

**PROPOSAL TO ENCOURAGE THE ENGLISH ORAL PRODUCTION IN A
MULTILEVEL CLASSROOM, WITH FOURTH SEMESTER STUDENTS OF THE
BACHELOR DEGREE IN MODERN LANGUAGES, ENGLISH AND FRENCH,
FROM UNIVERSIDAD DEL CAUCA AT SANTANDER DE QUILICHAO**



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Abstract

The present research study aimed at fostering oral production in a multilevel classroom with fourth semester students of the B.A. in Modern Languages, English and French, from Universidad del Cauca at Santander de Quilichao. This study was conducted in 2018 under the quantitative approach, with the participation of 25 female students and 3 male students in the experimental group during eight sessions. The methodology used to design the proposal was based on the social constructivism, which creates an academic environment where participants can produce spoken language. The analysis of the results showed that the use of collaborative work as a solution to alleviate the problems caused by multilevel classrooms worked out well.

Keywords: Multi-level, Motivation, Interaction, Collaborative Work, Oral Production.

Introduction

English is one of the most spoken languages in the world. The amount of schools and places where groups of people gather to learn a foreign language increases every day. This leads to mixed groups of classes. These environments represent a challenge for the tutors, who need to fulfill the needs of all their customers and adapt quickly to situations where students lack knowledge about a language structure; or situations where some students are supposed to be in a certain level of proficiency, but they are not. It is necessary to address the problem that this issue represents for education, since not everyone is working under the same conditions in the classroom, and some may feel with disadvantage. Due to the lack of resources that could help or guide the teachers in these scenarios, this study aimed at creating a proposal to foster oral production in fourth semester students of the Universidad del Cauca.

The chapter entitled *Problem Statement* tackles discusses why a multilevel classroom may become a problem without proper preparation. The *Justification* establishes the importance of encouraging collaboration among students to foster oral production in the target language. The theoretical framework discusses learning theories that help shape the model of the proposal, and to have a better perspective of the configuration of a multilevel classroom. *Previous Studies* sheds lights upon the investigations regarding the subject of this study at local, national and international level.

Keeping in mind that the objective of the project was to foster oral production in students, this experimental research was conducted under a quantitative approach, with an

experimental and a control group, constituted by students from the same fourth semester, which was divided into two groups. It comprised a pretest, an intervention, and a posttest. In the chapter dedicated to data analysis, some graphs are shown and discussed to illustrate the results obtained after the implementation of the proposal. Those kinds of activities included in the proposal are recommended to be included in the syllabus of the Modern Languages Program.

Problem statement

From the moment the researchers started their undergraduate degree in Modern Languages in 2014, they have perceived a particular and constant scenario in almost all of the English classes along the different groups. It mainly consisted of two issues: in one hand, compared to their peers, some students have higher oral proficiency in English, and they tend to use the English language whenever it comes to make oral interventions in class. On the other hand, within the same scenario, there are those students whose oral proficiency in English is low, which can be noticed because they choose their mother tongue over the target language to participate in class.

While doing scientific queries regarding this aspect, it was found that this phenomenon is registered in the existing literature under the names of *Multi-level* or *Mixed-ability* classroom.

As Gordon (2010) states “multi-level means that there is a wide range of learners from beginner students to advanced students”; Al-Humaidi & Al-Shammaki (2015) define it as “classes where students differ in their achievement, participation and their readiness to learn the foreign language... and have clear differences in their language levels” (p .33).

This scenario can become a problem: students do not have the same English level, but they will be assessed in the same way by international standardized tests. Additionally, according to field observations and the own experience of the researchers, they noticed that some students could feel intimidated, tense, helpless or anxious because of this situation. Horwitz et Al. (1986) state that students with higher levels of anxiety avoid participating in class when it comes to speaking out loud, while others could lose interest in it—because they try to keep up with the rhythm of the students with higher oral proficiency. On the

other hand, students with higher English level—compared to their class peers—can be discouraged or bored. The reason for this might be that most teachers expect every student to express him or herself with the same proficiency, so they can be assessed in the same way, and work with the same tasks.

Pereira (2010) (as cited in Mahmoud 2016), states that “the teacher’s manual does not help in this regard and the textbooks are not designed to address the needs of different learners” (p.4). If the instructor does not have experience teaching in this kind of groups, an enormous amount of cultural, intercultural, and linguistic wealth can be missed by him/her and the students.

Students who are proficient in English at Universidad del Cauca are advised to take a placement test, so they can take advanced classes. That does not offer a real solution to the problem of multi-level classes. In some cases, the groups are divided into two parties: students with low English proficiency and those with high English proficiency, which can result in discontent and discomfort in the students. This phenomenon called “the Pygmalion effect” was demonstrated initially in Iowa by Jane Elliot (1968), in an experiment entitled “*blue eyes, brown eyes*”, where part of the group had more advantages than the other. Students feel labeled, and the ones who have more knowledge of the language become a target for frequent questions by their peers, a practice that makes students spend time and concentration in other aspects. Students with low English level might assume negative attitudes, since their self-esteem and performance are compromised.

After reviewing Colombian journals specialized in language research including intercultural studies, social psychology, and foreign languages, it was found that the existing literature is almost null. Duque & Escobar (2010) and Serna & Erika (2014), have used the terms “multi-level” or “mixed-ability” in their contributions so far. This shows that

little importance has been given to the matter in schools, universities, and other academic environments at national level.

Research question

Does collaborative work implemented in a multilevel classroom, foster the increase of the English oral production in fourth semester students of the B.A.in Modern Languages, English and French, from Universidad del Cauca at Santander de Quilichao?

Justification

Participation and interaction play an essential role in the learning and teaching of languages. Regarding oral production, it is necessary that the learners participate in the activities developed in class, which aim at gaining experience in the oral interaction on a daily basis. For this reason, this project seeks to foster English oral production throughout collaborative work as a possible way to relieve the academic burden in the students of fourth semester of the Bachelor's Program Modern Languages, English and French (BPML-EF) by implementing activities and didactic sessions, in which students work in groups with the purpose of reaching goals as a team, thus encouraging participation and interaction in the target language, regardless the proficiency level. With this proposal, an optimal performance in the foreign language is sought, as well as an increase in the student-faculty interaction, since the main objective is to communicate.

This project seeks to benefit undergraduate students of the Modern Languages program in first place, since students with low proficiency levels, compared to their classmates, might feel intimidated before their class fellows or the teacher's decisions to make them participate. They will avoid participating in class, as evidenced by Rinaudo et al (2002), in a study carried out in Jujuy National University in Argentina. The implementation of this project will empower these students to participate in class; that is, students would be active subjects in their learning process. In the same way, students with high proficiency level will increase their oral production without having to restrain themselves to their classmates' learning pace. Moreover, this proposal will allow the researchers to reflect on the creation of pleasant environments, where students can feel that they are part of a learning process, and comfortable with their participation in class. The proposal seeks to bridge the gap

between students with high and low English oral production, so that they both have the same opportunities to make oral interventions.

On the other hand, this project might benefit the English-French Modern Languages program, because the findings could be taken into consideration in the design of the syllabus. It could also serve as a reference for future research, since there are no studies focused on this subject at local level, so far.

Multi-level classrooms have been a possible obstacle on the learning process of the students throughout their career. Nonetheless, it has not received appropriate attention. It is reflected in the lack of research or proposals which may offer possible solutions to it in the university's database. Thus, it is important to open the route that leads the way for a possible solution to alleviate the problem.

Objectives

General objective

To foster the English oral production of the fourth semester students of the Bachelor's Program in Modern Languages, English and French, of the Universidad del Cauca at Santander de Quilichao.

Specific objectives

1. To identify the English oral production levels of the fourth semester students through a standardized pretest.
2. To implement activities based on collaborative work.
3. To assess the English oral production of the students through a post test.

Hypothesis

Research hypothesis

Collaborative work fosters English oral production in fourth semester students from the B.A. in Modern Languages, English and French from Universidad del Cauca.

Null hypothesis

Collaborative work does not favor English oral production in fourth semester students from the B.A. in Modern Languages, English and French from Universidad del Cauca.

Description of the research context

Santander de Quilichao is located at the northern of the Department (state) of Cauca, approximately, 86 km from Popayán, and 55 km from Cali. It limits to the north with the municipalities of Villa Rica and Jamundí; to the west with the municipalities of Caloto and Jambaló; and to the south, with the municipality of Caldono. Its economy is basically based on agriculture; its inhabitants grow products such as: sugar cane, coffee, pineapple, and yucca, among others.

According to a report from the DANE (2010) (The National Administrative Department of Statistics), the population projection for Santander de Quilichao from 2005 to 2020 would be 96,518 inhabitants, most of them being indigenous, African-Colombians, and mestizos, making of this territory an intercultural one. That is why the town is also known as “Tierra de Oro” (Golden Land), name given by the Pijaos, an ancient community who inhabited this territory, which also offers a great diversity of fauna and flora.

Education is one of the overriding activities in this municipality: it has 116 public educational institutions, two of them, public universities (Universidad del Cauca and Universidad del Valle), which offer different programs.

Universidad del Cauca opened in Santander de Quilichao in 2012. At the beginning, it offered just two programs: Modern Languages, English and French, and Law. Nowadays, the university not only keeps offering those programs, but also Civil Engineering, and Industrial Agricultural Engineering. It counts on two Campuses: La Casona, and Carvajal.

Theoretical framework

To conduct this experimental study, researchers considered concepts that would shed lights to scientifically interpret the effect of the proposal in the participants, namely *Motivation* which is key in the learning process; *collaborative work*, proposed on the social constructivism as the vehicle to achieve an effective learning; *interaction*, necessary to develop a healthy academic environment promoting the social link and cooperation; *learning theories* from authors such as Piaget's *constructivism*, in which learning is perceived as an active, not a passive actor; Vygotsky's *social constructivism*, where it is stated that learning is a collaborative process, as well as his *zone of proximal development theory*, stating that a student can learn in presence of a knowledgeable student; Bruner's *scaffolding theory* which can be applied to all sectors for all ages; and *multilevel classrooms* and *Oral production*: the former referring to the way in which the classroom characteristics are defined, and the latter, to the ability to communicate something in an effective way.

Multilevel groups

The concept of *Multi-level* has been defined along a wide range of disciplines. Regarding language learning, it can be also found as *Mixed-Ability* or *heterogenous*. Authors like Valentic (2005); Matthew-Aydin & Horne (2006), Montes & Formosan (2006), Simanova (2010); and Tomlinson (1995) would agree that it is a classroom where everyone has different levels of performance in different language skills. Some other authors define it as

students who are in the same classroom and have similar background but vary in their abilities in the subject area.

