevant information, general topics or ideas, and agreement or disagreement between speakers. To work on this skill, students were going to use short conversations, dialogues, monologues and oral presentations about familiar topics with visual support. During the class observations, we could see that the teacher often used audios and videos that they watched in class with everyone at the same time or individually if the internet connection was not good enough to watch the video fluently. These videos were usually about topics regarding basic personal information, family, food, places and music.

In class 5, for example, students watch a video showing some people telling where they live, where they are from, what they do and their opinion about the place where they live. Students had to watch the video and answer 10 questions the teacher had given them about it. After they watched it, the teacher asked students the questions and they volunteered to answer the questions and tell what they had understood.

In class 11, the teacher showed students a video with general information about New Zealand and then she asked students for their opinion about it. After that, the teacher showed students a trivia quiz with multiple answer options about New Zealand from a book and asked students to choose the answers they think are correct. After that, the

teacher asked students what they answered and then played the trivia audio for students to check the answers and compare them with the answers they had chosen before.

In class 19, students watched a 3-minute video of a person giving basic personal information and they had to watch it and create questions about the person in it. They also had to have the answers to the questions they created. The teacher gives students about 30 minutes to watch the video and create the questions and answers. When students are ready, they go on Zoom and are organized in pairs so that they ask each other the questions they had created and check their partner's answers with the ones they had.

In these three classes, we observed how the teacher used both audios and videos for students to work on their listening in an individual way and also with their classmates, as was the case in class 19. The topics that students listened to in those audios and videos did correspond to the ones described for the listening skills, which included listening for relevant and general ideas, and they used conversations and monologues. We also saw that some of these activities led to students working together to discuss and check information, ask each other questions and mimic dialogues which required all members to do their share of the work, in order for all to complete the task successfully.

- Reading:

The second skill listed in the objectives table is reading. For this skill, students were to understand content in magazines, letters, forums, social networks and other sources. Texts describing people, places and daily life events were also included. To practice this skill, according to the syllabus, students were to use short literary works and texts with vocabulary, grammar and topics of frequent and familiar use, along with illustrations.

In class 7, for instance, the teacher shared with students some book pages in a PDF document where students found some short texts about traveling. The teacher

instructs students to read the texts individually and then work on some activities related to the texts. The teacher gives students around 20 minutes to read and complete an activity about choosing the right questions for some answers. After 20 minutes, the teacher reads the texts and tells students to listen carefully to reading and pronunciation. After she reads, she asks students to share the questions they think are correct for the answers in the activity and some students volunteer to give their answers.

In classes 14 and 15, students read a text about Amelia Earhart. In this case, the teacher also read the text first for students to listen to her carefully and then she had students read it out loud again. This text included illustrations. After reading, the teacher checked questions and vocabulary about the text and then she sent students a document with 7 questions to answer about the text. Students worked in groups of 3 to 4 people in different Google Meet video calls. They discussed, shared and complemented their answers to the seven questions and then they shared their answers with all the class telling what they had discussed in their group. We saw that the teacher encouraged students to participate in the group discussion they had after they worked in groups and she asked extra questions when they participated. She also asked students who often didn't participate, so that everyone was part of the discussion.

In class 44, students had read in the previous two classes the first two chapters of a book called *The Secret Agent*. Students read both chapters individually and, in this class, the teacher asked them general questions about the book and depending on students' answers she asked some follow-up questions. Then, the teacher showed students a questionnaire about the first chapter and students volunteered to answer the questions and activities about chapter one. Then, the teacher had students read the second chapter, taking turns and students did it voluntarily. For this second chapter they did not work on activities about it, instead, the teacher checked vocabulary and pronunciation in the text.

At the end, the teacher thanked the students who volunteered to read and encouraged those who didn't do it, try participating more often in class.

During these reading activities, we saw that students were working with material from different sources and texts with topics, vocabulary and grammar that were familiar to them with illustrations often included. The teacher had students work individually and also promoted group activities for students to work with their partners, discuss and clarify information or answers to complete a task they were given.

