



UNIVERSIDAD
ICESI

**THE USE OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING AS A WAY TO FOSTER STUDENTS'
ENGLISH ORAL SKILLS**

PROYECTO DE GRADO

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**MASTER'S PROGRAM IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN
LANGUAGE**

**UNIVERSIDAD ICESI
ESCUELA DE CIENCIAS DE LA EDUCACIÓN
SANTIAGO DE CALI**

2016

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- CL Cooperative Learning
- UCC Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia
- ZPD Zone of Proximal Development
- EG Experimental Group
- CG Control Group

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explore the impact of cooperative learning on the English oral skills proficiency of students at a private university in Pasto, Colombia during the first and second semester of the Academic Year 2016. It was an action research Project whose design counted on one control group and one experimental group. The latter participated in cooperative learning activities altogether with regular language instruction. The ongoing data was collected through a teacher's log and direct observations from the part of the teacher and from the part of two English teachers from the same University. After the study, it was observed that students' speaking skill improved notoriously compared to the initial stage.

Key words: Cooperative learning, oral skills proficiency, experimental, proficiency.

INTRODUCTION

Group work has been widely used in English classes at the Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia (UCC) as a way to promote collaboration and interaction among students. However, UCC English teachers have reported not very positive results after using group work in their classes. After considering the possible difficulties traditional group work presents it was considered necessary to adopt a Cooperative Learning method for English classes in order to help students maximize their language skills.

Cooperative Learning (CL) is a structured learning method that helps to create a learner-centered environment, in which students become active participants in their learning process by sharing information, asking questions and helping one another during lessons. This study investigates the effects of cooperative learning activities on students' speaking skills development.

In order to analyze the effects of CL in English classes, this action research project was carried out in the UCC. The main goal was to determine the real effects of CL on learners' oral skills development. Oral components such as comprehensibility, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and pronunciation were evaluated through a series of CL activities.

In what follows, the nature of this study is presented along with the literature review, the most relevant findings, some conclusions and the pedagogical implications CL had in language learners at the Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia.

1. RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This study took place in the Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia in Pasto, Colombia. This is a private university, founded in Pasto in 1993. The university offers four different undergraduate programs such as Medicine, Law, Dentistry and Engineering. Students come from low socio-economic strata as a response to the new admission policies in the university.

Around 92% of the students come from Pasto and nearby towns. As part of their curricula, students are required to take 5 levels of English throughout their careers. The university combines virtual learning with face to face interaction for the foreign language instruction.

Students spend 3 hours in the classroom and are required to dedicate 3 more hours as part of autonomous learning. The university has 5 computer rooms where students can develop the virtual activities. The platform they use is *Rosetta Stone* and provides practical exercises and the course contents. Students are not required to use textbooks in their classes and the program is organized by the **Open Lingua Department**.

1.2 PROBLEM SITUATION

Group work is frequently applied in classes with the idea to foster collaboration and improving social skills. UCC English teachers state that they use this strategy to save time or to manage classes better. However, it is felt that few of them understand the power of group work and see it just as students gathering together to solve a given task.

In the UCC group work has been used with the idea that students use the target language among them. Having students sharing ideas with their peers seems to be the ultimate goal of this strategy. However, it has been noticed that very few students use the target language and even less are willing to share ideas with their classmates.

Taking into account this reality, it was considered necessary to implement successful group activities that lead to language learning. Therefore, the idea of implementing CL was born. CL as defined by Johnson, D., Johnson, R., & Smith, K. (2014) “*is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning*”. Johnson, D., Johnson, R., & Smith, K. (2014) (p. 3). In other words, through cooperative learning, students help the group to achieve a goal and in return the group helps each member to improve skills and learn specific content. Therefore, using CL in the UCC seemed to be a reasonable attempt to cope with group work limitations.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Nowadays, the Colombian policies concerning foreign language teaching require university students to reach a B2 level in English proficiency by the end of their studies. Taking into account this reality, the UCC has dedicated time and effort to make the *Open Lingua Program* an effective means to achieve this goal.

Students are expected to achieve this mentioned language proficiency through weekly lessons accompanied by appropriate teaching methods and techniques. In order to do so, it was necessary to implement innovative strategies like the Cooperative Learning approach.

CL adoption sought to provide learners with a friendly, student-centered method that allows them to use their English in natural and enjoyable activities. After applying CL in English classes, students would have more chances to practice their language skills and develop their cognitive and social competences better.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION

To what extent can CL help to improve learners' oral skills in the classroom?

2 OBJECTIVES

2.1 General objective

To identify whether or not cooperative learning improves students' English oral proficiency.

2.2 Specific objectives

1. To analyze the most effective CL strategies for developing oral skills.
2. To examine the benefits CL has on learners and its incidence in their oral skills development.
3. To identify the impact of CL in students' English oral skills performance.

3. JUSTIFICATION

Having worked as an English Teacher, the author of this study has seen the difficulties some teachers have when using group work in their classes. Some teachers face discipline problems and some others do not get their students to focus on the given activities. The latter seems to be the most conflictive issue when working in groups. As explained by Kerr and Bruun (1983) and Morgan (2002), motivation of participants is one of the most serious problems in group work because some group members may not be totally committed to the tasks or to get the final outcome in the group.

These difficulties might be the result of the use of inappropriate group techniques. It is not enough to ask students to work together but giving them a purpose to do so. Once learners see the value of their contributions to the group, they commit to the task and participate actively. These group work guidelines are defined by Johnson, Johnson, & Smith (1998) as positive interdependence and individual accountability. In other words, students should first feel their role is important and valuable in the group before they can start helping the group to achieve the goal.

Considering this previous situation, the development of this study was necessary to clarify doubts regarding group work and to provide effective CL strategies to be used in the classroom. Besides, the development of this research project might allow teachers to understand the power of cooperation and encourage students to use their target language in authentic and engaging activities.

4 LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the theoretical framework for this study. It provides background on CL in terms of its theories, principles and techniques. This chapter starts providing a general description of group work followed by the discussion of theoretical perspectives regarding CL. The Vygotskian perspective, the social learning theory and Constructivism are described to be fundamental theories supporting CL.

An overview, a definition and some principles of CL are also presented throughout this chapter. Finally, this chapter provides a distinction between traditional group work and cooperative learning groups.

4.2 GROUP WORK

For Ur (1991) in group work, learners perform a learning task through a small-group interaction. It is a form of learner activation that is of particular value in the practice or oral fluency. For the author, group work fosters learner responsibility and independence, can improve motivation and contributes to a feeling of cooperation and warmth in the classroom.

Ur (1991) suggests four main steps that should be followed by instructors regarding group organization: presentation, process, ending and feedback. Presentation deals with the clarity of instructions in order to avoid time-wasting, confusion and lack of effective practice. Process is related to the following up of the activity by providing general approval and support, helping students who are having difficulty and keeping the students using the target language. Ending has to do with the fact that activities should finish while students are still interested and engaged, otherwise they might lose interest. Finally, feedback refers to giving the right solutions, showing appreciation for the effort and evaluating the final results.

Since CL is based on group work, it is relevant to consider these previous characteristics in order to develop successful group activities.

4.3 THEORIES UNDERLYING COOPERATIVE LEARNING

The importance of social learning has been studied from different perspectives in order to provide a holistic view of its relevance. Numerous theories consider social contexts and interaction as key developmental features in language learning. This paper focuses on three important theories to support Cooperative Learning. These theories are the Vygotskian perspective, the social learning theory and constructivism explained ahead.

4.3.1 The Vygotskian Perspective

For Vygotsky, (1978) interaction with others contributes to human cognitive development. Having the opportunity to share with others would lead to expand one's knowledge and to move from one stage to another. This theory is explained as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). For the author, the ZPD is the discrepancy between the student's actual developmental level and his/her potential level achieved with help from a more competent partner. In other words, the current knowledge learners have might be boosted through socialization with others by sharing and learning from them.

Furthermore, Vygotsky's states that human learning presupposed a specific social nature and was part of a process by which children grew into the intellectual life of those around them. For the author, there is a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is in the action of interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers.

In short, Vygotsky's theory can be clearly seen in CL activities when learners see others as important actors in their progress. Since CL implies the development of social skills, students realize the importance of seeking support and help from others and understand that a task might be better accomplished through the cooperation of everybody.

4.3.2 Bandura's Social Learning Theory

For Bandura (1971) “behavior can be acquired through direct experience or by observing the behavior of others” (Bandura, 1971) (p.3). The author argues that in the social learning system people experiment success or failure when interacting with others, this makes them maintain the positive responses and discard the negative ones. In other words, every action brings consequences and we tend to keep the favorable ones as good behavior.

For the author, people's behaviors are learned through examples either intentionally or unintentionally. He gives great relevance to the model effect. Bandura states that some complex behavior can only be produced through the influence of models. For example, a child would not be able to learn to speak if he has not heard any sample of speech before. This latter argument supports the idea of using CL for the development of oral skills in the classroom. The idea is that advanced learners serve as role models to the low-achievers and help them to develop correct speaking patterns.