Gordon (2010) uses the term mixed-ability, as a set of people who share the same course but have different English levels. In the same way, Al-Humidify & Al-Shammaki (2015) defines it as “classes where students differ in their achievement, participation and their readiness to learn the foreign language” (p.33) or “classes which have clear differences in their language levels” (p.33).

Other authors, such as Anijovich, Margerbier & Sigal (2004), define these classroom conditions as *heterogeneous*, and state that the instructor must be aware of the implications of working in an environment like this. They declare that:

The concept of a heterogeneous classroom not only aims to become aware of the variations in a population of students in terms of their intelligence and learning achievements, but also includes relevant differences when it comes to teaching: origins, ethnicity, culture, language, socio-economic situation, personal characteristics, learning styles, intelligences, inclinations, needs, desires, abilities, difficulties, among others. (p, 23).

Melinda Roberts (2007) defines the multilevel classroom as a space where students with different levels of knowledge meet:

Students arrive in an ESL classroom with varied educational backgrounds. Some students have had little or no education. Others have completed the equivalent of our junior high or high school, while still others have attended trade school, college or university, and even doctorate programs...students in the same ESL classroom can range from illiterate/low-literate to high academic proficiency. (p.2)

Tomlinson (1995) on his book “How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-ability Classrooms” illustrates that the literature indicates that teachers are not prepared with the

methodologies or a set of skills necessary to deal with mixed ability or multi-level groups and that the manuals do not offer a solution that works for this condition. He states:

Though today's teachers generally work with single classes with students of nearly the same age, these children have an array of needs as great as those among the children of the one-room school. Thus, a teacher's question remains much the same as it was 100 years ago: "How do I divide time, resources, and myself so that I am an effective catalyst for maximizing talent in all my students?" (Tomlinson, 1995, p. 37)

According to UNESCO (2005), the multilevel classrooms are meant to stimulate and enrich the learning process. They require a more flexible and inclusive education in order to strengthen them, and to guarantee the participation of all students. UNESCO (2005) defines the purpose of inclusive education as the place where all students can learn without considering their differences. It is practically a construction of collaborative knowledge.

"The purpose of inclusive education is to let the teachers and students feel comfortable with diversity and do not perceive it as a problem, but as a challenge; an opportunity to enrich the learning and teaching process", (UNESCO, 2005, p. 14). The multilevel classroom is a phenomenon that poses a challenge for teachers and students when they do not know how to take advantage of it.

Based on the previously analyzed definitions of Multi-level group, for the researchers, it can be understood as a classroom where students have clear differences in terms of oral production. In this particular environment, there are always students who perform at similar level, which most of the time, are the larger part of the class; but still, there are those who perform "below" the required level, needing extra time to finish the tasks, to express an idea orally in the target language. Those who perform "above" the required level, express their ideas easier than their classmates, usually for longer periods of time.

Motivation

Motivation has led humans to places never imagined. The concept has been defined in many fields worldwide throughout the human history. Authors like Santrock (2002) (as cited in Naranjo, 2009), define motivation as “the set of reasons why people behave in the ways they do” (p.153). For the purpose of this study, just motivation for language learning is considered. Gardner (1985) once acknowledged it as the length one strives to acquire the language because of the fancy to do so and the contentment derived from it. This means that it works as a system: a person gets as much satisfaction as he/she wants from learning a language if he/she keeps learning it.

Other authors, such as Valentic (2005) think that the teacher should motivate students to develop a positive attitude to language learning, since it seems to be deeply involved in the roots of teaching, and it affects the classroom in a wide range of aspects. He maintains that:

Motivation is the wheel that moves the whole teaching and learning process and as such deserves a full attention to be paid to it. It influences teaching dynamics and somehow determines what can be achieved in the class. It also affects the effectiveness of teaching and learning. (p.2)

Educators must keep in mind that their actions, tasks, and activities directly affect motivation in students, so, they must be careful with what they do. (Trechera as cited in Naranjo, 2009) believes that there are factors that the tutor should keep in mind when defining an objective to positively affect motivation. These factors are:

Knowledge, one must know the goal and the means required to reach it; *acceptance*, because there should exist an agreement about what is desired to do; complexity, it means that the goals must be difficult, but not impossible; they must represent a challenge, but they should not be unattainable; *specificity*, since the more concrete the objective, the easier it will be to contribute with an effort to achieve it. (p.162)

Not keeping these aspects in mind could result in students' loss of motivation. Learning a language takes a long path that is not always easy and this can affect the motivation in students. According to Valentic (2005), not being motivated would result in a lack of interest and, consequently, a lack of willingness to seek new experiences and scenarios which are crucial for the development of the oral competence in any language. In other words, if students are not motivated, the process is likely to be an uphill struggle for them and for the instructor.

In a nutshell, in this study motivation will be understood as the excitement that conduces students to start learning a language and being able to use it in every possible situation. Motivation could be, somehow, nurtured by the educator if a clear and consistent lesson plan is held, having used tools and theories that allow the students supply their own requirements. The lack of motivation might result in complex situations that could compromise the language learning.

Oral production

Oral production is known as the capacity human beings have to communicate. It is not only the production of sounds but the ability to give a syntactic meaning, semantic and grammatical to the sounds according with the context. Bailey (2005) defines oral production as a set of aspects which work together to communicate a message. "What we fail to notice on a daily basis, however, are the myriad physical, mental, psychological, social, and cultural factors that must all work together when we speak" (p. 2). In the process of learning a new language, oral production is one of the four abilities to be developed. Likewise, Bailey, Bula (2015) agrees that oral production is more than

production of sounds; it is a combination of many factors that are not just physical.

“Speaking is also a very demanding skill for language learners. When speaking, students need to pay special attention to several variables, among others cultural, phonological, social, psychological, linguistic, and physical conditions” (Bula, 2015, p. 2). For some students it can represent a challenge at the moment to orally express their ideas due to factors such as fear, lack of confidence or anxiety. It is precisely what this project wants to focus on, in getting students to feel comfortable when expressing their ideas without feeling that they are going to be judged by other students.

The oral production is defined as “the capacity to communicate effectively within a particular speech community that wants to accomplish its purposes” (Hymes as cited in Peña & Onatra, 2009, p.13). In other words, oral production refers to the ability to convey a clear message when we do oral interventions, for which it is necessary to have some abilities such as: fluency, accuracy, cohesion and coherence.

The researchers understand oral production as the ability to express an idea, an emotion, a feeling with a combination of sounds that can be understood by the members of a same linguistic community. We can simplify it by saying that it is the ability to convey a message with a clear sense in a spoken manner.

Coexistence

For carrying out the collaborative work and to get students conduct their tasks in pairs or in group, or even to support others it is important that students have good relationships with their classmates. It is necessary to create a good academic environment and thereby ensure

the participation and engagement of all members of the group. Coexistence refers to share a common place with one or more people frequently, who think and act differently. Humans are social beings who interact with nature or other individuals. Coexistence in the classroom should be found in: tolerance, respect, otherness, and companionship. Daniel Bar- Tal (2004) defines it as a mental state in which individuals accept their differences and resolve their disagreements without resorting to violence (Daniel Bar- Tal 2004). Otherwise the societies in which we live would be no more than a battlefield where only the strongest and most aggressive would survive. That is why coexistence should be promoted by teachers in order to create pleasant environments for learning.

Interaction

Interaction is a mutual practice carried out by two or more people, where they interact, exchange information and ideas at the same time in a social context. “It consists of the understanding and studying of the figure of communication systems. That is, life understood, perceived and lived as relationships that move and are moved by their interaction, and other relationships” (Galindo, 2005, p.557). Likewise, Goffman (1991) considered that “interaction can be defined in the strict sense as that which occurs exclusively in social situations, that is, in which two or more individuals are in the presence of their respective physical responses” (p.177). Thus, the motivation has a significant importance in the learning, in fostering the participation and the engagement of the student.

The interaction between teachers and students is a social act that needs to encompass the personal, professional, social, and human needs of the learner. These needs are not merely the needs to construct knowledge, but the need to be heard, praised, and accepted into the community of learners, among others (Patel, 2003. p. 3)

As Patel (2003) states interaction is not merely the exchange of ideas and information but also the need to be part of the group inside and outside the classroom. Students are seen as human beings who need other factors which make him feel an active and valuable learner in the process of learning the target language.

Based on the previous definitions of interaction, for the researchers, it could be perceived as the communication given between two or more people, where information and ideas about specific topics in a social context are exchanged. Classrooms are social environments; thus, interaction is happening at all times. It could take place in a teacher-student way or a student-student one. When it happens in a collaborative environment, it seems to work more dynamically than in environments where collaborative work is not considered, because everyone is involved in the context.

Constructivism

Constructivist paradigm deepens on the learning origins, the way it is created, shaped, and shared, as Méndez (2002) states: “It is mainly an epistemology; it means a theory which tries to explain what the nature of the human knowledge is” (p. 82). Constructivism has been widely attributed to the psychologist and pedagogue Jean Piaget (1952). These theory inquiries into the origins and processes that a human being carries out for the acquisition of knowledge. It is a construction that takes place in the permanent interaction that human beings have with society. In this theory the person is considered an active, dynamic performer who is aware of her/his mental structures.

Coll, C (1993) says that constructivism is a psychological theory of a cognitive nature; this one postulates that:

The learning process of a language, like any other human learning process, is the result of a constant construction of new knowledge with the consequent restructuring of previous ones. In other words, from a constructivist conception, learning does not take place when copying reality, as postulated in behaviorism, but it supposes a reconstruction of the previous knowledge that a person has to give place in said cognitive structure to new knowledge. (p.7)

Based on Coll (1993) constructivism is the theoretical base to confirm that learning acts as an active agent with frequently restructurings, as all processes of the human being, learning occurs in observation, in experimentation and in interaction with other individuals. It will then be the final product of a whole collective process that cannot be carried out individually.

The learning theory explained above let us perceive that we learn better in a social environment where we construct meaning through interaction with others. We can also understand that this construction does not only take place with the mother, as this was the way constructivism was first interpreted, but it is also executed with other human beings.

Social constructivism

Later on, a new constructivist current arises; this trend is known as *social constructivism*, whose pioneer is Lev Vygotsky (1978). It is based on Piaget's constructivist model, but it has significant differences, as the language theory and the origin of learning. According to Piaget (1952) the language is the result of the cognitive development; whereas Vygotsky (1978) states that the language is the core of it. According to Piaget (1952) the learning origin stems mainly from the exploration, and it is developed individually. In contrast, Vygotsky (1978) maintains that learning is a social construction. Besides that, Vygotsky highlights the need of the tutor in the learning process; Piaget stated that the learning

process take place in the inner of human being and it is an individual process thus the tutor role is not necessary.

Although Piaget's cognitive constructivism and Vygotsky's social constructivism share certain postulates, as considering the learner an active subject, Vygotsky (1978) says that learning is the construction of an individual reality built on interaction with others, it is given as a response to a collective process. "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological)" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.68).