- Writing:

The third skill listed is writing. To work on writing, students were asked to write simple texts about their family, personal information, topics familiar to them and give their opinion about them. Students' written production was based on personal context and guided by other written and audiovisual texts from different sources.

In class 4, for example, the teacher created a chart in a Drive Doc for students to write questions about personal info, family, study, work, lifestyle, friends, hobbies, and free time to get to know their classmates better. In the Doc, students had some sample questions for them to follow. After they wrote their question in the Doc, the teacher went on Zoom and made breakout rooms of three students. In their groups, they had to ask each other the questions they had written and share their answers. After 15 minutes, students joined all their classmates again and the teacher also asked them questions from the Doc.

In class 31, students had to write about a vacation they spent with their family and tell why that day was important to them and what they did with their family. Students used some monologues they had listened to and read as an example. The teacher gave 15 minutes for students to write and then they were organized in pairs to read their text to a classmate and ask questions about it. While students shared their texts, they asked each other questions to get more information about it and confirm what they had understood.

In class 33 and 34, students had to write a story based on a video that the teacher had shown them. Students had 40 minutes to create their idea and structure it as much as possible. After 40 minutes, they shared their ideas with the class and the teacher. The teacher also shared her idea, so that students would have an example to follow. Next class (34), students were organized in groups and they had to share their ideas with their group. While students shared their text, they had to ask questions about it since sometimes ideas were not clear enough. However, students were able to communicate their story ideas. Sometimes they used Spanish when they could not explain well, though.

We could see that students were often asked to share their written work with the whole class or some of their classmates, even if it was a short task, like the questions they wrote in class 4. The teacher often promoted group work when students were assigned writing tasks and they were organized in pairs or groups so that they could read to their classmates what they had written, check their work together, and share their opinions with each other in order to improve their texts. Students also worked on writing that was challenging enough for them to complete with some help from their teacher and they also had text examples to follow provided by the teacher, which allowed them to know how their texts were expected to be like.

- Speaking:

Considering speaking, students were to communicate, request, describe and give information related to topics like daily life, academic experiences, family, and places. Giving short presentations and their points of view about those topics was also included. Students' speaking interaction was supposed to be brief with short and simple phrases guided by questions at a regular speed and paused articulation and intonation.

In class 37, for example, students were asked to create 2 questions for a one-minute video that each student made, in which they talked about themselves. Students

wrote their questions in a Drive Doc that the teacher created and checked to make corrections, making sure that students understood them. Then, the teacher organized students in pairs on Zoom, so that they could ask their classmates the questions they had written and talk about them for a few minutes. The teacher switched students' partners every 5 minutes, for them to ask and talk to different classmates.

In class 48, the teacher showed students a three-minute interview twice and then she gave students 10 minutes to answer 6 questions about it. During this time, she played the video again. After 10 minutes, the teacher played the video one more time and then she organized students in pairs for them to share and discuss their answers. Students talked with 2 different classmates for about 8 minutes with each one, they both answered the questions and checked that they had done correctly by comparing their answers and giving their reasons for them.

In class 50, the teacher created a Drive Doc called "Speaking practice" in which students found different questions about how the Covid-19 pandemic changed their lives. The teacher shared some of her experiences and then she gave students around 20 minutes for them to check the questions and get ready to discuss with their classmates. After 20 minutes, the teacher made groups of three students so they could start sharing their answers. In their groups, we could see that sometimes students participated taking turns and other times they went with the flow of the conversation and they all shared their answers to some of the questions they wanted to check. Students practiced speaking in their groups for about 30 minutes.

During the development of these speaking tasks, we observed how most of them promoted group work and required students to work together and cooperate in order to successfully complete each of the tasks they had been assigned. While students completed these tasks, they had to share ideas, opinions, confirm information they had gathered and

create dialogues related to topics they were familiar with, like daily life, family, places, likes. Sometimes, students had to present or send the dialogues they had created and they were always given enough time to complete them. These tasks provided students with opportunities to practice their speaking skills in pairs or small groups, which maximized students' speaking time and possibly helped them feel less pressured by all their classmates to answer questions or share their thoughts.