4.3.3 Constructivism

Cobb & Bowers, (1999) define constructivism as the interaction of persons and situations in the acquisition and refinement of skills and knowledge. Besides, constructivism is said to share with social cognitive theory the assumption that persons, behaviors, and environments interact in reciprocal way. Furthermore, Geary, (1995) states that constructivism helps people become active learners who develop knowledge for themselves. The idea that people are active learners supports the importance of constructivism in a CL project. In CL as in constructivism, learners are required to perform tasks and become responsible of their own learning.

4.3.4 Task-based learning

Task Based Learning (TBL) is a student-centered method that focuses on the use of authentic language through meaningful tasks. Students are provided with authentic tasks that make them use the language in a creative and spontaneous way. Assessment is primarily based on task outcome. CL and TBL share some basic characteristics that make them comparable. During this study, the idea of using CL in the classroom was to provide learners with authentic and meaningful tasks just as in the TBL method.

4.4 DEFINITION OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING

The philosopher John Dewey was one of the most influential educators in the twentieth century. His ideas of learning influenced greatly on academic fields. For Dewey, learning should be an active and dynamic process based on children's expanding curiosity in their world. He was convinced that interaction with others will normally allow learners to receive feedback on their activities, learn socially appropriate behaviors, and understand what is involved in co-operating and working together (Dewey, 1940, 1966) cited in Gillies, R. & Ashman, (2003) (p. 1). His ideas of learning in social environments were the cornerstone of cooperative learning.

CL has received much attention from educators and researchers. CL has been widely defined and used in classroom as a way to foster social skills and improve learning. For example, Jacobs, G., Power, M. & Inn, L. (2002) define CL as principles and techniques for helping students work together more effectively.

For Gomleksize (2007) CL occurs when students work together to achieve specific goals. Wichadee (2007) states that CL is a pedagogical approach that encourages student-student interaction every time they work in small groups and intensifies their learning and reach their intended objective. Badache (2011) defines group work as an instruction method where learners of different cognitive levels form groups and work together in order to solve a specific objective. Learners take the responsibility of their own learning and of those in the group. In other words, successful results would benefit everybody equally in the group. Finally, a more succinct

definition of CL is provided by Johnson, Johnson, & Smith (2014) who state that within cooperative situations, individuals seek outcomes that will benefit themselves and also the team members.

4.5 PRINCIPLES OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Even though, some people might think that group-work or putting students together would necessarily lead to cooperative learning, Johnson, Johnson, & Smith (1998) state that truly cooperative learning implies the development of certain characteristics such as: Positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face promotive interaction, interpersonal and small group skills and group processing. The authors define these principles as: Positive interdependence referring to idea that members of the team need one another in order to succeed. Individual accountability which is related to the responsibility each member of the group should develop. Face-to-face promotive interaction that can be explained as the mutual collaboration of team members in order to produce something. The development of interpersonal and small group skills is another principle in CL and finally group processing which can be understood as the constant feedback the groups needs to have in order to maintain effective working relationships.

Maintaining these principles in class would necessarily lead to effective CL activities development. In fact, students' awareness of these principles would make their contributions to the group more valuable and would differentiate CL work from traditional group work.

4.6 TYPES OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING

As said before, CL can be understood as the well-directed use of small groups in which students work together helping one another and trying to reach the highest potential of each group members. However, Johnson & Johnson (1999) go beyond this CL definition and state that cooperative learning groups can be categorized as formal, informal or base groups depending on the objective to be achieved.

4.6.1 Formal cooperative learning

For the authors this type of learning implies that students work together either for a short or long period of time, they should also share goals and focus on completing a given task. In formal cooperative learning groups, teachers are required to provide clear and achievable objectives, collaborate in group formation, provide the materials to be used, explain the task, assign roles to the learners, present the evaluation criteria, keep track on students' progress and assess learners as the main feedback provider.

4.6.2 Informal cooperative learning

This type of learning can be used for shorter periods of time that might go from some minutes to a whole lesson. Informal cooperative groups can be used to focus student' attention on the material of the class, set the goals of the lesson or as a final activity at the end of each lesson.

4.6.3 Cooperative base groups

This type of group can help students with long-term activities. Cooperative base groups focus on helping group members to achieve academic success. The idea is that learners find appropriate assistance in this type of group. For Johnson, Johnson (1999) cooperative base groups meet in a daily basis, which necessarily leads to social skills development.

4.7 TECHNIQUES OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING

In previous paragraphs, the importance of CL has been widely discussed; however it is also important to consider which activities help learners to improve their English oral skills. Since there is a huge number of CL activities, it was necessary to choose the ones that foster social and oral skills.

In his book “Cooperative Learning: A Response to Linguistic and Cultural Diversity” Holt, D. (1993) makes a compilation of the most common CL activities and explains the use and procedure of these structures. For the development of this study the following CL activities were considered. These activities were contextualized to meet the students’ needs and to foster oral skills in a more feasible way.

4.7.1 Jigsaw

After forming groups, each group is required to choose an “expert”. The expert is normally the more proficient student in the group. Later on, the experts form an “expert group”; this expert group works together to master the material or task, then they return to their home teams to teach their teammates what they learned. Social skills are built through the use of this activity because learners need to trust the expert and the expert needs to be able to interact with members of different groups as well.

4.7.2 Numbered-Heads Together

Each member of the group is assigned a specific number, then they are asked a question to be discussed in the group. After some minutes, one number is called and he/she has to share the group’s answer. This activity promotes individual accountability because all members need to make sure of having the right answer.

4.7.3 Three-step interview

In groups of four, students form two pairs and conduct a one-way interview. After hearing their peers' responses, they switch roles and answer their classmates' questions. In the end everybody has asked and answered questions. Once they have their peers' responses, they share them to the group.

4.7.4 Inside-Outside Circle

For this activity, two concentric circles are formed, with students inside facing out and those outside facing in. Students ask and answer questions given by the teacher and write down the responses. Then, they rotate after hearing a bell ring and start the same process with their new partner. Once they have heard all their partners they stand up and clarify doubts with the teacher.

4.7.5 Partners

Students form pairs within their home team. Then, each pair is given a short story to read, discuss and master with the help of the teacher. After some minutes, the teacher collects the stories and the pairs share their stories. They need to make sure to report the main ideas as well as including details. After sharing stories each member of the team receives a quiz with questions from the story. If all team members get 80% or more correct on the test, each team member gets bonus points.

4.8 COOPERATIVE LEARNING VS. TRADITIONAL GROUP LEARNING

Since CL is based on well-structured principles, it differs from traditional group work; CL activities are well-structured tasks which involve positive interdependence, individual accountability and the development of social skills among others. In typical group work activities, the tasks are usually not as well and clearly designed as cooperative learning activities. Putnam (1998) states that one of the most important differences between typical group work and cooperative learning group work is the heterogeneous nature of cooperative learning groups. CL groups are frequently intentionally mixed in terms of learners' skills and achievement level, gender, culture, and language characteristics. The table below shows some major differences concerning CL and traditional group work.

Table 1

Difference between traditional groups and CL groups

| DIFFERENCE | TRADITIONAL GROUPS | CL GROUPS |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Group formation | Students form groups with whoever they want or whoever is sitting near them. | Teachers (and students) plan group size and composition so as to maximize the potential of the groups. |
| Collaborative skills | Students are assumed to know how to work together. | Collaborative skills are explicitly taught. |
| Group solidarity | Students are assumed to have a common purpose with their fellow group members and to care about one another. | Teachers attempt to build group solidarity. |
| Individual participation and learning | Group members are assumed to be interested in participating and learning. | Teachers encourage each group member to feel responsible for participating and learning. |

Adapted from Lin, M. (2011)

4.9 CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ORAL SKILLS

This study intended to provide activities that foster oral skills in language learners. In order to achieve some improvement concerning this issue, some oral components were taken into account. Students were assessed based on the completeness of their responses but also on the accuracy of the following descriptors.

4.9.1 Pronunciation

Since the main purpose of this study was to improve oral skills. It is vital to pay special attention to pronunciation. As English has become the language used for international communication, it is important that its speakers are able to exchange meaning effectively. Burns and Claire (2003) state that clear pronunciation is essential in spoken communication. Even where learners produce minor inaccuracies in vocabulary and grammar, they are more likely to communicate effectively when they have good pronunciation and intonation.

4.9.2 Fluency

Hartmann and Stork (1976) state that “a person is said to be a fluent speaker of a language when he can use its structures accurately whilst concentrating on content rather than form, using the units and patterns automatically at normal conversational speed when they are needed” (Hartmann and Stork, 1976) (p. 86).

Fluency refers to the correct use of the language with the speaker’s own pace. According to Binder, Haughton and Bateman (2002) speaking fluency also helps learners improve their learning process by contributing to three types of learning outcomes. The first is retention and maintenance which is described as the ability to retain knowledge after a course has finished. The second is endurance described as the ability to resist distraction for long periods of time. Finally, application, the ability to apply what has been learnt in different situations and with more creativity.