In his theory Vygotsky (1978) states that human learning is an active process. It is the result of interaction between the human being and society. It begins in a social context (interpersonal); afterwards, it transcends into an internal context (intrapersonal). It is based on an observation, internalization, assimilation, and reproduction process of the mental structures. The human learning process is not just the result of an individual action, and it is not a simple, external or innate process determined by the developmental stage. For Vygotsky (1978) learning is the result of a historical and social procedure, which requires the relation of both the biological and the social aspects.

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice:

First, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological).

This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 68)

It is important to mention that Vygotsky and Piaget postulates refer to a speaker, who transmits an encoded message, and a listener, who receive it and tries to understand what is being communicated, that communication process is possible because both individuals share the same linguistic code that was previously constructed in mutual agreement.

With that being said, social constructivism plays the main role in the study we conducted. It also influenced the creation of the proposal and the route used to implement it. The researchers believe that the tutor is not the only one who possesses the knowledge in the classroom. They believe it can be retrieved from everyone in a class, even the person who does not participate or engages in the activities during regular English classes.

Zone of proximal development

Vygotsky (1978) made significant contributions to education. He developed the theory of “zone of proximal development”, which sponsors the collaborative work and is considered the principle of the learning and the ability development. Vygotsky (1978) defines the zone of proximal development as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky,1978, p.86).

The zone of proximal development explains that it is necessary for an individual, with more experience and knowledge, to work as guide in the learning process; that role is assigned generally by the tutor who provides knowledge and helps mentees to construct their own. Vygotsky (1978) maintains that more qualified students can support others with less expertise; they can encourage and stimulate the development of underdeveloped abilities.

The zone of proximal development explains that a given task that might be complex for some students, but it can be fulfilled with other peers as an element of support, in order to encourage the learning and development of the abilities. This was taken up by Jerome Bruner y David wood (1978), in the “scaffolding theory”. To these authors, learning is based on continuous restructuration; possible due to the interaction and collaborative work. These authors define the scaffolding as the support that the student receives during the acquisition of knowledge. For Bruner and wood (1978), the support depends on the student knowledge level: that is, a student with a low level needs more support. This support is gradually removed until the student is able to fulfill the task by himself/herself.

After studying this theory, the researchers understand that support can come from the tutor or a partner with more developed skills. Focused on collaborative activities, it is also known as “collective scaffolding”. The learning is mediated by external factors that require the interaction with other individuals, it is in continuous construction. The zone of proximal development sets out the collaborative work as a necessity for an affective learning. Learning theories accord that the learner has to be immersed in an environment that allows him or her to explore and use the knowledge the have acquired in the classrooms.

Collaborative work

Collaborative work is defined as the fulfillment of a task in which there are two or more participants generating ideas. It looks for creating learning environments that help developing and stimulating individual and group abilities. In collaborative work the results are given as the fruit of a social construction.

In an article called “inclusive classroom and cooperative learning” Pujolas (2009) defines the collaborative work as the equal participation of a group in order to achieve a goal that encourages, and potentiates, interaction and learning. The author says:

We can define collaborative work as the didactic use of small teams of students, generally of heterogeneous composition in performance and capacity, although occasionally they can be more homogeneous, using a structure of the activity that assures the maximum equitable participation (so that all members of the team have the same opportunities to participate) and optimises the interaction among them, so that all members of a team learn school content. (Pujolas, 2009, p.12)

Jerome Bruner and David Wood (1978) define the collaborative work as a scaffolding necessary to advance in the construction of knowledge and the fulfillment of tasks, where learners support in trained peers in order to reach goals, that would be impossible to achieve individually or without assistance.

It involves a scaffolding process that enables a child to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his/her unassisted efforts. This scaffolding consists essentially of the adult “controlling” those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner's capacity, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence. (Jerome Bruner y David Wood, 1978, p.199)

This tells us that there are some areas where the learner will need a hand traditionally given by the guide. In this case, the elements that are initially beyond the learner's capacity are not going to be “controlled” by the tutor, but instead, they are supposed to be managed by the same participants. According to Jerome Bruner and David Wood (1978), all apprentices have a need of guidance in their learning process, a person who can help them to fulfill a task that could be tedious in first instance for them. Soon they would develop the same and other similar tasks themselves due to their expertise, practice and experience. Hence, collaborative work would be a very good way to manage multi-level classrooms.

Literature review

Looking for information that could support our theoretical positioning, guide the way the proposal was going to be implemented, and help as a point of reference for later comparisons, the researchers sought for studies proposing activities which encouraged the oral production in English throughout peer coaching or teamwork.

Studies at international level

At this level, the researchers found a study carried out at Sultan Qaboos University, Oman: “Learner-centered Group Work in Multi-level EFL Classes”. 206 students belonging to 6th and 7th semester of EFL participated in it. The study aimed at reviewing some steps that would alleviate the burdens of a multi-level group. It proposed that teamwork can become more “learner-centered” in order to foster collaborative work within the classroom. It also suggested that students should be allowed to choose their groups or partners, and also, that this strategy would be more effective when working with adults, or - like in this case- college students, since adults have more developed skills. Furthermore, it also suggested that the first language can be used in order to succeed in the target language during the development of activities. The effectiveness of this proposal was judged in the percentages that pointed to collaborative work as a good strategy. However, it is recommended to carry out more experiments implementing this technique, in order to assess its effectiveness. (Mahmoud, 2016).

In a study entitled “A Case Study on Multi-level Language Ability Groupings in an ESL Secondary School Classroom: Are We Making the Right Choices?”, carried out in Toronto, as a result of Soto’s (2010) doctoral thesis, the participants were five students and one

teacher. The researcher tied together two theoretical frameworks, one by Lave and Wengers (1991), and the other by Dörnyei and Ottós (1998), with his own. In this study, the author answered questions and approaches put forward by other researchers in previous studies, such as the concept of “self-regulation” in the action phase proposed by Dörnyei and Ottós (1998), which can be understood as legitimate peripheral participation, or the ability to “imagine” or “line up”, proposed by Lave and Wengers (1991). With this, the author proved the effect of multilevel groups on the participation and motivation in high school students. The researcher found that not managed well, these two variables are affected both positively and negatively by heterogeneity in the classroom. By contrary, if the teacher nurtures a supportive environment, the students with lower, middle and higher levels of proficiency can get along well. The teacher is a role model in scene in this study, this one engages peer mentoring through example. The teacher acknowledges that due to the multilevel classroom nature, not all student’s needs are encountered, so one must be motivated to try to solve it on their own. This study shredded lights on the ideal conditions for the proposal to work out well.

Studies at national level

In Colombia, few studies have been conducted in terms of multi-level groups or mixed-ability groups. After carrying out an exhaustive search of these two concepts in eleven journals specialized in linguistics applied to the foreign language teaching, researchers found that, so far, just two studies focusing on this topic and language learning and teaching, had been carried out.

One of the studies: “Let the Problems Come, and Let the Learning Take Place” done by Duque and Escobar (2001) describes the meaning of a multilevel course. Additionally, the author describes some reasons why multilevel classrooms are formed. He also proposed some ways to alleviate the problem. This study did not carry out experimentation and is limited to a literature analysis. The research proposes collaborative work as one of the possible ways to alleviate the burden of the multilevel groups. Likewise, it recommends more training for teachers in terms of dealing with this kind of groups.

The other study called “Language-Building Activities and Interaction Variations with Mixed-Ability ESL University Learners in a Content-Based Course” was conducted by Héctor Serna & Ruíz (2014) at the Rosario University, Bogotá. It is an action research and implements language construction activities and interaction patterns. In this research, 8 two-hour sessions were applied to a multilevel group of 24 students: 22 female students, and 2 male students. This study aimed at describing how these two techniques can increase the interaction and content learning between students and teachers. The study shows that it is possible to succeed in the objectives of the course, in terms of students’ oral participation, as well as content learning, in students with different English language skills.

Studies at the local level

So far, no studies regarding this subject have been conducted at the local level. Therefore, it is appropriate to encourage research on oral production in multilevel groups in the region.

Methodological framework

This research was carried out with students of the Bachelor's Program in Modern Languages, English and French, from Universidad del Cauca at Santander de Quilichao. The participants were selected because they had some specific characteristics that made them appropriate for carrying out the research: different English level, origin, ethnicity, and age. According to Roberts (2017), this group could be defined as a multilevel classroom with ideal conditions for research. Additionally, this was the only class divided into two groups what made it suitable for researchers, in order to have a control and an experimental group.

Population

Participants came from different places, such as: Corinto, Caloto, Villa Rica, Puerto Tejada, Bolívar, Popayán, Santander de Quilichao and surrounding departments, such as: Valle, Huila, Putumayo, and Nariño. As a result of the different origin, researchers found a rich cultural diversity with a significant predominance of the Indigenous, African-Colombian and Mestizo ethnicities. Both groups had the same hours per week, but different schedules.

The population was mixed. It consisted of twenty (22) female and nine (9) male students, with ages ranging from 18 to 23 years old. The group selected as the control group was IV A Class, and it consisted of 11 female and 3 male students. The experimental group was IV B Class and it consisted of 10 female and 5 male students. It is important to note that most of the participants had graduated from public schools and had not taken any other courses before being admitted to the university.

The selection of the control and experimental group obeyed to the balance between the male and the female population in each group. The researchers found out that IV B class was more balanced, and -for that reason- they decided to choose it as the experimental group.

Approach

The design of this study was the quantitative one, since this study attempted measuring the oral production levels of the participants before the beginning of sessions, and after the end of them. The researchers wanted to obtain empirical data about the influence the participants had along the development of the activities based on collaborative work inside and outside the classroom.

Instrument

After an exhaustive search for an appropriate test to measure the oral production level of the fourth semester students of the Bachelor's Program in Modern Languages, English and French, the researchers decided that the most appropriate tool was an oral interview (see appendix B). The test was designed by the Ministry of National Education, in order to apply it to people who were going to participate in the summer camps in Colombia in 2016. The test was applied to four cohorts of 3802 participants in the summer camps.

The test was divided into five questions starting with the basic level and increasing its complexity. It allowed the researchers know if the participants were able to answer all the questions coherently.

The basic level questions were asked at the beginning in order to generate confidence in the students, and also to engage them in using the target language. The complex questions

were asked at the end of the interview, so the researchers could measure the fluency, grammar knowledge, vocabulary usage, accuracy and oral production level.

Methodological phases

This research was divided into four main stages which are going to be explained below. Each of them allowed the researchers to have an organized, detailed view of the process where they intervened in early stages of problems that arose.