The course's methodology is described as one that seeks the autonomy of future language teachers and the social construction of knowledge based on task and project learning with a systematic formative assessment. We could see during the class observations that, in fact, students were assigned different tasks for them to complete either individually, in pairs or in groups. These tasks were linked to the four skills, listening, reading, writing and speaking and as students worked on them and completed them, there was a social construction of knowledge by discussing and sharing with the whole class or in the groups students were in. The methodology also states to be based on collaborative learning as students are able to manage and have more control over their learning. They are also responsible for understanding what they are learning, why they are learning it, how they are doing it and to what percentage they are reaching the course objectives, as well as their personal ones. In order to do this, students are to develop metacognitive skills that allow them to monitor and be aware of their own learning.

We believe that while students were, in fact, responsible for their own learning because they had to make sure to practice and reinforce what they did in class, the teacher was still checking on their class work and giving them instructions regarding what they had to do and how they had to do it. We think that in this first semester, the teacher begins to promote students' responsibility and awareness for learning, but since they aren't probably used to it from high school, they still need some time to properly start monitoring

and managing their learning. We believe that first semester students are just beginning to get used to their academic environment and might need some time to get accustomed to it, until they get to the point where they are fully responsible and autonomous.

Based on our observations, we saw that students still depended on the teacher giving them instructions and telling them what they were supposed to do and how they had to do it with the help of examples. The teacher also often checked that students were working on the tasks she had given them by joining their groups and making sure that they were interacting with each other and completing the task correctly. We saw that students were also interdependent since they often needed to work with their partners at the same time to be able to complete a task. This is why we think that while collaborative learning was beginning to be developed, in our opinion there was also cooperative learning throughout the activities and tasks that students completed during this first semester. Moreover, during these class observations, we identified that the conceptualization of cooperative work in language learning usually encompasses working in small groups, regularly monitored by the teacher. In these groups, students worked with each other putting together ideas to complete a task and complemented their work by sharing what they had done and asking questions about it, to engage in discussion with their classmates.

- Interviews analysis:

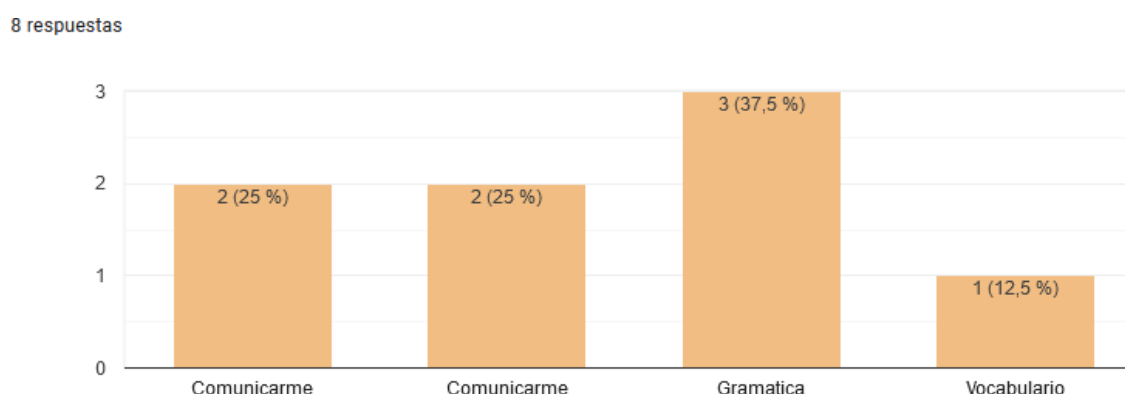
Let us remember that we did two interviews for this case study. The first one was at the beginning of the course and there were eight students interviewed. The second one was at the end and there were seven students interviewed. Also, to be able to analyze this information, we continued using the same conditions, as they were described before. The interviews consisted of 21 questions, 11 in the first one and 10 in the second one, some of them were closed questions and others were open questions.