4.9.3 Vocabulary

Many authors have similar definitions about vocabulary. According to Diamond & Gutlohn (2006) vocabulary is the knowledge of words and their meanings. This means that without establishing a strong vocabulary base first, comprehension and use of a language will not be achieved. In addition, the student should be able to recognize words, and know their meanings as well. Furthermore, vocabulary knowledge helps students with language comprehension. Like Widdowson (1989), McKeown (2002) state vocabulary knowledge is the heart of a language comprehension and use. Additionally, Barra (1995) suggests that in order to comprehend a text successfully students need to have sufficient word knowledge. This is to say that the comprehension of a language depends on the amount of words that are known in that language.

4.9.4 Grammar

Hymes (1971) states that a truly communicative competent speaker should develop certain knowledge of both rules of grammar and rules of language use appropriate to a given context. That is why, grammar was given such a crucial role in this study. Learning the correct structure of the target language was the first step before enhancing their speaking skills.

4.9.5 Comprehensibility

This term refers to whether or not students were able to make themselves understood during their presentations. This item intended to measure clarity and organization of oral presentations. Krashen (1998) states that when speakers reach this comprehensible output, they will eventually arrive at the correct form of their utterances and will be able to convey their messages satisfactorily

5 METHODOLOGY

5.1 RESEARCH SETTING

As mentioned earlier this study took place in the Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia in Pasto. The university facilities were used to carry out surveys and the activities. Classes were developed from 7 am to 10 am every Tuesday with the EG and from 7 am to 10 am on Thursdays with the CG. In general, there was a friendly atmosphere with both groups.

5.2 SUBJECTS

The participants in both classes in the study were first-year undergraduates majoring in medicine. Both, the EG and the CG students were in first-level and were considered basic users (A1) according to the CEFRL. The total sample size was 51 students with 26 in the EG and 25 in the CG. The table below presents some biographical information concerning the sample.

Table 2
Participants' biographical information

| Class | Male | Female | Major | Mean age | High school | |
|-------|------|--------|----------|----------|-------------|---------|
| | | | | | Public | Private |
| CG | 13 | 12 | Medicine | 20.5 | 19 | 6 |
| EG | 9 | 17 | Medicine | 22.5 | 16 | 10 |

Own elaboration 2016

As shown above, the CG and the EG shared some similar characteristics, students in both groups are majoring in medicine and participants in the two groups have attended to public and private schools in Pasto and in other towns. The CG is formed by 13 male students and 12 female ones, while the EG has 9 male students and 17 female ones. Students' age is also similar and there is a little variation due to one student in the EG who is 35 years old.

Both groups were allowed to use the university facilities and had a three-hour class every week. In order to determine their level of English proficiency a speaking pre-test was taken by the two groups. Results of the tests are shown in the data analysis chapter.

5.3 TREATMENT

In this study, the EG participated in CL activities in conjunction with regular language instruction. Classes lasted 120 minutes every week and they participated in CL activities for about 60 minutes in each session. Making a total of 5 hours of CL activities.

This study was divided into two phases. The first phase lasted 7 weeks during the second semester of the academic year 2015-2016. Evaluation and teaching on the first phase was performed by the author of this study. Each CL activity was evaluated by using a speaking rubric (see appendix # 2) previously socialized with the students.

The second phase lasted 4 weeks during the first semester of the academic year 2016-2017. Training and teaching was done by the author of this study and a final term evaluation was performed by two different professors. The evaluation consisted of an oral presentation and the grading was done by using the same speaking rubric mentioned above.

The groups in the EG were formed by the teacher considering aspects such as level of English, number of participations in class, results from the speaking pre-test. The idea was to create heterogeneous groups in which more advanced learners helped the beginner ones. Besides, creating these groups led to interpersonal and small group skills development, which are a cornerstone in CL according to Johnson, Johnson, & Smith (1998).

The EG students participated in CL activities for about 60 minutes in each session in conjunction with regular language instruction. On the other hand, the CG students received regular language instruction, but worked on the same activities. That is to say, the CG students participated in oral presentations and worked in pairs or groups but in the traditional groups formation way. Evaluation in the CG was also done by using the speaking rubric. (see appendix #2)

It should be stated that the EG students spent more time on CL activities development while the CG students spent more time studying vocabulary, grammar rules and exercises in more detail. English was used as the major language of instruction. The students were required to speak English in class. Student attendance records were verified to ensure the attendance in both groups during the experiment. In addition, the two groups received extra classes with the language assistant every two weeks.

Figure 1
Phase One

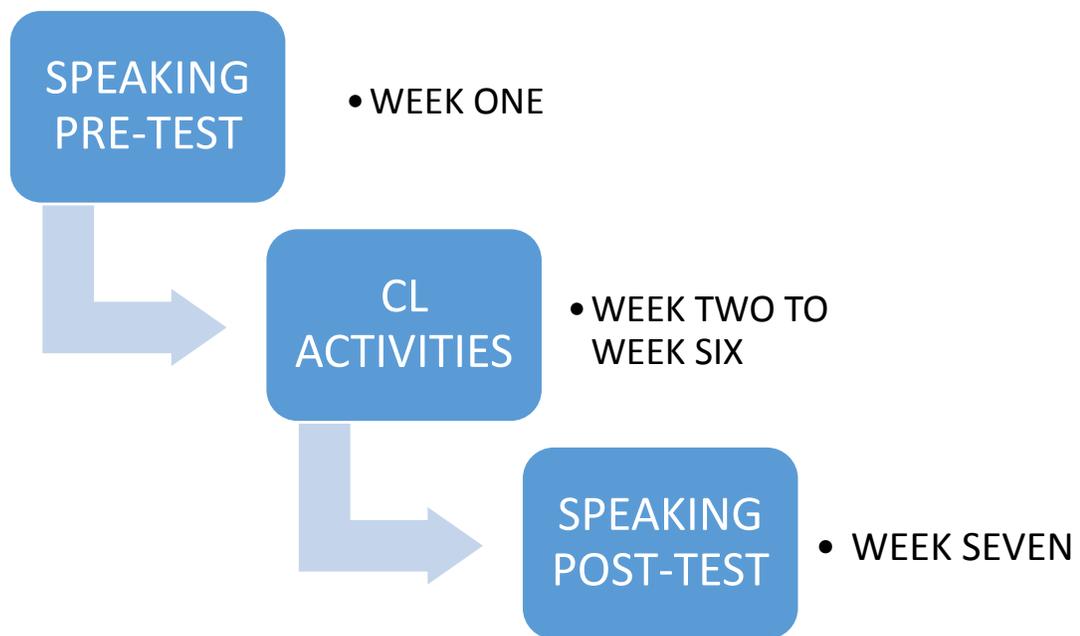


Table 3
Description of CL activities

| WEEK | ACTIVITY | EXPLANATION OF THE ACTIVITY |
|-------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| One | Speaking pre-test | See Appendix # 3 |
| Two | Numbered heads together | Students were asked to provide a complete definition, including physical appearance, clothes and possible profession of a person shown on the board. They spent five minutes in the group preparing the answer, after this time, one student was called to represent the whole group and shared the answer. |
| Three | Three-step interview | <p>The class was divided into 4 groups of four and 2 groups of six. Each student in the group received some information about a famous person, for example: student # 1 received information related to family background, student # 2 received information about the famous person's physical appearance, and student # 3 had information about the famous person skills and outcomes. Finally, student # 4 received information related to the famous person's likes and dislikes.</p> <p>Later, students asked questions to their peers and wrote the answers, in the end, they were required to prepare a group oral presentation about this famous person including as much valuable information as possible.</p> |
| Four | Partners | Students were divided into 4 groups of 4 and 2 groups of 6. Each pair in the group received a short paragraph about a famous person biography. They were required to master the information and clarify doubts with the teacher. After 15 minutes, each pair shared orally its part of the biography with the rest of the group. They made sure to include general information as well as details in their presentations. At the end of the activity, one student from the group presented the whole information. |
| Five | Jigsaw | Students formed groups and chose two experts from each group. Then, the experts form a new group in which they were asked to read an article about pros and cons of living in a small city. While the expert group read and mastered the information, the other members of the team were given a list of new words and expressions found |

| | | |
|-------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | | in the article. After returning to their original teams, the experts presented the topic and explained the details of the reading. The other members listened carefully and asked questions when necessary. |
| Six | Inside-outside circle | Students received a set of 10 small blue cards with questions regarding free time activities and hobbies and a set of 5 red cards with possible answers. They had to ask their peers as many questions as possible and write down their answers before the bell rang. If students did not have an answer card, they had to answer the question by themselves. This activity helped learners to memorize questions, improvise answers and improve the pronunciation of free time activities. |
| Seven | Speaking post-test | See Appendix # 4 |

Figure 2
Phase two



5.4 INSTRUMENTS

Table 4
Instruments

| INSTRUMENT | PURPOSE |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| STUDENTS' BIOGRAPHICAL SURVEY | To identify valuable information regarding the participants in the study. |
| SPEAKING PRE-TEST | To know students' current English level regarding oral skills. |
| SPEAKING POST-TEST | To observe changes after intervention. |
| SPEAKING RUBRIC | To measure objectively students' oral production. |

5.4.1 STUDENTS' BIOGRAPHICAL SURVEY

The students' biographical survey helped the researcher to determine similarities and differences between the EG and the CG. EG Students were informed about the study on CL the first day of class. The survey contained different questions regarding personal and academic information as shown below.