First phase:

The first step of the process was to analyze the population in detail, throughout a characterization survey by the researchers. Through that survey, researchers collected some data, such as the name, age, origin, previous English studies, and some qualitative aspects, such as the English level they believed they had and how they felt in the English class regarding their participation level. This way, researchers could identify particular and general characteristics of the participants. (See Appendix A).

Second phase

The second step in the research was to apply an oral test (interview) which was recorded in order to collect data regarding the participants' oral production level. The data obtained was measured according to length of oral production, fluency, grammar, and accuracy. (See appendix B).

The oral test was carried out a week before the application of the activities. Researchers interviewed the participants one by one. Sometimes, during the test participants did not understand the questions, so researchers asked them again and slowing down. They did not

understand some words at times; so researchers used synonyms, in that way participants might answer the all questions. It is important to mention that researchers had done some observations to the groups to know participants and also to do a first approach; to gain the confidence of the group.

Third phase

The third step was to implement the methodological proposal. This proposal was designed based on the theories and previous studies carried out worldwide. It was designed as a lesson plan, which included activities, objectives, tools, and estimated time for each session. The proposal was carried out during 8 two-hour sessions. During this time, the activities focused on encouraging the participants' oral production. (See Table 1). It consisted on activities based on collaborative work. Eight sessions of two hours were carried out. During the activities, participants had to talk most of the time, others were related to vocabulary in order to learn more words related to daily activities, verbs and objects. On the other hand, there were some activities related to cultural aspects and history, in order to acquire knowledge about different themes and to talk about many different aspects during the speaking sessions. Asking out loud was a technique we suggested at the beginning of every session, that way we would solve the doubt as a group instead of doing it individually; it would help to reinforce the knowledge about the subject in the ones who knew it already and solve the doubt on the ones who did not know it but did not want to ask because of many given reasons.

Fourth phase

The last step was to apply a post - test to the participants. That post- test had the same pre - test framework, in order to ensure the validity of the obtained results, they were

assessed by contrasting the pre - test and post — test, so the effect of the proposal in the participants could be evidenced. A debrief took place in this stage. At the end, researchers analyzed the data, and drew conclusion of the research.

Findings and results

Results of the interview

For the analysis of the interviews and the pre and posttests applied, participant's oral production was assessed within length of oral production, range, accuracy, fluency, interaction, coherence to rate the amount of speech that was being produced, as well as its quality. The results from the interview were also crossed with the rubrics proposed by CEFR in terms of speaking.

Speaking skill in CEFR

As it can be seen in figure 3 and 4, 7% of the students in the experimental group stayed in A1 level. 60% of them went from A1 to A2. 20% remained the same level. It also means that 13% of the students went from A1 to B1 level in the same period of time. This means that 73% of the students from the experimental group leveled up.

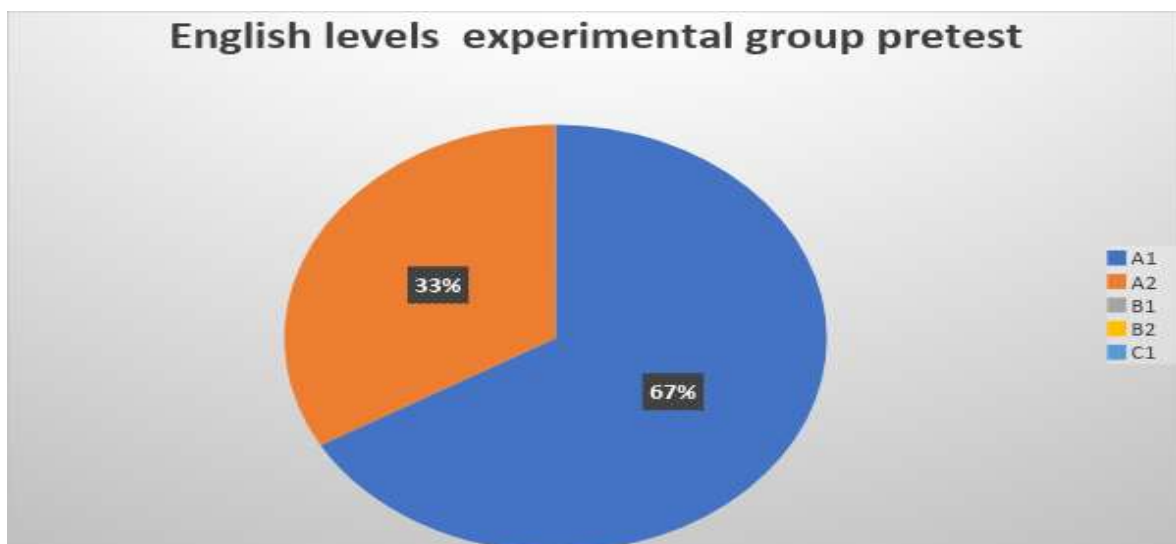


Figure 3 — *English levels experimental group pre-test*

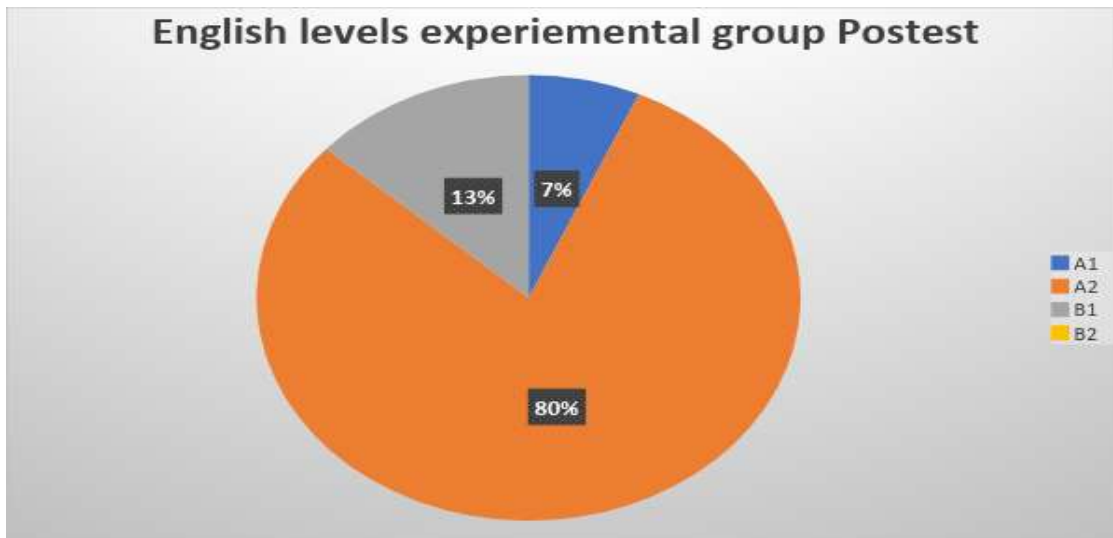


Figure 4 — *English levels experimental group post-test*

On the other hand, in the experimental group (figures 5 and 6), 11% of the students remained in A1 level, which means 34% of the participants went from A1 to A2 level, and 33% remained in A2. Only 11% of the students went from A2 to B1; the only C1 person remained the same, according to the CEFR. This means that 45% out of the participants leveled up.

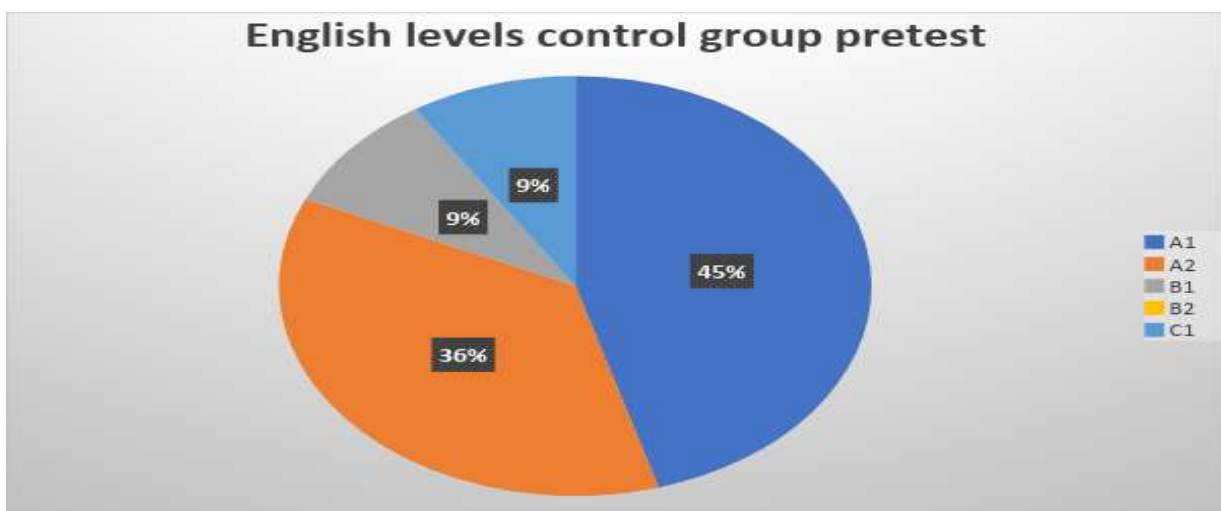


Figure 5 — *English levels control group pre-test*

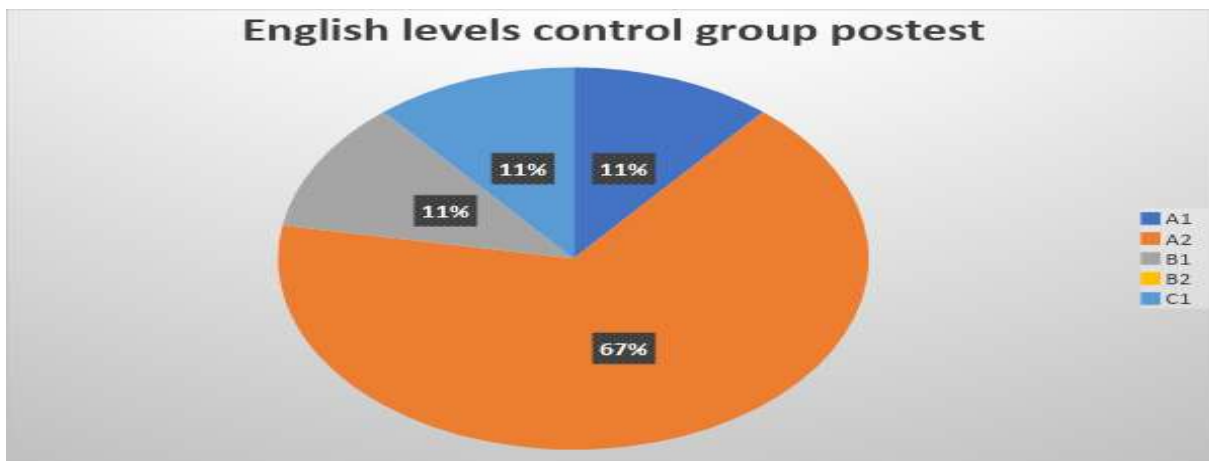


Figure 6 — *English levels control group post-test*

The figures above show a general view of the changes participants from both groups had regarding the CEFR levels. Nevertheless, it does not show the full picture of the impact of the activities in the participants of the experimental group. Along the implementation process, the researchers found that collaborative work fostered oral production in all the participants from the experimental group. Besides, it also improved some other areas that are worth mentioning. Below are some factors that encouraged students to improve; those factors helped the researchers realize the importance of a positive academic environment where students can feel free and comfortable to talk and express themselves regardless of their mistakes.