In the first interview, the first question was about the perception they had of their initial classes. Students' perceptions were mostly oriented toward the Teacher talk/instruction/explanations because they liked how the professor presented the information and how she made herself understood. However, in the second interview there was more presence of ICT tools - Digital resources/tools and Teacher talk/instruction/explanation as students like the fact that the teacher was capable of having interactive classes through the use of technology.

Then, there were the expectations of the students based on the difficulties that they had at the beginning of the course. Some of them talked about improving in grammar, vocabulary, but mostly in speaking. It was important to them to feel comfortable communicating through English. In this case, 8 of 8 students agreed that their expectations were met and that continued in the second interview as the expectations were fulfilled.

Graph #1

Student expectations - Interview #1



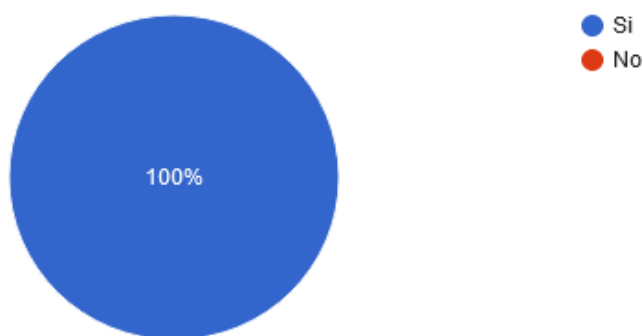
75% of students agreed on the fact that they wanted to improve in communication while the other 25% preferred to expand their vocabulary and grammar knowledge. These

results indicate that most students expected to work on their communicative competence and the ability to maintain fluent conversations when engaging in discussions with others.

Graph #2

Course met expectations - Interview #2

7 respuestas



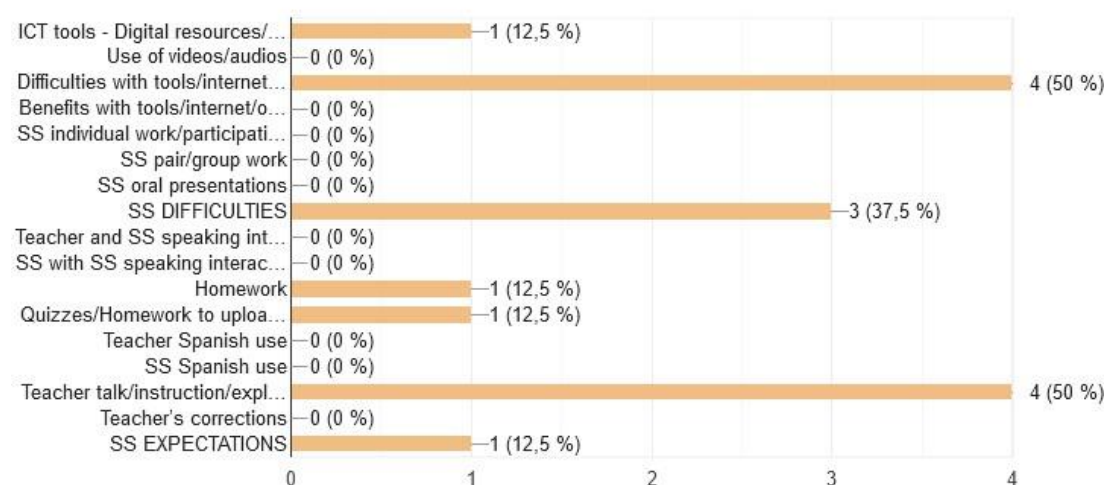
100 % of students agreed that the course met their expectations at the end of the semester and that they were happy with the results and work they did over the course. They expressed that they evidenced an improvement in their ability to communicate and knowledge of the language, which made them feel more confident when they wanted to communicate in English.

In terms of the difficulties that the students experienced, there is one outstanding aspect related to the lack of interaction between Teacher-Student due to students not being able to communicate with an effective vocabulary. It is important to mention that the first classes were a little difficult for the students because they were learning a new language and they did not have previous knowledge that might have helped them to learn English and communicate effectively, that is the reason why Teacher talk/instruction/explanation was difficult to understand.