Table 5
Students' biographical survey

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----------|-------------|
|  UNIVERSIDAD COOPERATIVA DE COLOMBIA  | | | |
| COOPERATIVE LEARNING BIOGRAPHICAL SURVEY | | | |
| What are you studying in the UCC? | | | |
| Medicine | Law | Dentistry | Engineering |
| | | | |
| Gender | | | |
| Male | | Female | |
| | | | |
| Which type of school did you study at? | | | |
| Private | | public | |
| How old are you? | | | |
| | | | |

5.4.2 SPEAKING PRE-TEST

Before students start their academic year, they are given a one-week orientation in which they get to know the university policies, the facilities and receive some classes with their future teachers. In this week, students were informed about the purpose of the study and the procedures to follow. The teacher explained the nature of the speaking pre-test and asked learners to rehearse and prepare their presentations for the following week. The test lasted for about 5 minutes with each student and consisted of four parts

Table 6
Speaking pre-test format

| PART | REQUIRED TASK | EXPECTED OUTCOME |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Introduce yourself and others | Learners should mention their name, age, place they are from, school they studied at, favorite food, sport and movie as well as other subject's personal information |
| 2 | Describe your physical appearance | Student's information should include: hair color, eyes color, important physical characteristics and a description of their outfit. |
| 3 | Describe your family | Students were required to talk about their relatives. To mention their professions, their ages, their likes and dislikes. |
| 4 | Answer questions | To clarify information that remained unclear from their presentation. |

Throughout the test, students were given total freedom to repeat, stop and restart their presentations. Pictures and visual aids were permitted although not required. Sometimes, students took more than the expected 5 minutes, they showed their proficiency and expertise on the topics given. Preparation was evident and influenced positively and negatively on some participants' scores.

5.4.3 SPEAKING POST-TEST

The same tool used in the pre-test was used for the speaking post-test. This test aimed to determine whether or not CL had had positive effects on learner's oral performance after a 5-week English study.

5.4.4 SPEAKING RUBRIC

The speaking rubric, which can be observed in the following page, was used in order to measure students' oral production objectively. Wolf and Stevens (2007) state that rubrics have numerous benefits such as: making the learning target clearer, making the assessment process more accurate and fair and providing learners with tools for self-assessment and peer feedback. The speaking rubric used in this study was socialized with the students the first day of class after having it validated by some colleagues.

Table 7
Speaking rubric

ORAL PRESENTATION RUBRIC

Name _____ Date _____ Score _____

Top score: 35 = 5.0

| ITEM TO ASSESS | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Comprehensibility | The student speaks clearly; at a good pace and loud enough. His speech is comprehensible. | The student speaks clearly; at a good pace and loud enough most of the time. His speech is not fully comprehensible. | The student hesitates and rushes throughout the presentation. It is difficult to follow parts of his speech | The student's speech is incomprehensible. Hesitates frequently and makes basic mistakes. |
| Grammar use | The student uses grammar structures correctly and accurately all the time. | The student uses grammar structures correctly and accurately most of the time | The students makes some grammar mistakes, his speech is comprehensible but difficult to follow in some parts. | The students makes grammar mistakes, his speech is incomprehensible and difficult to follow in most parts |
| Vocabulary | The student uses the vocabulary learned in class with confidence and accuracy | The student uses some vocabulary learned in class with confidence and accuracy | The student uses some vocabulary learned in class but makes mistakes | The student does not use the vocabulary learned in class, makes mistakes and does not know the meaning of some words |
| Fluency | The student's speech is fluent with natural pauses. | The student hesitates occasionally and stops for searching words | The student hesitates during most of his presentation, is visibly translating and needs to pause frequently. | The student is constantly searching for vocabulary, does not complete utterances and pauses after each word |
| Pronunciation | The student's utterances are phonetically correct. Utterances are comprehensible and there is awareness of accent. | Student's speech is comprehensible but makes occasional mistakes. Some utterances present a strong accent. | The students makes frequent errors that confuse listener and require guessing at meaning | Most student's utterances contain errors. Many utterances are incomprehensible, there is little communication. |

6 RESULTS

This chapter aims to explore the impact of cooperative learning strategies on students' oral proficiency. Furthermore, this analysis examined the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies on students' oral skills compared to students in a classroom where traditional strategies were used. The outputs generated by an initial and a final test accompanied by some cooperative strategies results are presented below.

6.1 EFFECTS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING ON STUDENTS' ORAL PROFICIENCY

Table 8

Speaking results before and after intervention

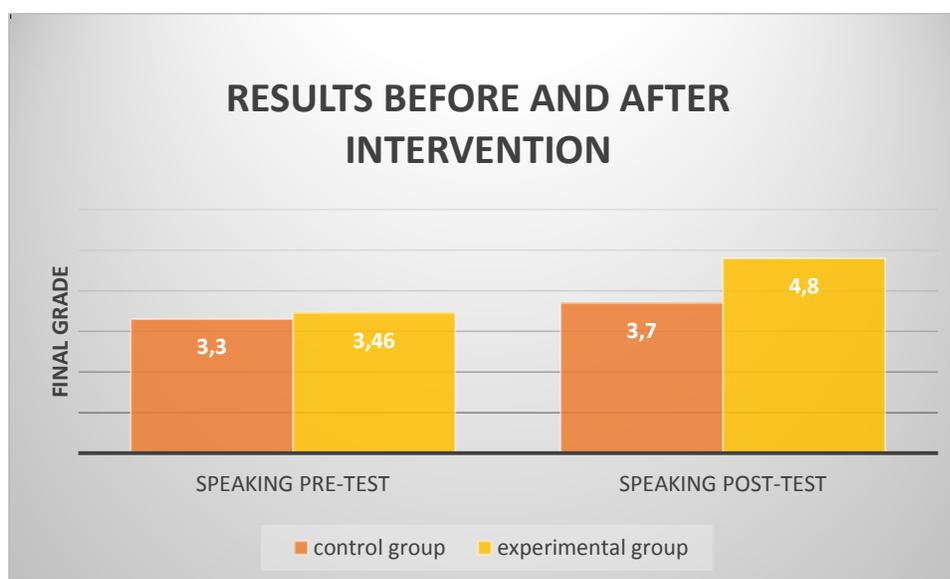


Table 8 shows the overall grades obtained by the students in the speaking pre and post-test. There were some similar results in the speaking pre-test in both groups. However, EG students improved significantly better in the speaking post-test than CG ones.

6.2 EFFECTS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING ON COMPREHENSIBILITY

Table 9

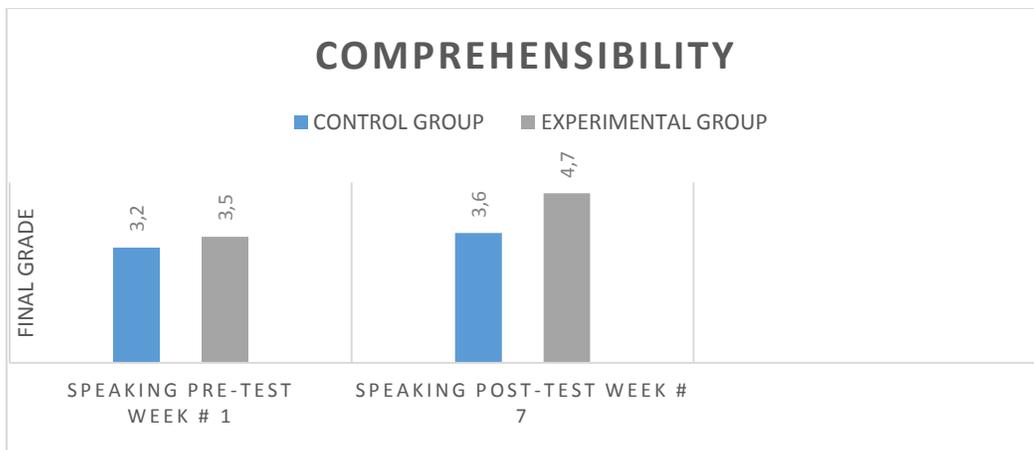
Comprehensibility during cooperative learning activities

| Cooperative learning task | Week # | Grade. (5.0= Top score – 2.0 Lower score) | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| | | 5.0 | 4.0 | 3.0 | 2.0 |
| Numbered-Heads Together | 2 | 45% | 28% | 22% | 5% |
| 3-Step Interview | 3 | 57% | 32% | 9% | 2% |
| Partners | 4 | 87% | 11% | 2% | 0% |
| Jigsaw | 5 | 84% | 15% | 1% | 0% |
| Inside Outside Circle | 6 | 91% | 4% | 5% | 0% |

Table 9 shows the development of learners in terms of comprehensibility. As shown above, comprehensibility increased significantly after week # 3. Students' presentations were easier to understand and their messages were clearer. From week # 4 on, none of the learners' scores were below 3.0 which is a proof of the clarity of their messages and their utterances. In week # 6, students' scores were the highest and a significant difference can be observed when compared to week # 2.

Table 10

Comprehensibility before and after the intervention



As shown above, learners in the EG and the CG obtained similar grades in the speaking pre-test carried out in week # 1. However, after the intervention, learners in the EG improved drastically compared to the CG ones.