Length of the oral production

Concerning range, accuracy, fluency, interaction, coherence, not many significant differences were found, the improvement in the quality of oral production. It was maintained overall by the participants in the experimental group. The verbal tenses were

considered during the analysis of the pretest and posttest. None significant difference was perceived in either the experimental or the control group.

Since the beginning of the experiment, the researchers predicted that an increase in the levels of the English oral production was going to happen in both the experimental and the control groups, since both were exposed to English classes for about ten hours a week, they could study and practice after classes; there were many other factors that could result in the improvement of the two groups. Yet, if compared, the time the participants took to answer the questions in the pre and post-test was different for each group. As seen in figure 1, 100% out of the participants in the experimental group increased the time of their answers in the post-test; it might be due to the confidence they gained during the sessions with the guides and their peers, as well as the new vocabulary that participants learned. As a consequence, they might have felt comfortable to express more ideas during the post- test. On the other hand, in the control group, the increase was observed in just 56% out of the participants, while the remaining 44% reduced the time to answer in the posttests—as shown in figure 2. This means that almost half of the control group had a regression in the oral production, while all the participants in the experimental one improved.

Interaction and participation in the activities showed that participants could make part of the conversations during the activities, appealing to previous knowledge of the language learned at college. Grammar was not considered in this study, which just focused on making students express orally, regardless of grammar mistakes. In some occasions, students forgot the right words in English and appealed to Spanish, then they switched back to English, as Mahmoud (2016) suggested in his study, it permitted participants to keep up with the conversation forget about the language barrier. Participants realized they were able to talk for longer periods of time. The results show that interaction and participation

increased in the target language, thus fostering the oral production levels in the experimental group.

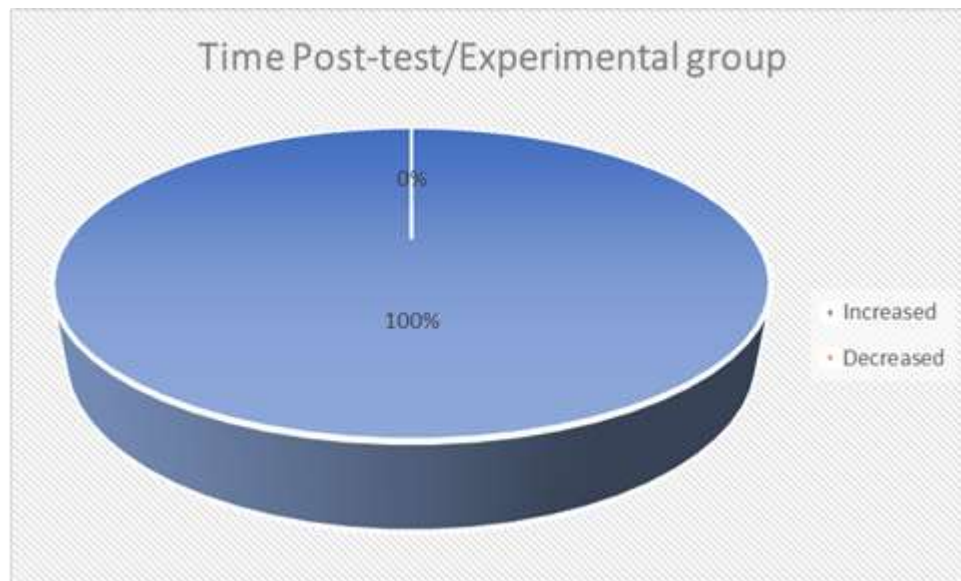


Figure 1 — *Time post-test/Experimental group*

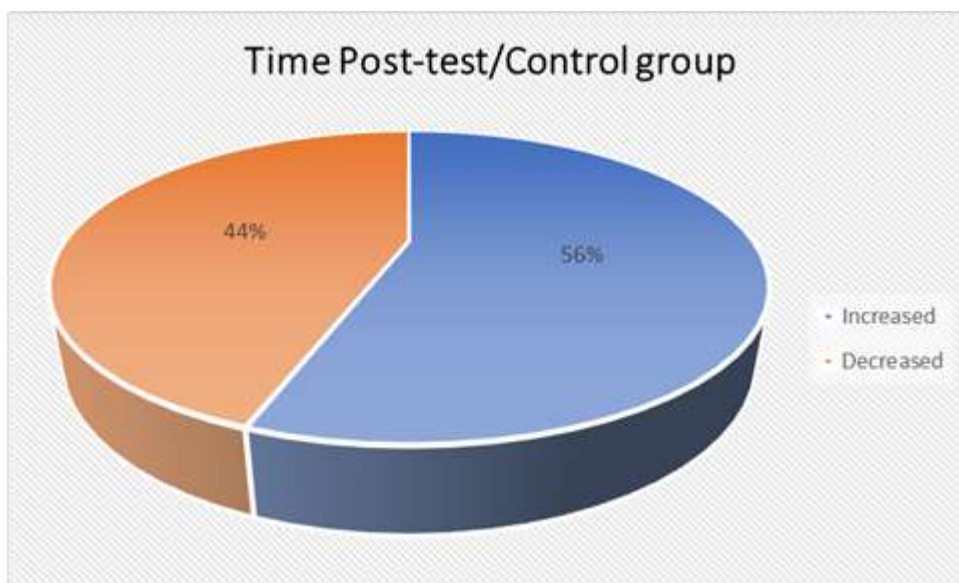


Figure 2 — *Time post-test/control group*

The debrief

The fourth phase also consisted of doing a debriefing of the proposal as a whole. After the last session and after having conducted the post-test, a conversation where everyone shared their opinions about the proposal and the way they felt with it was engaged. It is worth mentioning that the researchers guided the discussion through a semi-structured interview.

During the interview researchers asked participants about collaborative work; what they thought about the activities and what they thought about working in pairs or groups. Participants commented that the activities were good in terms of motivation and encouragement to participate and interact with different members of the group. They were capable to express their ideas. They also thought that they felt comfortable having a conversation, even to discuss and lose the fear to talk. They also commented that the sessions were positive; that collaborative work is a good way of teaching in a multilevel group which allow that all members make part of the course and help each other

This proposal was as positive to participants as to the guides. Activities also encouraged researchers to learn and enrich the quality of their teaching, to have better group management, to give simple instructions when participants do not understand, and also to give advice when participants feel they were not capable of doing something.

“The activities were very interesting, I thank you very much because I learned things, I learned general culture...vocabulary, you helped me a lot [...]” (S4) (our translation).

Participation

In the Modern Languages Program, professors look for English classes where everyone participates in the activities using the target language, some students did not do it because of their low English level, they did not feel comfortable speaking in the target language. During the sessions proposed by the researcher, participation was at high numbers during the activities, participants did oral interventions asking questions, giving opinions, or expressing their ideas.

During group activities every participant had a task to complete in order to achieve a common goal, when time was over researchers could notice that groups wanted to be the first to start the activities. In other activities, as the “Gay adoption debate”, participants raised their hands to participate first and they also argued against classmates’ comments about the topic, they showed themselves more open to intervene.

On the other hand, when participants could not make part of the class and express their ideas because of the lack of vocabulary and the mispronunciation of the words, participants asked guides and classmates for help in order to be more comfortable and sure about the ideas they wanted to share with classmates. Vygotsky (1978) maintains that more qualified students can support other with less expertise, they can encourage and stimulate the development of underdeveloped abilities, this was evidenced during the activities what permitted a high interaction and participation in the sessions.

The participation of students depends largely on the motivation they have on the subject. If the tutor wants to get all students to focus on the subject, the class must be dynamic, and the topic should be taught through different ways, to prevent students getting bored. If the

students are motivated by the issue in question they are going to participate, but if they do not understand they might lose the attention easily and they might feel bored.

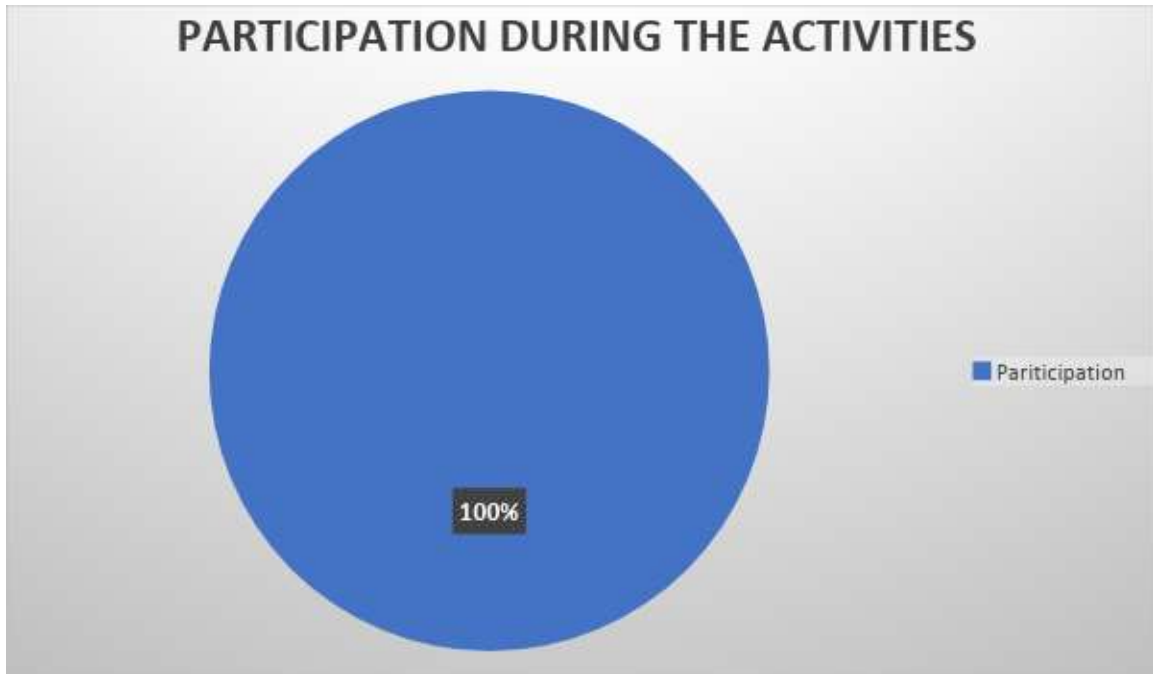


Figure 7 — *Participation during the activities*

Motivation

During the implementation of the activities, it could be noticed that this factor increased progressively. At the beginning participants did not show motivation at all. It might have been because they thought researchers would do the traditional classes in the classroom where everyone is sitting down in a row, but after the first and second session participants felt motivated and eager to know what the activities were about. They asked about the next sessions as well. They were motivated to do the activities planned inside and outside the classroom. They mentioned that the activities could help them in the process of learning the target language, even in the future, to plan what they will do after finishing their undergraduate degree.