Graph #3

Difficulties - Interview #1

8 respuestas



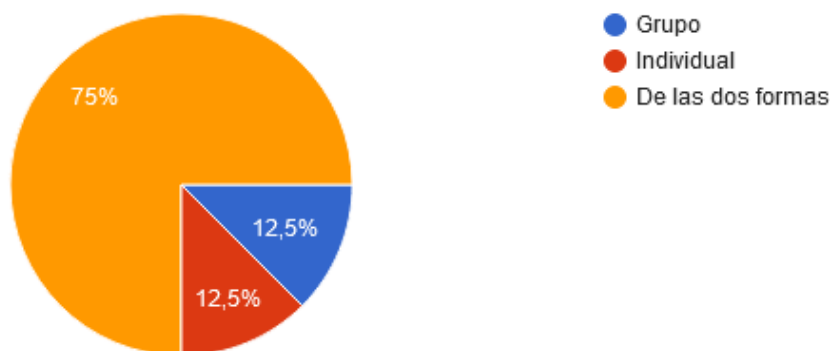
62.5% of students agreed that there were most difficulties with tools/internet/others and Teacher talk/instruction/explanation. In terms of difficulties with tools/internet/others, students usually mentioned that the internet was the most common one. They expressed that their internet connection was not always stable and that it failed at times, which caused them to be out of class for a few minutes, miss entire classes, and have unclear sound from their classmates and teacher. Considering tools, some students said that they had difficulties using Google Drive when trying to find material that was uploaded by the teacher. This happened because not all the students were familiar with Drive and they had to learn to use it as the course developed. Fortunately, the students always had the teacher's support/help with questions and doubts they had about this tool.

Then, there is the communicative and cooperative competence. Each student agreed that communicative competence and cooperation were present in their classes through student-student interaction and teacher-student interaction until the end of the course. In terms of the teacher's guidance towards group interaction, not all the students were comfortable. Most of them claimed to prefer both: group and individual work as shown in graph #4:

Graph #4

Individual and group working - Interview #1

8 respuestas



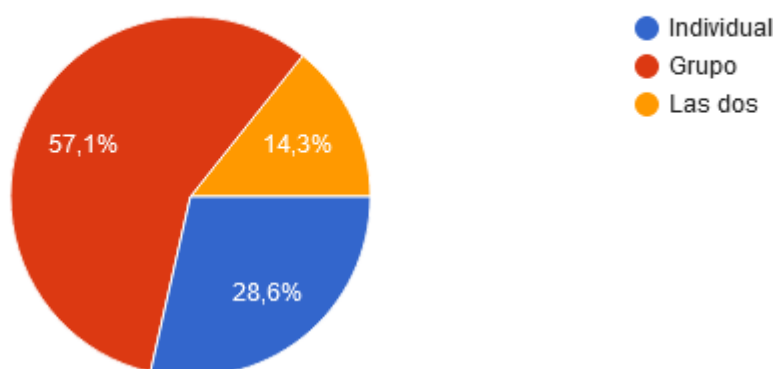
75% of the students preferred to work individually and in groups. Students mentioned that they thought they could maximize their learning if they worked with others because they could complement and help each other. Regarding individual work, some students expressed they preferred to work individually due to the fact that they could manage their own time and did not depend on a classmate to finish the work assigned.

Unlike the first interview, at the end of the course, more students answered that they preferred working in groups over both individually and in groups.