6.3 EFFECTS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING ON GRAMMAR USE

Table 11

Grammar use during cooperative learning activities.

| Cooperative learning task | Week # | Grade. (5.0= Top score – 2.0 Lower score) | | | |
|---------------------------|--------|-------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| | | 5.0 | 4.0 | 3.0 | 2.0 |
| Numbered-Heads Together | 2 | 65% | 24% | 9% | 2% |
| 3-Step Interview | 3 | 82% | 9% | 4% | 5% |
| Partners | 4 | 93% | 6% | 1% | 0% |
| Jigsaw | 5 | 86% | 14% | 0% | 0% |
| Inside Outside Circle | 6 | 90% | 3% | 7% | 0% |

It can be observed in table 11 that learners' grammar competence improved continuously throughout the intervention. Even though students' initial command of grammar was above 60%, they showed a better application of grammar rules in their presentations. Normally, learners scored above 3.0 in most of the activities.

Table 12

Grammar use before and after the intervention

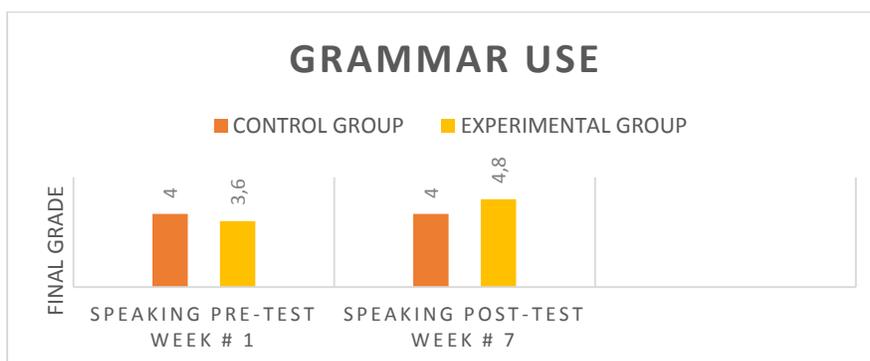


Table 12 shows the average grades obtained by the EG and the CG in terms of grammar use in the speaking pre and post-test. It is observed that the CG students got higher grades in the speaking pre-test. However, the EG students showed a significant improvement after the intervention while the CG maintained the same performance.

6.4 EFFECTS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING ON VOCABULARY

Table 13

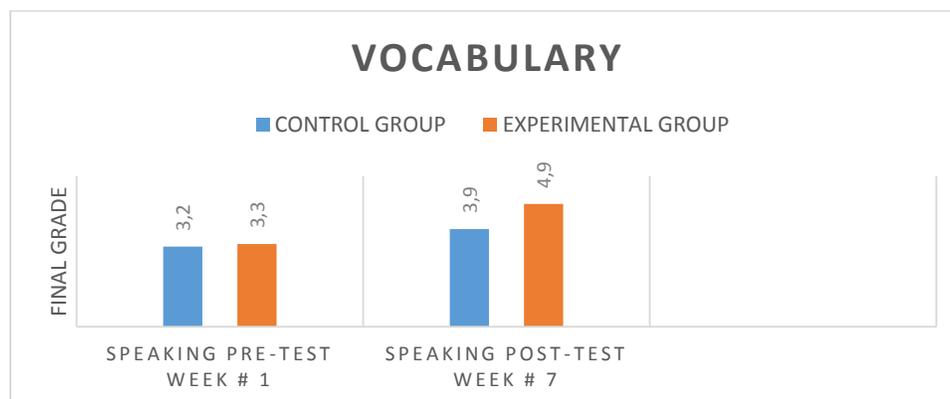
Vocabulary during cooperative learning activities

| Cooperative learning task | Week # | Grade. (5.0= Top score – 2.0 Lower score) | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| | | 5.0 | 4.0 | 3.0 | 2.0 |
| Numbered-Heads Together | 2 | 24% | 59% | 17% | 0% |
| 3-Step Interview | 3 | 55% | 40% | 5% | 0% |
| Partners | 4 | 88% | 7% | 5% | 0% |
| Jigsaw | 5 | 96% | 3% | 1% | 0% |
| Inside Outside Circle | 6 | 95% | 4% | 1% | 0% |

Table 13 shows the positive change students had in terms of vocabulary building. After week # 2, learners started to show a constant improvement regarding lexical items. Students' presentations demonstrated a wider knowledge of words and expressions. By week # 5, learners' grades were mostly 5.0 concerning vocabulary which was one of the major changes compared to week # 2.

Table 14

Vocabulary before and after the intervention



On one side, both groups scored similarly in the speaking pre-test. Learners' grades were higher than 3.0 with some difference in favor of the EG. On the other side, the EG grades improved notably compared to the CG in the speaking pre-test and post-test. Students in the EG had a notorious improvement compared to their results in the speaking pre-test.

6.4 EFFECTS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING ON FLUENCY

Table 15

Fluency during cooperative learning activities

| Cooperative learning task | Week # | Grade. (5.0= Top score – 2.0 Lower score) | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| | | 5.0 | 4.0 | 3.0 | 2.0 |
| Numbered-Heads Together | 2 | 32% | 62% | 5% | 1% |
| 3-Step Interview | 3 | 52% | 26% | 12% | 10% |
| Partners | 4 | 67% | 29% | 4% | 0% |
| Jigsaw | 5 | 86% | 9% | 5% | 0% |
| Inside Outside Circle | 6 | 84% | 8% | 2% | 6% |

Fluency also improved during the intervention. As shown above, the EG's grades were regularly increasing as the activities were carried out. By week # 6, students' presentations became more fluent and less hesitation took place. However, a 6% of the students scored under 3.0 in this week. This result will be explained in the coming section.

Table 16

Fluency before and after the intervention

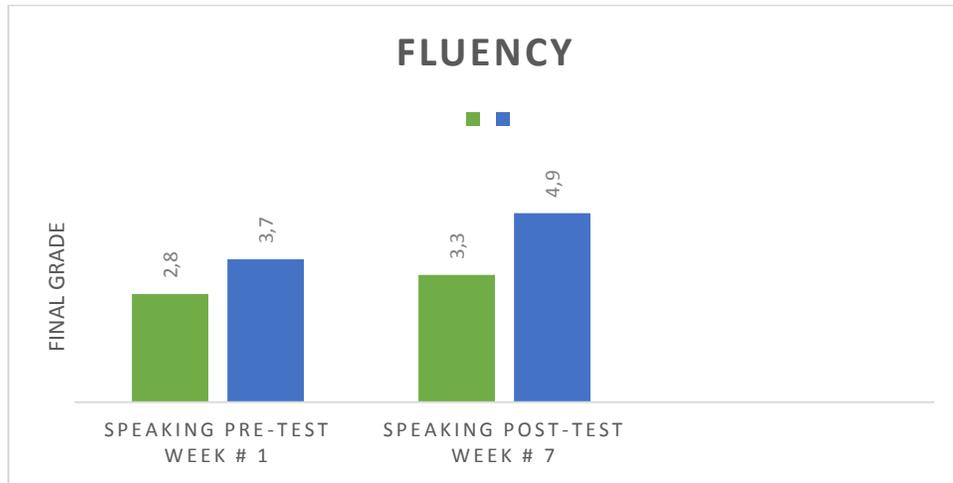


Table 15 shows the important changes concerning fluency after the intervention. Even though, both groups showed improvement, the EG changed considerably moving to higher scores compared to the CG. The grades obtained for the EG in week # 7 showed consistency throughout the process.

6.5 EFFECTS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING ON PRONUNCIATION

Table 17

Pronunciation during cooperative learning activities

| Cooperative learning task | Week # | Grade. (5.0= Top score – 2.0 Lower score) | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| | | 5.0 | 4.0 | 3.0 | 2.0 |
| Numbered-Heads Together | 2 | 12% | 77% | 11% | 0% |
| 3-Step Interview | 3 | 65% | 35% | 0% | 0% |
| Partners | 4 | 89% | 7% | 4% | 0% |
| Jigsaw | 5 | 96% | 3% | 1% | 0% |
| Inside Outside Circle | 6 | 93% | 5% | 2% | 0% |

Table 17 represents the grades obtained by the EG in terms of pronunciation. As it can be observed, there is a considerable difference between week # 2 and week # 6. Students showed a constant improvement week after week without being affected by the activity type.

Table 18

Pronunciation before and after the intervention

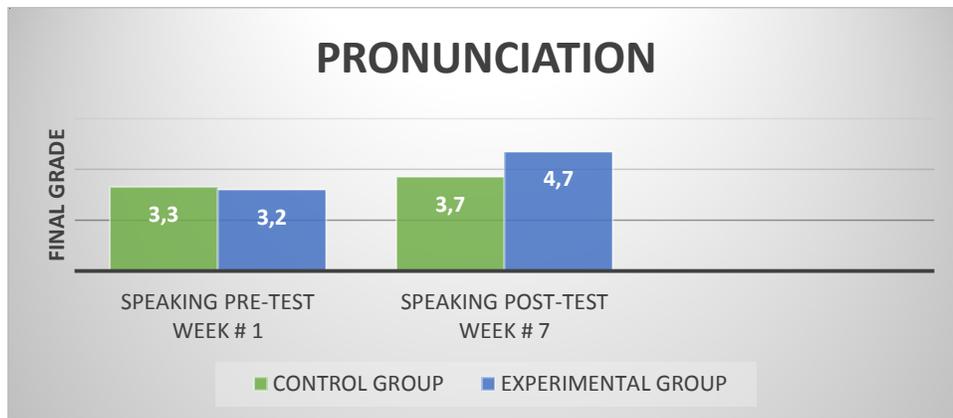


Table 18 shows the grades obtained during the speaking pre and post-test. During the speaking pre-test, the CG got a higher grade than the EG. However, at the end of the intervention a considerable improvement can be observed in the EG. Even though, both groups showed improvement, the CG did not show significant changes comparing the pre and post-test.