The theory suggested that the objectives must be balanced in order to positively affect motivation. As part of our proposal objective, we aimed to balance our activities, so that students would not lose motivation in the process. Part of it can be observed in participants affirmations, such as “...*the activities were balanced, for instance, there were some where one had to speak a lot and others where it was more about understanding the words...so it didn't turn boring because of the balance we talked about [...]*” (S5) (our translation) or “*I really liked the activity ‘interpreters’... because I spoke and the other translated. Besides, many people here want to be an interpreter*” were done in the debriefing. Topics that catch the interest of the learner are a key element to keep motivation on high levels during classes.

Interaction

Participants stated that interaction in the group increased thanks to the proposal. They said that before they did not have good communication, they did not even talk to some classmates because of the preconceptions they had about their personalities or work styles. The activities done in pairs and groups allowed participants to interact and collaborate with different classmates. Besides, participants mentioned the interaction among them was done lacking fear of mispronouncing a word or using it wrongly. Furthermore, they said they thought classmates could help in many aspects in the process of learning the target language, some participants asserted:

“I think it was a good experience ... I do not interact and sometimes I avoid talking because I do not know vocabulary, or I don't know how to express myself, but in these sessions, I felt the need to talk and advance[...]” (S8) (the researcher's translation)

Interaction was at high levels during the sessions. The communication and exchange of information between participants and guides enriched the environment and improved the confidence to express their ideas in a freeway, as Vygotsky (1978) says in his theory of social constructivism, the learning is constructed in an active way, that is why the interaction is an important factor in learning languages. Participants can increase the oral production through interaction with others. This was evidenced during the activities like ‘circle of opinions’ or ‘my summary’, where participants interacted with different classmates and also with the guides.

“I’d never had the chance to interact with people from other semesters, I feel nervous to talk and I know what I want to say but I cannot. Anyway, at one activity we did, you controlled the time and we had to talk fluently, to go to the point, and do not give many laps. I learned vocabulary, and interacted with my classmates with whom I hadn’t not had the opportunity to speak with” [...] (S9) (our translation)

Academic environment

The academic environment was an important element during the pedagogical sessions because the participation depended basically on the interest, enthusiasm and confidence of the participants. Thence, it was important for starting each session to implement a warm up, it permitted to stimulate the participants and to involve them in the activities, as well as to engage them with the language.

Through collaborative work, students developed friendship bonds that were internalized promoting learning. That strategy built a communication bridge that increased the mutual support. The fear at the moment of participating in class almost disappeared, and the class became a space where feedback among participants could be given. Students with higher

oral proficiency felt it was necessary to help others in order to advance, and they considered the achievement as collective and not individual. Learners who were less proficient needed to be assisted, as Jerome Bruner (1976) proposed in his theory of scaffoldings— these were found in their classmates. The confidence bounds, let them take risks and to contribute more to the class, making a richer space for knowledge.

“I was able to see that in the time we were interacting with you I feel we joined more as a group, I feel that we collaborated more; I feel that I can ask anyone anything and they would respond; I feel that it helped us a lot to grow as people, and as a group. I feel very well in the group [...]” (S8) (the researcher’s translation)

During the sessions, students stated to have perceived more comradeship. They could interact with peers who they did not interact a lot with, before the implementation of the proposal. It helped them to develop team spirit where everyone felt useful in the group. Collaborative work eliminated student’s status and got them to work together towards a collective goal. The activities focused on guaranteeing that everybody participated. They realized they were able to do things that they did not know they could, as to speak about random topics with previous preparation, to sum up ideas and share them clearly, and to speak in public without feeling anxiety. They had the chance to learn, enjoy and build a good academic environment. They stated during the reflections done at the end of each session, that the methodologies used during the proposal were funnier than others used regularly in the classroom. According to them, one might evidence that students can learn while they are enjoying their classes through games and recreational activities, strengthening relationship inside the group. Besides that, they were convinced that the success of the group depends on the cooperation of each one and not on individual efforts.

“I think we were very individualistic, or we used to work just with a certain group of people, because we didn’t know the way the others were, and one judges and says ‘look the way that one or this one works, I don’t like it’. So, it was really interesting because I think everyone works here and we realised we can help each other [...]” (S1) (our translation)

The environment in the control group did not show any change, even the participants stated that they felt an environment a little unfriendly and some sort of rivalry between them. In the control group they were divided into sub-groups because of their own decision. It is important to mention that students with higher proficiency did not participate a lot to avoid that other students called them names or asked them too many questions. Besides that, students with less proficiency preferred not to participate to avoid the judgments or because they just did not want to get out of their comfort zone. The proposal is a good method for alleviating these kinds of situations inside a multilevel classroom where teachers and students need pedagogical tools for getting an inclusive learning.

For the researches, one of the main strategies for succeeding during the sessions was to create a good academic environment, encouraging the participants to be part of the activities. The idea was to have a reciprocal learning and to get a collective goal on the basis of individual knowledge. It was a great experience for participants that helped them to accept and value other people’s points of view and to strengthen tolerance and acceptance.

A pleasant environment fostering the desire to participate or to be part of a group was essential in the development of the project, pleasant environment permitted that all student work with their partners without exceptions or differences, nobody felt excluded which generated motivation.

Participants' confidence

When speaking in the target language students can fear mistakes and judgment. Most of them do not want to face the bullying created as a consequence of a bad pronunciation, a grammar mistake or maybe a word used in the inappropriate moment. As a consequence, anxiety appears during the learning process. According to Horwitz and cope (1986) there is a connection between the levels of anxiety and the success on the second language learning one could have. Horwitz (1986) defines anxiety in the foreign language “as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning to arise from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (pg.128). As a consequence, students could hold back in class. This phenomenon is due to several factors, Meihua Liu (2006) mention some of them: “various factors such as a limited vocabulary, lack of practice, lack of preparation, fear of making mistakes and being laughed, and memory disassociation contributed to student anxiety in oral English classrooms”. (pg. 131)

On the analysis of data, researchers made a comparison between oral production during the pre-test and post-test, and they found that the level of oral production of the participants increased in the experimental group. Students felt more comfortable speaking during the post-test. Researchers believe that these results were due to the confidence developed during the sessions and the empathy with the classmates and facilitators. During the sessions, the goal was clear “collaborative work is the way for a successful learning”. No public judgments, no bullying. The achievement of the goals was possible just through the cooperation of all members of a group, regardless their levels of proficiency in the target language. The confidence in students is important at the moment of participating in class, fulfilling their tasks, or dive oral presentations, also when resolving tests. The anxiety

caused in a determinate moment also known as “specific anxiety reactions” can block students' minds causing that they forget most, if not all, of what they have previously studied. For that reason, it is important to work on strategies that allow students to alleviate those symptoms and to achieve the objectives of the learning process.

Learning depends largely on the confidence a person has, and anxiety represents an obstacle for it. To promote confidence in students should be an essential part of the process. “Students strongly feel that anxiety is a major obstacle to be overcome when speaking in another language, and several recent approaches to foreign language teaching, such as community language learning and suggestopedia, are explicitly directed at reducing learner anxiety” (Horwitz et al. 1986).

Researches focused on encouraging the confidence of the participants in order to get them to participate during the sessions. It improved, not just the academic environment, as a result their oral production increased as well (see figure 7). After the comparison it is clear that the confidence generated during the sessions on participants got them to speak and interact more during the tests. Researches even noticed that participants looked more relaxed during the last interview.

Collaborative work

In early stages of this project we wondered if implementing collaborative work in a multilevel classroom would work out well for the increase of oral production in a specific population. After implementing the proposal, we found that collaborative work is a key

element when trying to bridge the gap between students with higher and lower levels of oral production. We found it would contribute by giving a shift to the way learning was perceived by students; making themselves another source of knowledge instead of just the professor.

“the proposal was very helpful, in the activities we saw that it was not about one person, it was always about the group, we always helped each other, we always collaborated, we were always as one[...]” (S8) (our translation)

Along the implementation of the proposal we witnessed how collaborative work functioned as a tool student could use whenever they had the need to. There were moments, for instance, when a person did not understand the grammar or was not sure about the pronunciation of a word; he or she felt free to ask publically, for the reason that they felt at ease with the group and the environment generated by the activities and the facilitators.

“The support we give each other must be maintained, it is very important for a good communication. If someone doesn’t know something, we must act and collaborate as we can [...]” (S8) (our translation)

“... What also worked for us was that you corrected us in our pronunciation and our classmates as well [...]” (S5) (our translation)

When doing the debriefing at the end of each session, they were eager to participate in the target language. In a lot of moments, they mentioned they felt comfortable interacting with the group, where they complemented their classmates’ ideas and could also contribute with their own ones. This facilitated that everyone committed to reach the objective of the activities in a collaborative way.

“*We helped each other and we realized the correct use of a word ourselves [...]*” (S5) (our translation)

Analysis of the implementation of the proposal

After the implementation of the proposal to encourage the English oral production in a multilevel classroom, it is possible to point out conditions as an open space to perform the large group activities, the motivation, eagerness to participate, participants’ confidence and disposition to collaborate in a group as requirements to design a safe social environment for participants to speak in English and construct meaning with their more knowledgeable classmates. After carefully analyze the sessions, the researchers discerned that the term *knowledgeable* was relative; sometimes it could mean a person who had more expertise in pronunciation, or another who knew more words, or one who was who was better at grammar and could contribute to solve a doubt that the rest of the group may have got, and many others. The utterances of the participants during and after the experiment as well as the experience gained during the development of this study permitted the researchers to conclude that the proposal has a positive impact in the Modern Languages students, since it allows the tutor to create a place to communicate in the target language.

Analysis of the proposal

From the genesis of this research, each session was planned for students to perform activities as a group. They would be involved in activities that comprised topics such as “general culture” or required nonverbal skills. These elements helped the researchers to create a suitable environment where participants felt comfortable enough to orally express themselves. The activities were designed to take place outside and inside the classroom.