Graph #5

Individual and group work - Interview #2

7 respuestas



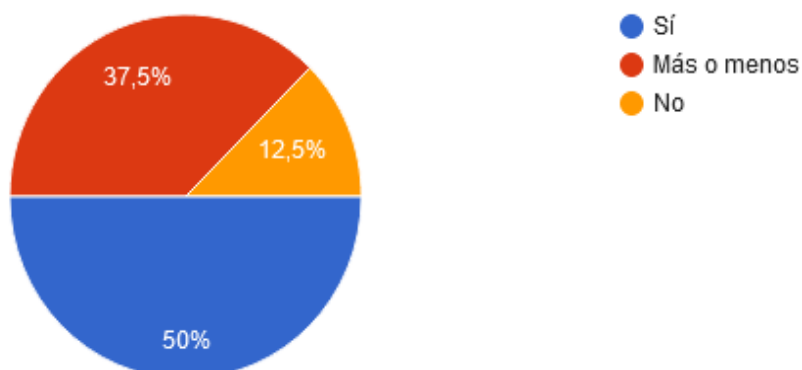
57% of students preferred to work in groups. At the end of the course, students expressed that they saw it was beneficial for them to work in groups for the reason that they could share their language knowledge, exchange ideas with their classmates, and practice more of their speaking skills. They also expressed that when they worked in groups, they had more speaking time and opportunities to participate in discussions. In addition to this, they usually felt less anxious or afraid of making mistakes because their classmates were supportive and helped them when they could.

Although the student interaction was present, they indicated that it was low because it is different to interact in a virtual classroom than in a normal classroom. In graph #6 we can see it:

Graph #6

Interaction student-student - Interview #1

8 respuestas



In the first interview, only 50% of the students answered they could interact well with their classmates and 37,5% said they more or less interacted with them in class.

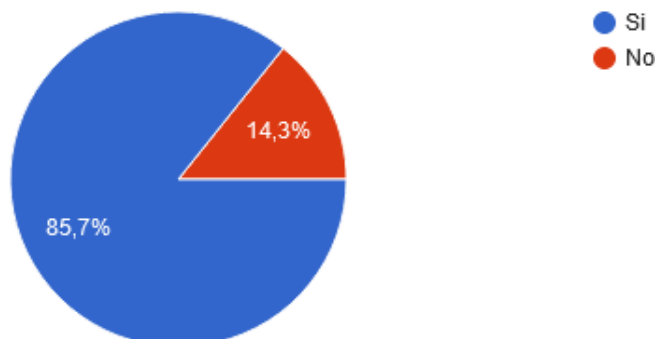
These results were fairly understandable due to the fact that at the time of the interview, students were still in the first weeks of the course and getting to know each other. Also, we believe that because the classes were virtual, this kept students from having more spontaneous in-person communication. Students usually had their microphone muted and only unmuted it when they had to answer questions they were directly asked or when they voluntarily decided to participate, which often only a few students did.

In the second interview, students answered that there was more group work and this resulted in more student-student interaction, as we can see in graph #7:

Graph #7

Interaction student-student - Interview #2

7 respuestas



85% of the students answered that they felt there was more student-student interaction by the end of the course.

E-learning has changed the way of learning and interacting because social interaction is through a screen, so are the tools to study. Nowadays, it is important to have all the technology and networked information to be able to attend classes as Naidu (2006) says. In the case we analyzed, there were some students who expressed in the first interview that they had difficulties attending classes:

Student 4 “(...) también las clases virtuales a veces pueden ser difíciles en cuanto al aprendizaje, hay muchas dificultades con lo del internet y pues no es lo mismo tener un clase presencial a una clase virtual (...)”

Student 7 (...) en cuanto a mi conectividad porque pues hay momentos en los que se va el internet cinco minutos antes de la clase y yo como que “y aquí qué? entró a la clase y estoy bien perdido porque no sé de qué hablan o que han trabajado (...)”