6.7 OBSERVATIONS OF CONTROL GROUP AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUP BY EXTERNAL PROFESSORS

As mentioned above, two English teachers were asked to observe the EG and the CG. Students in both groups were required to prepare two presentations. The first activity demanded a complete description of a family member and the second one was the description of a city they would like to visit.

In order to maintain objectivity in the study, student's presentations were on the same topic, lasted the same time and they were previously informed about the external evaluators. The English teachers used the speaking rubric to measure students' performance.

Table 19

First Observation Control Group. Teacher A

| Cooperative learning task | Grade. (5.0= Top score – 2.0 Lower score) | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| | 5.0 | 4.0 | 3.0 | 2.0 |
| COMPREHENSIBILITY | 56% | 44% | 0% | 0% |
| GRAMMAR USE | 68% | 32% | 0% | 0% |
| VOCABULARY | 79% | 21% | 0% | 0% |
| FLUENCY | 85% | 14% | 1% | 0% |
| PRONUNCIATION | 83% | 17% | 0% | 0% |

The table above shows the results obtained by the CG during a speaking activity in which an outsider professor observed their performance. Students were assessed using the same speaking rubric and the evaluator had not had any previous contact with the students. CG students obtained high scores in fluency and pronunciation. In general, CG students scored relatively higher than in other activities. This finding will be explained in Chapter 7.

Table 20*Second observation Control Group. Teacher B*

| Cooperative learning task | Grade. (5.0= Top score – 2.0 Lower score) | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| | 5.0 | 4.0 | 3.0 | 2.0 |
| COMPREHENSIBILITY | 39% | 35% | 21% | 5% |
| GRAMMAR USE | 59% | 18% | 21% | 2% |
| VOCABULARY | 48% | 21% | 18% | 13% |
| FLUENCY | 54% | 27% | 19% | 0% |
| PRONUNCIATION | 63% | 17% | 20% | 0% |

It can be observed in table 20 that students' scores were lower than in the previous observation. The number of students with low grades increased, especially, in terms of vocabulary and pronunciation. The percentage of learners with grades under 3.0 increased and the highest score was obtained in pronunciation.

Table 21*First Observation Experimental Group. Teacher B*

| Cooperative learning task | Grade. (5.0= Top score – 2.0 Lower score) | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| | 5.0 | 4.0 | 3.0 | 2.0 |
| COMPREHENSIBILITY | 78% | 17% | 5% | 0% |
| GRAMMAR USE | 80% | 18% | 2% | 0% |
| VOCABULARY | 74% | 26% | 0% | 0% |
| FLUENCY | 68% | 32% | 0% | 0% |
| PRONUNCIATION | 75% | 22% | 3% | 0% |

Table 21 represents the results after a jigsaw presentation. All students obtained grades above 3.0. There was a minor percentage who obtained low grades. In general terms, scores followed the same pattern as in stage # one. Learners received high grades in grammar use and comprehensibility and scored low in pronunciation.

Table 22*Second Observation Experimental Group. Teacher A*

| Cooperative learning task | Grade. (5.0= Top score – 2.0 Lower score) | | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | 5.0 | 4.0 | 3.0 | 2.0 |
| COMPREHENSIBILITY | 87% | 13% | 0% | 0% |
| GRAMMAR USE | 91% | 6% | 3% | 0% |
| VOCABULARY | 90% | 10% | 0% | 0% |
| FLUENCY | 89% | 8% | 3% | 0% |
| PRONUNCIATION | 92% | 6% | 2% | 0% |

Table 22 shows the results obtained by the EG in a second observation. Students' scores were high and improved those ones in the first observation. Most grades were above 4.0 and the observer made positive comments regarding learners' presentations.

7 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

As shown in the previous section, the results in the Experimental Group were significantly better than those in the Control Group. In general terms, learners took advantage of the CL activities developed in the classroom. Throughout the study, learners showed a positive attitude towards the activities and they were engaged and committed to the study. Even though, the C.G did well in some speaking activities their results were not as positive as the EG ones. In both groups, there were positive and negative experiences as described below. The first stage provided satisfactory results that were confirmed after stage two and by the observations done by two English teachers who had not had any previous contact with the EG or the CG.

With respect to the speaking pre-test, the results showed similar performance in both groups. In general, students' presentations included the required information and performed according to the expectations. Besides the similarity in the grades, there were some identical results in items such as comprehensibility, with a minor advantage for the EG. In terms of grammar use, the CG obtained a better grade than the EG. Regarding vocabulary and pronunciation, both groups got similar grades; they included the required expressions and managed to pronounce correctly some key words during their presentations. Fluency was the item in which the EG scored much better than the CG. It was evident that EG students had prepared and memorized parts of their presentations which led to higher results in their final grades.

Furthermore, during the development of CL activities in the phase one, students showed a better performance based on the type of activity done in class. For example, learners got the highest grades while doing an *inside-outside circle* activity. This might be explained due to the fact that students received cards with key notes as resources. Furthermore, they had been exposed to the topic before and were familiar with some common vocabulary used for free time activities. Another activity in which students' grades were high was *jigsaw*. The fact that all the students knew the specific vocabulary helped the development of the activity. Besides, the role of the experts was beyond sharing information and they also became tutors and role models in terms of pronunciation and grammar use.

On the other hand, not all the activities led to satisfactory results. Even though, most activities were successful, there was one that failed to achieve the expected outcome. *Numbered-heads together* was the activity in which learners struggled the most. There are some causes that explain the low results. First of all, it was the initial CL activity done in the classroom, learners were still getting to know the nature of the activities and they had some problems assigning roles in their groups. Second, teacher's explanation was not clear enough and it might have affected the final outcome. Third, learners were not aware of the importance of their contributions to the group. This resulted in no one taking responsibility for the task. In the end, only individual efforts were made to complete the task.

Regarding the development of components of the oral skills such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, comprehensibility and fluency it can be said that different CL activities favored specific components of oral skills. For example, *Partners* favored grammar use more than any other activity. The fact that learners could easily connect the content of the activity with the grammar point made the presentation ran smoothly and without significant grammar mistakes. Similarly, *The Inside-outside Circle* fostered comprehensibility. In *The Inside-outside Circle*, students paid special attention to their classmates' answers and tried to report exactly what they heard. When they changed the original message, their peers corrected them and clarified the information.

Vocabulary and pronunciation were also improved through the development of *Jigsaw*. The fact of having groups of experts and more advanced students in each group facilitated the understanding of new words and their pronunciation. In this activity, the high-achievers constantly helped the rest of the group by modeling pronunciation and making sure their peers used the required vocabulary. In other words, the experts became tutors inside the classroom.

In general terms, grammar and comprehensibility were the components of speaking skill in which learners improved the most. Students received the highest grades in these two components consistently. The general oral proficiency also improved as a result of training and the full understanding of CL principles. By the end of week # 6, learners were familiarized with the meaning of cooperative work and were willing to continue using CL strategies in the classes.

Finally, after applying CL activities, a speaking post-test took place. The results were consistent to the ones during the intervention. Learners scored high grades and improved considerably compared to the initial test. Grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation were the three top grades. Compared to the pre-test, learners improved 26.8% which demonstrated the effectiveness of CL in improving English oral skills in university students. These results in the speaking post-test were very similar to the ones obtained by some students with the external teachers. In general, there was a significant improvement in learning and in grades after comparing the two groups.

Besides the improvement of certain components of oral skills, some other important findings were observed during the intervention. These findings were related to students' performance and to the teacher's role. For example, motivation towards activities increased and students felt more committed to task development. This finding was significantly valuable because as Cheng, H. F., & Dörnyei, Z. (2007) state "motivation is one of the key factors determining success in foreign/second language (L2) learning". In other words, motivated learners have a better disposition to improve and learn a foreign language. CL helped to refresh classes and make them more dynamic. Students were asked to stand up and move, to form groups and ask questions. All of this increased motivation and commitment to the classes.

Another main finding was the development of peer assessment inside the classroom. Advanced learners provided valuable feedback to those who struggled with the tasks. This assessment practice helped low-achievers to grasp content and form. Since students knew it was a "swim together or sink together" approach. High-achievers put a great effort in teaching and correcting pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary to their peers. Similarly, low-achievers were attentive to the comments of their peers and sometimes they preferred to ask questions to their classmates than to the teacher.