Researchers encouraged participants to talk as much English as they could.

Notwithstanding, the use of Spanish was allowed, so that participants would not feel forced to talk in a language they might have not felt at ease with; this based on the scaffolding theory proposed by Bruner y David Wood (1978). With this, the researchers tried to avoid triggering anxiety as much as possible too.

Researchers treated the problem of multilevel classrooms from a different point of view in order to solve it: the combination of collaborative work, the zone of proximal development, and the social constructivism made the learning process more interesting and appealing. Participants could re-construct knowledge and meaning with their peers.

After having experienced a different way of learning a language, the participants reflected on the value of including this model in the syllabus of the Modern Languages program. Some affirmations, like the ones below, were mentioned on the debriefing that was conducted at the end of the proposal's implementation: *"I think professors should consider including this kind of activities in their program. That way, I think, the classes would be more interesting, and we can practice more...we don't want to be always inside the classroom [...]"* (S1) (the researchers' translation).

Conclusions

The activities from the proposal permitted interaction among students regardless their English proficiency level, mispronunciations, grammar faults, fluency, accuracy and so on. Researches became aware that the relationship established between facilitators and students is a crucial point in language oral production, the more comfortable students feel with their guide, the more confident they will feel to talk. Respect, support and willingness to help others are also important points to have in mind when teaching a multilevel group.

The figures showed that a 100% of the participants in the experimental group increased their oral production. The debriefings researches conducted at the end of each session, as well as the one done at the end of the proposal's implementation allowed researchers to perceive that the relationship among participants also improved, not to mention their eagerness to learn a useful language as English is.

Oral production is affected by many factors inside and outside the classroom. By implementing collaborative work in those spaces, we can cope with lots of the fears and doubts students have when learning another language. It will also reinforce friendship, values, and the sense of helping others without expecting them to help back.

In a nutshell, the proposal to encourage oral production through collaborative work has shown positive results when it comes to foster oral production levels, besides it encourages other areas like the interaction among students and the academic environment. Researches encourage taking the proposal into longer implementation to have a perspective of the results in long term.

Recommendations

The activities proposed to encourage oral production through collaborative work were carried out with students belonging to the fourth semester of the B.A. Program in Modern Languages, English and French of the Universidad del Cauca at Santander de Quilichao. It is important to keep in mind the suggestions below before applying the proposal, so to achieve positive results.

- Encourage students to speak English and ask for information regarding any activity, no matter if they mispronounce, or if they do not use English grammar correctly. It is important that the instructors speak English to model.
- Make students work in peers or teams, so they can help each other in order to fulfill an assigned task.
- Consider the place where the activities are going to be carried out; some activities require more room to be performed.
- Test the material to be used in the class in order to make sure they allow the students to meet the objectives.
- Make sure students have understood the instructions correctly before starting the activities. This will help to develop them smoothly.
- Develop activities outdoors to prevent the routine and to keep students motivated.
- Make sure everyone participates during the activities; sometimes participants refuse to talk or isolate themselves from the groups performing the tasks.
- Recommend participants to ask their questions out loud; that would remind everyone about the topic or may solve doubts.

- Encourage students work with different classmates during the activities.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Dear participant,

The purpose of this study is to design a proposal that allows to enhance the oral production in English of students from fourth semester Modern Languages from the University of Cauca. The information you provide will be useful for the Modern Languages Program and the improvement of its academic practices. Your answers will be kept confidential and as the data collected will be used for academic purposes only, and it will not allow anyone to link the participants with their answers.

Estimado participante,

El propósito de este estudio es diseñar una propuesta que permita fomentar la producción oral en inglés dentro de un curso multinivel de cuarto semestre de la Licenciatura en Lenguas Modernas de la Universidad del Cauca. La información que usted proporcione será útil para el programa de Lenguas Modernas y el mejoramiento de sus prácticas académicas. Sus respuestas se mantendrán confidenciales y los datos recopilados se usarán sólo para propósitos académicos y no se permitirá que nadie vincule a los participantes con sus respuestas.

Nombre: _____

Apellido:

Correo institucional: _____ **Celular:**

Género: Masculino ___ Femenino ___ Otro ___ **Fecha de Nacimiento:** Día: ___ Mes:

___ Año: _____

Edad: _____

Lugar de nacimiento: Ciudad/Pueblo _____ Departamento

Lugar donde vive: Ciudad/Pueblo: _____ Departamento:

Etnia (*escoja solo uno*):

Afrocolombiano __ Mestizo __ Indígena __ Blanco __ ROM (Gitano/a)

__ Otro __

¿Cuál es su lengua nativa? _____

¿Se enseñaba la asignatura de inglés en el colegio donde se graduó? Sí

__ No __ *Si la respuesta es Sí, conteste lo siguiente:*

Número de horas por

semana _____

Describa su experiencia en

general _____

¿Ha estudiado usted inglés en instituciones fuera del colegio y la universidad? Sí __

No __

Si la respuesta es Sí, conteste lo siguiente:

¿En qué institución estudió? _____ Horas por semana: _____

Tiempo de permanencia en el lugar: Años _____ Meses _____

¿Tiene certificado de competencia en inglés? Sí __ No __

Si la respuesta es Sí

¿Qué nivel de inglés tiene usted de acuerdo con el marco común europeo de referencia para las lenguas? A1 __ A2 __ B1 __ B2 __ C1 __ C2 __

¿Qué examen de suficiencia tomó?

KET __ PET __ TOEFL __ IELTS __ ¿Otro? __ ¿Cuál?

¿En qué fecha realizó el examen de suficiencia? Mes __ __ Año __ __ __ __

Si la respuesta es No

¿Qué nivel de inglés **considera** que tiene usted de acuerdo con el marco común europeo de referencia para las lenguas?

A1 __ A2 __ B1 __ B2 __ C1 __ C2 __

¿Hace intervenciones orales haciendo uso del inglés en clase de inglés?

Siempre __ Frecuentemente __ A veces __ Muy poco __ Nunca __

¿Por qué?

¿Se siente cómodo cuando hace interacciones orales en inglés en la clase?

Siempre __ Frecuentemente __ A veces __ Muy poco __ Nunca __

¿Por qué?

¿Tiene alguna experiencia enseñando idiomas? Sí __ No __

Si la respuesta es Sí, conteste lo siguiente:

¿Qué idioma(s) ha enseñado? inglés __ francés __ español __ otro __ ¿Cuál? ____

¿En qué tipo de instituciones ha enseñado? Escuela __ Colegio __ Instituto de idiomas __

Otro __ ¿Cuál? _____

¿Cuánto tiempo trabajó? (en números) Meses __ __ Años __ __

¿Trabaja actualmente como profesor de idiomas? Sí __ No __

¿Qué piensa del salón con relación a la producción oral y participación en inglés?

¿Cree que la metodología que el profesor de speaking utiliza es la adecuada para la enseñanza del idioma? Sí __ No __ A veces __

¿Por qué?

¿El profesor toma en cuenta los diferentes niveles de producción oral en inglés de los estudiantes para realizar las actividades de clase? Sí __ No __ A veces __

¿Por qué?

Cuando se trata de realizar actividades relacionadas con inglés en el salón prefiero:

Trabajar solo/a __ Trabajar en grupo __ No tengo preferencia __

¿Por qué?

¿Habla usted inglés? Sí __ No __

¿Dónde utiliza su inglés? En el trabajo __ Campus universitario __ En casa __ Lugares públicos __ Redes sociales __ Otros espacios ____

¿Cuáles? _____

¿Qué tan a menudo habla inglés? (*en horas por semana*)

___¿Con quién utiliza su inglés? Amigos ___ Compañeros de Clase ___ Familiares

___ Extranjeros ___ Profesores ___ Otros ___ ¿Quiénes? _____

¿Cómo estudia usted inglés en casa?

¿Ha viajado a países de habla inglesa? Sí ___ No ___

¿Cuales? _____

¿Cuál fue el motivo de su viaje? Vacaciones ___ Estudio ___ Trabajo ___ Visita ___

¿Le gusta el inglés? Sí ___ No ___

¿Por qué?

¿Cómo ha sido su experiencia con el idioma inglés en general?

Muy buena ___ Buena ___ Regular ___ Mala ___ Muy mala ___

¿Por que?

Al firmar esta encuesta doy cuenta que mis respuestas son verídicas y confiables. Además, acepto que los datos recopilados sean utilizados con fines académicos —como publicar en revistas, diarios de investigación, etc.

Firma

Appendix B

Instructions for Administering the Oral Interview:

1. Familiarize yourself with the rubric prior to administering the evaluation.
2. Read the directions out loud to students in Spanish before beginning the assessment.
3. Read each question slowly and clearly. Give the student ample time to answer. Do not prompt students during this evaluation, however, you may repeat questions as necessary.
4. Questions have a “starter” question in bold and “prompt” questions in italics. Always read the starter question, use your judgement with which prompt questions are needed to elicit the maximum response.
5. Record and time the interview.
6. Each interview should last between 5 minutes.

Rubric Assessment:

1. Use the rubric guide to assess student’s performance in the 5 competencies measured.
2. Take notes during each response on each of the 5 competencies.
3. Spend 3 minutes after each test reviewing your notes and placing the student in their averaged score.
4. Use the scoring guide to average the European Framework level for each student.

Oral Interview

Question number 1: please describe yourself to me.

Tell me about your appearance and your personality.

Question number 2: Tell me about your family.

How many people are in your family? where are they from? what do they like? Who do you live with?

Question number 3: look at this photograph, Tell me what you see.

What is your interpretation of the picture? what colors do you see? what do you think the people are thinking?

Question number 4: This is my first time in Colombia. can you give me some

advice? What can I do or see in Colombia? Where is the best place to visit? why?

Question number 5: Tell me about your experience learning English.

What are your hopes for your English learning? How can English help you in your life?

What do you find difficult easy about English.?

End of the Test

Appendix C

Session 1

Activity 1	RPS Slide
Time	10'
Objective	To stimulate students towards learning
Procedure	You and your challenger need to be toe to toe. You play rock paper scissors and the person who wins then takes their forward foot and puts it behind the other, heel to toe. The person who lost has to slide forward to meet the winner's toes while keeping their back foot planted.
Rules	None
Materials	None

Activity 2°	Organizing a story
Time:	25 minutes
Objective:	To develop communicative skills
Procedure:	A writing divided into several parts will be delivered to each group. Each member of the group will have a paragraph. The participant who believes having the introduction should read it outloud and the others should look for the following paragraphs until completing all the content. Then, students are going to listen the audio and to verify if it is correct, finally questions about each paragraph will be asked; so that each member of the group participates with the answers.
Rules:	All groups will have the same story. Each student will read their part out loud. Everyone must participate with their respective paragraphs and answers according to the question.
Materials :	Pieces of the story This is the VOA Special English Agriculture Report.