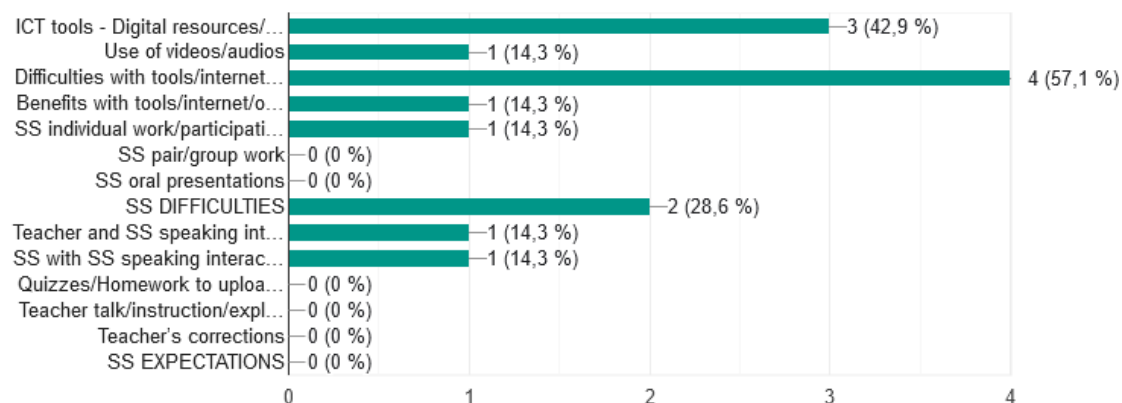
Student 8 (...) La conectividad, sí, porque en estos dos últimos días en uno se fue la energía y en el otro se fue el internet entonces a uno le toca siempre buscar como para donde ir o cómo uno se puede conectar entonces eso. (...)

Furthermore, there were students that did not feel prepared for E-Learning because their experience in High School with virtual classes was not very positive, but throughout this semester, they improved their learning and 3 students mentioned they had difficulties in their learning due to the virtual conditions.

Graph #8

How Virtual Learning affected or benefitted my English learning - Interview #2

7 respuestas

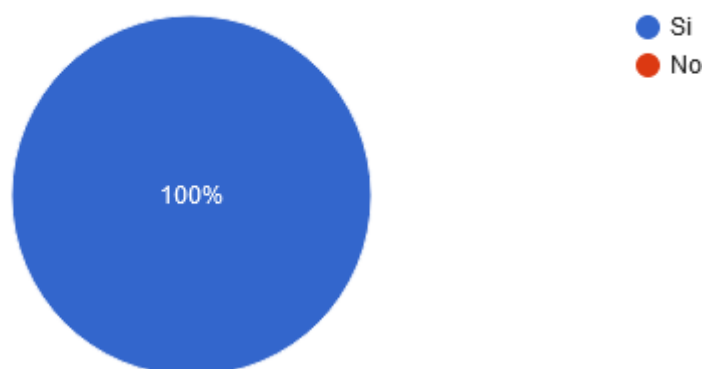


42% of students agreed that virtual learning was affected by Internet failure throughout their classes. Also, the teacher's knowledge about virtual classes was autonomous because they had to look for information and tools to complement their teaching. Initially, as this E-Learning was new at the university we thought that this might affect learning, but students agreed that their teachers were prepared to give classes and this was evidenced in the second interview.

Graph #9

Teacher's virtual teaching - Interview #2

7 respuestas



100% of the students agreed that the teacher knew how to use different ICT tools during classes and that as they used them throughout the semester, they could see that there was an improvement in how they were included in classes since each time, the teacher had more practice with those tools.

During class observations, we saw that sometimes the teacher had difficulties using ICT tools but she usually found a way to overcome them or quickly carried out a secondary plan to keep the class going. Also, when students were able to help the teacher, they always did it in a nice way. Regarding some of the ICT tools used throughout the semester, Zoom and Google Meet were the video call tools they used to have their classes and they also used Google Drive and Google Classroom to share class materials and submit students' work.

Based on the data collect through the interviews, we saw that students mostly agreed on the fact that they improved their language knowledge and communicative skills by the end of the semester. Most of them considered that they benefited from cooperative work because they could learn from their classmates, engage in discussions sharing ideas, and in this way, they felt they maximized their learning and felt more relaxed and comfortable speaking. However, there were very few students who still preferred to work

individually because they felt that working with other slowed them down and made them change the way they wanted to do the tasks assigned. Also, some students had other responsibilities in addition to their classes and this made it difficult for them to work with their classmates when they had to complete tasks out of class.

Despite in the first interview, cooperative conceptualization was a difficult process that the teacher faced, we could verified the teacher efforts through the classes and at the end was a radical change taking into account that interaction student-student and teacher-student as a social skill were improve and students recognize that cooperation facilitate the learning process of a second language.