This latter finding led to another improvement in the classroom. Teacher's rapport improved significantly due to the fact that the experimental group had more opportunities to interact formally and informally with their teacher. Brookfield (1990) defines rapport as "the affective glue that binds education relationships together". For this specific case, this "affective glue" helped to reach the initial objectives and improved academic relationships inside the classroom.

After week # 3, learners were willing to participate and attentive to directions in order to achieve successful results. Similarly, the teacher became supportive and helpful. In general, everybody was committed to developing all kinds of activities.

After the successful results obtained in the first stage, it was thought that some external observations would give the study a more objective perspective and would widen the scope of the research by collecting further results and performing a deeper analysis of CL effectiveness. In order to do this, two English teachers were asked to observe students' presentations and evaluated them using the same rubric as in phase one. As mentioned in chapter 5, the observers had not had any previous contact with the groups. CG observation was done by a female teacher who started establishing an easy rapport with the students. Some learners affirmed to feel better with the professor and their grades were above 74%. Students and the professor provided positive comments on the activity and learners enjoyed having a different professor as an evaluator.

After the observation, students affirmed they felt more confident with a female teacher than with a male one. Thus, gender started being considered as an influential factor in learners' results. As Taqi, H. A., Al-Darwish, S. H., Akbar, R. S., & Al-Gharabali, N. A. (2015) state "*Gender is a teacher-related factor that is constantly researched due to the major influence it has on aspects of teaching and learning, such as teacher-student interaction (including miscommunication), teacher fairness toward male and female students, student engagement in class and ultimately, student overall performance at school*". Taqi, H. A et all (2015) P. 183. However, this finding requires further research to determine the extent of gender in language learning and to decide whether or not it has an influence on learners' development.

Regarding the EG, the two observers agreed with the idea that learners had developed a positive attitude towards the activities. During these observations, students' grades were above 70%. In general, students obtained high grades in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar use. Learners' presentations were reported to be clear and organized.

In general, these observations confirmed the positive results previously obtained in phase one and provided further information for the observers, the students and the researcher. Regarding students, they were pleased with their grades and could notice actual improvement in their speaking skills, confidence and self-esteem also improved. Giving students this feeling of achievement was the major contribution of these observations.

Similarly, the observers were positively surprised by the results and were interested in start using CL in their classes. The observers compared the EG with their own groups and noticed the importance of implementing well-structured techniques in their classrooms. Finally, the researcher of this study could reaffirm the results and even showed the outcome of applied theory in the classroom. In short, and after a considerable effort, it can be objectively concluded that CL does help to improve English oral skills in undergraduate students and fosters motivation, group work and social skills.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to determine whether or not CL improves students' English oral skills. After the development of the proposal described above, there were positive results in terms of academic performance and also regarding students' attitudes. Several conclusions can be drawn from the research project, some related to the learners' role, others with the teaching methodology and some others with the teacher's role as a crucial factor in successful research projects.

Considering students, this study may be seen as an initial step to encourage learners become active learners who participate in their learning process. For language teachers, this project might be taken as an actual research product and therefore it can encourage teachers to continue doing research inside the classroom.

The following are the most relevant conclusions drawn from the study.

- CL was a feasible and practical teaching method that put communicative approach into action. It was a student-centered teaching method that helped to improve the students' oral communicative competence of the target language.
- CL created a friendlier and supportive learning environment in which learners felt confident asking questions and getting involved in tasks-development.
- **Inside-outside circle** and **Jigsaw** proved to be effective CL activities. Having external help such as cue cards or advanced peers as assistance providers, made students feel more confident and have more resources to achieve the given task.
- CL helped to create varied and interactive teaching situations in which students provided support to one another and the advanced learners became tutors of their classmates as proved during the development of the activities.

- CL increased class participation. Students developed a sense of responsibility towards CL activities and developed their roles accordingly.
- Social skills were enhanced through CL activities. Students learned to listen to one another and respected different points of view. Interpersonal relationships were strengthened after each CL activity.
- Traditional group work did not provide as positive results as CL. Traditional group work led to discipline issues, lack of participation and low grades. During CL, all learners were engaged and committed whereas in traditional group work only one or two participated in the activities.
- CL was a dynamic teaching method that boosted the students' motivation through well-structured activities. Learners enjoyed different tasks and were engaged from the beginning to the end of each lesson. In general, motivation towards language learning increased in the EG and students used to expect every class with enthusiasm.
- CL also facilitated feedback. Students were attentive to recommendations and advice from both the teacher and their peers. This constant process helped learners to comprehend vocabulary and improve pronunciation.
- Beyond academic performance, CL fostered some psychological benefits for students. For example, attitude towards the lessons improved, motivation increased and interpersonal skills were enhanced.
- CL provided many opportunities for the learners to continually exchange information, activate background knowledge, and construct their own new knowledge. For example,

advanced learners were focused on learning new words and polishing their pronunciation while beginners were concentrated on learning grammar patterns and made themselves understood.

Based upon the previous conclusions, it can be said that CL does actually help learner to improve their oral skills in a target language. Learners not only performed better in CL activities but also improved their attitude towards the subject and their motivation to learn a foreign language increased significantly. In short, CL is a feasible teaching method that enriches different teaching contexts; it also fosters the students' social aspects such as friendship, collaboration and respect. Thus, CL is strongly recommended for EFL teachers and students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was intended to measure the impact of CL on students' English oral skills. During a considerable period of time CL activities were applied and analyzed in order to determine the effectiveness of these activities in the classroom. However, this research project should not be considered as a definite answer to determine CL effectiveness. Based on this idea, some recommendations are provided in order to continue studying the benefits of CL in language teaching/learning.

Due to external factors such as time, number of students and students' proficiency level, it is necessary to conduct this type of research in several institutions in order to compare results and see further conclusions.

The study was conducted with students whose ages range from 18 to 23 years old. Developing this type of studies with children or older learners would provide meaningful results to determine the effectiveness of CL on oral proficiency.

CL proved to have positive effects on oral proficiency in a two-phase research project. It is necessary to develop a more extensive project to determine the effect of CL on reading, listening and writing skills.

A wider variety of CL activities is necessary to determine the most beneficial activities for learners and to establish which activities foster English oral sub-skills such as: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and fluency.

Another recommendation has to do with the participants. Having more experimental groups might provide further results and would help to understand better the actual function of CL in language classes.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix # 1

Biographical survey format

| | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | UNIVERSIDAD COOPERATIVA DE COLOMBIA | |  |
| COOPERATIVE LEARNING BIOGRAPHICAL SURVEY | | | |
| What are you studying in the UCC? | | | |
| Medicine | Law | Dentistry | Engineering |
| | | | |
| Gender | | | |
| Male | | Female | |
| | | | |
| Which type of school did you study at? | | | |
| Private | | public | |
| How old are you? | | | |
| | | | |

Appendix # 2

The speaking rubric

|  Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia | UNIVERSIDAD COOPERATIVA DE COLOMBIA THE USE OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING AS A WAY TO FOSTER STUDENTS' ENGLISH ORAL SKILLS ORAL PRESENTATION RUBRIC | | |  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ITEM TO ASSESS | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| Comprehensibility | The student speaks clearly; at a good pace and loud enough. His speech is comprehensible. | The student speaks clearly; at a good pace and loud enough most of the time. His speech is not fully comprehensible. | The student hesitates and rushes throughout the presentation. It is difficult to follow parts of his speech | The student's speech is incomprehensible. Hesitates frequently and makes basic mistakes. |
| Grammar use | The student uses grammar structures correctly and accurately all the time. | The student uses grammar structures correctly and accurately most of the time | The students makes some grammar mistakes, his speech is comprehensible but difficult to follow in some parts. | The students makes grammar mistakes, his speech is incomprehensible and difficult to follow in most parts |
| Vocabulary | The student uses the vocabulary learned in class with confidence and accuracy | The student uses some vocabulary learned in class with confidence and accuracy | The student uses some vocabulary learned in class but makes mistakes | The student does not use the vocabulary learned in class, makes mistakes and does not know the meaning of some words |
| Fluency | The student's speech is fluent with natural pauses. | The student hesitates occasionally and stops for searching words | The student hesitates during most of his presentation, is visibly translating and needs to pause frequently. | The student is constantly searching for vocabulary, does not complete utterances and pauses after each word |
| Pronunciation | The student's utterances are phonetically correct. Utterances are comprehensible and there is awareness of accent. | Student's speech is comprehensible but makes occasional mistakes. Some utterances present a strong accent. | The students makes frequent errors that confuse listener and require guessing at meaning | Most student's utterances contain errors. Many utterances are incomprehensible, there is little communication. |

Appendix # 3

The speaking pre-test (5 – 7 minutes)

1. Complete the table below with your personal information and then use it to introduce yourself.

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| First name | |
| Last name | |
| Age | |
| Place of birth | |
| Place of residence | |
| Phone number | |
| Hobbies | |
| Occupation | |
| High school | |

2. Be prepared to spell your last name and the name of your school. For example

My last name is Hernandez: H-E-R-N-A-N-D-E-Z

I studied at Champagnat high school: C-H-A-M-P-A-G-N-A-T

3. Use the charts below to introduce Sarah and Daniel, use the correct pronouns for each one. (his/her)

| | | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------|--|--------------------|----------------------------------------|
| First name | Sarah | | First name | Daniel |
| Last name | Roberts | | Last name | Bullard |
| Age | 25 | | Age | 33 |
| Place of birth | New York | | Place of birth | Oregon |
| Place of residence | Medellin | | Place of residence | Sacramento |
| Phone number | 3162869758 | | Phone number | 555873648 |
| Hobbies | Play basketball, listen to music and dance | | Hobbies | Horseback riding, painting and drawing |
| Occupation | Art teacher | | Occupation | Medical student |
| School | New York college | | School | Yale university |

4. Describe your physical appearance: include parts of the body and adjectives in your description.
5. Describe what you are wearing today. Include colors and adjectives in your description.