Activity 3	Memory
Time	40 minutes
Objective	To improve the ability of memorizing words and talking about them
Procedure	Students are going to be separated into groups, and they are going to go to the board one by one, once on the board, they are going to look some objects in a picture during 30 seconds, after that the picture is going to disappear, so they should write and say as much objects as they remember from picture.
Rules	Each student must participate
Materials	Pictures,computador, video beam, markers.

Session 2

Activity 4	Screaming Toes
Time	10'
Objective	C
Procedure	Start out in a circle with everyone looking down. You will have five seconds to find someone's feet to look at ad when the count is complete, you look up at the same person. If they are also looking at you , you both yell. This can be played in two circles where the yellers switch circles.
Rules	None
Materials	None

Activity 3°	General knowledge
Time :	25 minutes
Objective	To develop communicative skills
Procedure	Participants will be divided into groups and questions will be asked about general culture. Participants will have a time limit to answer the questions, the answers will be multiple-choice.
Rules	if the answer is incorrec the others can respond
Materials	Computer, projector.

Activity 5°	Circle of opinions
Time:	20 minutes
Objective:	To develop communicative skills
Procedure :	The participants will make two circles, one inside the other, a question will be given, and the participants will talk about it for a minute or so, later they will rotate, and a new question will be given.
Rules:	None
Materials:	None

Conversation starters for the Circle of Opinions

What do you think about English language?

What do you think about French?

What is easier for you, English or French?

Do you want to work as a teacher?

Would you like to learn another language, why?

Would you like to travel abroad? Where?

Have you talked to foreigners? How was your experience?

Did you study English before starting the college?

What do you like doing on your free time?

What did you do during the student's national strike?

What do you think about studying three (3) academic semesters in a year?

Do you like animals?

What is your favorite book and why?

What is your second favorite carrier?

What culture do you admire and why?

If you travel to other country which cultural element do you carry on your bag? why?

Activity: 6°	My memory
Time:	20 minutes
Objective:	To learn vocabulary

Procedure :	The participants will be divided into groups of four, the leader is going to say a word, so, one of the members is going to repeat it, after that, the facilitator is going to say another word and the second participant has to say the first word and the new one, and so on until they complete the all words.
Rules:	Just one participant can talk at the time
Materials:	None

Session 3

Activity	Guessing painting
objective	To practice vocabulary
Procedure	Each participant should have their eyes covered and paint an object in the board the others participants should guess what the object is.
Rules	Participants have 1 minute to paint the object
Materials	Marker, something to cover participants' eyes

Activity 7	Interpreters
Time	30 minutes
Objective	To encourage speaking and listening.
Procedure	Each student must speak during almost one minute and a half and his/her partner should try to interpret what he/ she is saying, after that, they should change the roll.
Rules	everyone must be translators
Materials	None
Topic	Students life, one anecdote, a story

Activity	Describing words
Time:	20 minutes
Objective:	To encourage oral production
Procedure:	Students are going to be divided into two groups, then, they are going to select one participant who will be in charge of describing an object, but the participant must not mention some keywords. The object and the keywords will be in a flash card which she/he should choose randomly. The winner

	will be the group which guesses more quantity of words in a specific period of time.
Rules:	The participants must not mention keywords. He /she should speak just in English
Materials:	Flash cards

Activity 10°	Road of questions
Time:	40 minutes
Objective:	To develop communicative skills
Procedure:	The students will be divided into 3 groups, each group will have the opportunity to roll the dice, depending on the number they get, they will advance along the way which will lead to a question. If the answer is correct, they can move forward and roll the dice again, if the answer is incorrect, the group will not be able to advance and will assign the turn to the opposing team.
Rules	Everyone must roll the dice according to their turn. The participant will have a certain time to give the answer.
Materials	Road of questions, dice, stopwatch

Session 4

Activity 32	Guiding a blind person
Time	20'
Objective	To develop trust between partners/To develop social sensitivity
Procedure	Participants decide in their pairs which one will be th blind person. Blindfolded participants forma a big circle while their pairs stand randomly far away and the will give him/her directions in order to get together. The participant-leader cannot move from his/her spot. The switch roles so both participants can do the activity.
Rules	None
Materials	Scarves/blindfolds/ coats

Activity 29	2 truths and a lie
Time	20'
Objective	To warm up/chill out
Procedure	Everyone in the group comes up with 1 truth and 1 lie about themselves. They then tell these to the group and others try to guess which is which.
Rules	None
Materials	None

Activity 3°	Crossword
Time:	25 minutes
Objective	To identify key according to the phrase
Procedure	The group must complete a crossword based on a series of premises according to the students' prior knowledge.
Rules	None
Materials	Crosswords

Session 5

Activity 31	King of Stones
Time	20'
Objective	To develop communicative competence
Procedure	Participants are suggested to have fast changing conversations in which the words “yes” and “not” are forbidden. The person who says yes or no must hand over one of their stones/beans
Rules	Each participant gets five beans/rocks. Participants walk around the place
Materials	Bag of beans/Rocks

Activity	Molding Doug
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Time	25 minutes
objective	To practice vocabulary guessing the object
Procedure	In groups of 5, a member of the group is going to mold a dough and the other students are going to guess the object.
Rules	Student molding the dough cannot talk.
Materials	Plasticine
¿Objects to mold	shoe, bracelet, umbrella, tree. bridge, building, house, car, phone, bird, sandal, t-shirt, star, snake, bottle, whistle, airplane, fruits, ball, motorcycle, backpack, colors, tie, charger, table, giraffe, fish, turtle, rooster, egg, board, television, glass fridge, box, jean, syringe, belt, cap, beer, arrow, pear, strawberry, skateboard, boat, door, window, bed, closet, sandwich, light, bulb, knife, glasses, plate, glass, computer pencil, car, baby sit, bras, boxers, airplane, flower, lamp, car, duck, donkey, monkey, butterfly, spoon, fork extincor, church, gloves, chair, camel

Activity: 12°	Debate gay adoption
Time	25 minutes
objective	Practice English and work in groups
procedure	Students will be asked to number themselves from one to four on their teams. We will ask a question and announce a time limit. Students should discuss together and get an answer. We will say a number and ask all students with that number to stand up and answer the question. We will tell the correct answer and deepen in the topic through a debate.
Rules	Only the students with the called number will be allowed to talk.
Materials	None

Activity 34	Fortunately /unfortunately
----------------	----------------------------

Time	20'
Objective	To foster coherence and logical construction of sentences/To develop verbal communication
Procedure	The simple constraint is that the story shifts from positive to negative and backwards as each participant takes a turn. A: There was a man dying of thirst in a desert. B: Fortunately, he suddenly saw a café. (A): Unfortunately, he did not have any money on him...and so on.
Rules	None
Materials	None

Activity: 11	Pyramid
Time:	20 minutes
Objective:	Practice English through argumentation
Procedure :	Students are going to ask each other about a language they think is more common in the world and why; for instance: English, French, Spanish, Mandarin and so on. If they agree, they join will gather until they form 2 or 3 groups that are going to explain why they chose that language.
Rules:	None
Materials:	None

Activity 25	Pressure point
Time	10'
Objective:	To pump it up
Procedure :	split group into pairs. They introduce themselves and shake hands, looking each other in the eye. While their hands remain clasped together, they both extend their right forefingers and try to tag each other on the shoulder.

	the game leader calls out “Rotate, please!” frequently so that participants switch partners repeatedly and quickly.
Rules:	The challenge: they are not allowed to break eye contact.
Materials:	None

Session 6

Activity 2 ◦	The ball
Time:	15 minutes
Objective:	To practice vocabulary and pronunciation
Procedure :	The participants will make a circle, a student will say a word in English and throw the ball to another student, the student who receives the ball must say another word that starts with the last letter of the previous word.
Rules:	The participants can not to repeat the words already said. If they repeat the words, they will be asked to leave the circle.
Materials:	A ball

Activity: 8°	My summary
Time	25 minutes
Objective	To develop communicative skills
Procedure	The participants will be located in two rows facing each other, a topic will be given. The first row will have to talk about the subject to his classmate for a minute and a half. Then, the row will rotate, and the time will be reduced to one minute to talk about the same topic to a different classmate. Finally, the row will rotate again, and 20 seconds will be given for a final summary of the given topic.
Rules:	None
Materials:	None
Topics	Technology, life in other planets, abortion, gay adoption, current political situation of the country, marijuana legalization in Canada.

Activity 10°	Story flash cards
Time:	20 minutes
Objective:	To develop communicative skills
Procedure :	The students will be divided into 3 groups of 5, each one will have a card with a piece of a mute story, the groups will make a circle and a participant of the group will start creating the beginning of a story, then the next participant will continue according to the image he/she has in the card, and so on until the whole group participates. Finally, one member of the group will tell the others what the story was about.
Rules:	Coherence in the story
Materials:	Flash Cards

Session 7

Activity	Frogger
Time	15'
Objective	To warm up
Procedure	Have participants sitting in a circle. The game consists on a “frogger” whose goal is to send people to sleep showing them his/her tongue while there is a detective who tries to catch him/her. The detective has three chances to figure who the “frogger” is.
Rules	None.
Materials	None.

Activity	Skit
Time	25'
Objective	To practice speaking

Procedure	A moral dilemma will be given to the group, they should solve it through a skit and give a brief explanation of why they decided to do it that way.
Rules	None.
Materials	None.

Activity 23	RPS train
Time	10'
Objective	To warm up
Procedure	A whole bunch of people are playing rock paper scissors. The winner continues on and the person who lost puts their hands on the other's shoulder and becomes their cheerleader. The train gets longer and longer as a person wins until there is only one train left.
Rules	The people behind have to be loud enough to be listened by the head of the train
Materials	None

Activity	Stop
Time	25 minutes
Objective	To practice vocabulary
Procedure :	Students are going to do 3 groups of five, the guider says a letter and the groups are going to write a name, a city, a fruit, a color, and a thing
Rules:	2 minutes for writing or until a group says stop
Materials:	a paper, a pencil

Session 8

Activity 33	What are you doing?
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Time:	20'
Objective:	To develop language creativity / To develop verbal and non-verbal communication
Procedure:	Couples. A start with a non-verbal activity (e.g. running). B asks: "What are you doing?". A gives a different answer (e.g. "I'm reading a book"). B reads the book and A asks: "What are you doing?"
Rules:	None
Materials:	None

Activity:	Werewolves of miller's hollows
Time:	30 minutes
Objective:	To argue
Procedure	Each member of the group is going to have a card, the cards can have a wolf, who is in charge to kill villagers, a witch who has two potions, one for life and one for death, villagers who want to kill the wolves, and a seer who can see which character is each one.
Rules	Participants can see partner's card They
Materials	Game