10. Conclusions

In the analysis of the three sources of evidence used for this study, the results showed that during this course students were often working with each other, in pairs or groups, cooperating to successfully complete given tasks. The teacher proposed speaking, reading, writing and listening tasks that required students to work jointly so that they could fully complete each one of the tasks.

Cooperative work was frequently promoted by the teacher through those learning tasks with the help of digital materials, since classes were virtual. These materials included PDF texts, audios, videos, images and video conferencing tools like Zoom's breakout rooms and Google Meet video meetings for students to be able to work with one another. The teacher often encouraged students to share their thoughts and experiences with their peers and this exchange of ideas was done through discussions with all the class or the use of group and pair work. In this way, students were not always asked to accomplish learning tasks to present to the class after completing them but they were also given tasks to practice and engage in communication to improve their communicative

competence in real-life situations proposed in class by their teacher. In these tasks, students asked and answered questions about situations they had experienced, and they shared their thoughts and experiences with their classmates.

Based on the classes observed, we can conclude that students were able to develop and work on their communicative competence by taking part in group tasks and discussions. Because the teacher always used topics that they were familiar with and could speak about, the students felt connected to the topics and were able to express their experiences and opinions. This allowed most students to be able to engage in conversation with their teacher and peers.

We were able to establish that some characteristics that contribute to the development of communicative competence are: organizing students into small groups of 3 to 4 students, using familiar and appealing topics based on students' likes; assigning tasks that require students to exchange ideas and monitor them while they work in group; employing meaningful and real-life situations and using materials that include visual support (like images and videos). We found that working from these minimum principles helps students initiate discussion, get involved in conversation and they also feel less pressured and worried about participating and making mistakes.

When it comes to a methodology that promotes cooperative learning, we saw that the teacher implemented a task-based learning methodology which we believe promotes cooperation in the classroom, since it provides students with the opportunity to work together and help each other in order to complete a task. We consider it important to promote cooperative work because from it, students will develop important social skills that are necessary when working with others and because they can benefit from each other's efforts to achieve greater academic success. As Johnson et al. (2013) argue,

students involved in cooperative learning are likely to perform better academically and their quality of university life can improve thanks to the relationships they can create while working with their classmates, rather than doing it individually. As many students mentioned in the interviews, they had to cooperate with their peers and through that process they were able develop relationships with them and maintain constant interaction and dialogue that often led them to learn from each other and be more comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions in class because they usually did it in small groups of 3 to 4 students.

Regarding how cooperation is conceptualized in English language teaching, let us remember that Johnson, Johnson, & Smith defined it as “the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own, and each other’s learning.” (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith (2013, p. 3) Similarly, findings in our study suggest that cooperation in language learning is conceptualized as work that is done in small groups that allows participants to exchange knowledge and ideas, which lead to the creation of a written or spoken language piece. Additionally, throughout this process, the group participants make use of their social skills to engage in constant communication that helps them improve their language skills and enriches the learning outcome. In this way, each participant makes a personal effort to help the group, which in turn, not only benefits the entire group, but also each participant’s learning process.

Some of the difficulties we faced throughout the development of this study were the entire dependence on a good internet connection to be able to join the classes and follow them without having problems, due to sound cutting out or being disconnected from the video call. Students also encounter these difficulties and knowing that it is not possible for them to fix it could become frustrating. Another big difficulty was the national strike that caused a hiatus in all academic activities from late April to late August

2021, which not only brought uncertainty to all of us but also disrupted the students' learning process during a considerable amount of time.

As for future research, it would be interesting to see how both cooperation and collaboration happen in a more advanced English class since students would be able to be more independent learners compared with first semester students. Therefore, collaboration could be used more by teachers. Also, given the virtual conditions under which this study was carried out, due to the pandemic, it might be interesting to see how different the results would be if done in regular in-person classes.

Finally, according to our analysis, cooperation in the classroom can significantly help students improve their communicative skills as a result of the constant interaction students need to have with their peers in order to successfully complete different tasks, develop better relationships and build knowledge together collectively.

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12. Appendixes

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