6. Use the following family tree to describe the members of your family. Include their names, ages, professions and hobbies.



Appendix # 4

The speaking post-test (10 minutes)

1. Complete the table below with your personal information and then use it to introduce yourself.

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| First name | |
| Last name | |
| Age | |
| Place of birth | |
| Place of residence | |
| Phone number | |
| Hobbies | |
| Occupation | |
| High school | |

2. Be prepared to spell your last name and the name of your school. For example

My last name is Hernandez: H-E-R-N-A-N-D-E-Z

I studied at Champagnat high school: C-H-A-M-P-A-G-N-A-T

3. Use the charts below to introduce Sarah and Daniel, use the correct pronouns for each one. (his/her)

| | | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------|--|--------------------|----------------------------------------|
| First name | Sarah | | First name | Daniel |
| Last name | Roberts | | Last name | Bullard |
| Age | 25 | | Age | 33 |
| Place of birth | New York | | Place of birth | Oregon |
| Place of residence | Medellin | | Place of residence | Sacramento |
| Phone number | 3162869758 | | Phone number | 555873648 |
| Hobbies | Play basketball, listen to music and dance | | Hobbies | Horseback riding, painting and drawing |
| Occupation | Art teacher | | Occupation | Medical student |
| School | New York college | | School | Yale university |

4. Describe your physical appearance: include parts of the body and adjectives in your description.
5. Describe what you are wearing today. Include colors and adjectives in your description.

6. Use the following family tree to describe the members of your family. Include their names, ages, professions and hobbies.



Appendix # 5

Numbered-heads together (25 minutes for preparation & a 5 minute-presentation)

| | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <p>Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia</p> | <p>UNIVERSIDAD COOPERATIVA DE COLOMBIA</p> <p>THE USE OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING AS A WAY TO FOSTER STUDENTS' ENGLISH ORAL SKILLS</p> <p>Numbered-heads together</p> |  <p>OPEN LINGUA</p> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Directions:

1. Describe Michael and Catherine, include personal information, physical appearance, clothes, hobbies and guess their possible profession.
2. Based on their professions, describe their possible daily routine.

| Michael | Catherine |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |  |

Appendix # 6

Partners (40 minutes for preparation & a 7 minute-presentation)

| | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <p>Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia</p> | <p>UNIVERSIDAD COOPERATIVA DE COLOMBIA</p> <p>THE USE OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING AS A WAY TO FOSTER STUDENTS' ENGLISH ORAL SKILLS</p> <p>Partners</p> |  |
| <p>Pair # 1</p> | <p>Shakira Isabel Mebarak Ripoll was born on February 2, 1977, in Barranquilla, Colombia. With a Lebanese father and Colombian mother, Shakira honors both her Latino and Arabic heritage in her music. She wrote her first song at the age of 8 and signed her first record deal at 13.</p> <p>After her first two albums flopped, Shakira took the reins of her third album, becoming involved in every aspect of its production. Released in 1996, <i>Pies Descalzos</i>, meaning "bare feet," sold more than 3 million copies. The album featured her trademark sound, a blend of Latin, rock and Arabic musical styles. Her follow-up record, <i>Dónde Están Los Ladrones?</i> (1998), which translates as "Where are the thieves?", reached the top of Billboard's Latin charts. Not long after, Shakira won her first Grammy Award (best Latin pop album) for <i>Shakira: MTV Unplugged</i> (2000).</p> | |
| <p>Pair # 2</p> | <p>While hugely popular throughout much of the rest of the world, Shakira had not yet achieved a major record on the U.S. pop charts. In an attempt to increase her American fan base, in 1997, at the age of 20, the singer moved with her family to Miami, Florida, and taught herself to write songs in English. There, she enlisted Emilio Estefan, of Gloria Estefan and the Miami Sound Machine fame, to act as her manager and producer.</p> <p>In 2001, Shakira released her first English-language album, <i>Laundry Service</i>, which quickly brought her the success in the United States she had been waiting for. The album reached No. 3 on the charts, selling more than 200,000 copies in its first week of release. <i>Laundry Service's</i> big hits included "Whenever, Wherever" and "Underneath Your Clothes."</p> <p>Shakira returned to the Top 10 of the albums chart twice in 2005. She released the Spanish-language <i>Fijación Oral, Vol. 1</i> in June of that year, followed by the English-language <i>Oral Fixation, Vol. 2</i> in November. <i>Fijación Oral, Vol. 1</i> garnered Shakira her second Grammy, this time for best Latin rock/alternative album.</p> | |
| <p>Pair # 3</p> | <p>Outside of her busy career, Shakira created the Pies Descalzos Foundation to help children in her native Colombia receive a quality education. She is also a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, and was honored by the United Nations' International Labor Organization for her philanthropic efforts in 2010.</p> <p>Shakira is in a relationship with Spanish soccer player Gerard Piqué. The couple welcomed their first child together on January 22, 2013. They named their son Milan, which means "dear, loving and gracious" in Slavic; "eager and laborious" in Ancient Roman; and "unification" in Sanskrit, according to a statement on Shakira's website. In August 2014, the couple announced she was pregnant again. Their second son, Sasha, was born on January 29, 2015.</p> <p>Shakira previously dated Antonio de la Rúa, son of former Argentine President Fernando de la Rúa. In April 2013, de la Rúa made headlines when he sued the Latin songstress for \$250 million, charging that he had helped create some of his ex's hit songs as well as the "Shakira brand."</p> | |

Adapted from <http://www.biography.com/search?query=shakira>

Appendix # 7

Three-step Interview (15 minutes for preparation & a 5 minute-presentation)

| | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <p>Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">UNIVERSIDAD COOPERATIVA DE COLOMBIA</p> <p style="text-align: center;">THE USE OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING AS A WAY TO FOSTER STUDENTS' ENGLISH ORAL SKILLS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Three-step Interview</p> |  |
| <p>STUDENT # 1</p> | <p>Falcao's father played professionally as a defender in Colombia and Venezuela, moving to the latter country when Falcao was five. At first, he was picked on in Venezuela for not being good at the country's most popular sport, baseball.</p> <p>Falcao is married to Argentinean singer Lorelei Taron. In early 2013, it was revealed that Falcao was expecting his first child with her. Dominique Garcia Taron was born on 13 August 201, his second daughter Desirée Garcia Taron was born in February 2015.</p> | |
| <p>STUDENT # 2</p> | <p>Falcao Garcia is 1.78 meters tall, he weighs 78 kgs, he has white skin and long black hair. Falcao has big white teeth and a big nose. Falcao's mouth is small and he does not have mustache.</p> | |
| <p>STUDENT # 3</p> | <p>Falcao has got many records throughout his career. Some of the most important are being Colombia all-time top scorer with 25 goals, having the highest Goal Record in UEFA Europa League single tournament (17 goals), being the only player in to win consecutive UEFA Europa League titles with two different teams and also being the top goal scorer in the UEFA Super Cup with 3 goals.</p> | |
| <p>STUDENT # 4</p> | <p>Falcao loves playing soccer of course. However, he also has some hobbies such as playing video games, riding horses, playing the guitar and spending time with his family. Falcao does not like going to bars or discos and he can't stand rock or electronic music.</p> | |

Appendix # 8

Three-step Interview (15 minutes for preparation & a 5 minute-presentation)

| | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <p>Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia</p> | <p>UNIVERSIDAD COOPERATIVA DE COLOMBIA</p> <p>THE USE OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING AS A WAY TO FOSTER STUDENTS' ENGLISH ORAL SKILLS</p> <p>Jigsaw</p> |  |
| <p>PROS</p> | <p>CONS</p> | |
| <p>The increasing crime rate in cities and the increasing cases of rape and assault can panic anyone. City dwellers have to face this ever-increasing crime rate. In a small town you feel safe, you need not check the door locks several times a day. The complex alarm systems do not have much requirement in small towns. Also one is not annoyed much by salesmen and telemarketers as they do not visit or call small town dwellers.</p> <p>Currently the ever-increasing costs in cities have left people exhausted. Increasing tax and mortgage rates can drive anyone crazy. The small towns are beneficial in this matter as taxes are lower in small towns. Due to economic collapse most of the people are now exploring new towns for settling down in order to manage their costs. Also the prices of most of the clothes and grocery are of reduced amount.</p> <p>Peaceful atmosphere is a dream for a city dweller. City life is marked with hustle and bustle, traffic jams and bustling markets. Small towns have a pollution free environment and more green patches can be noted. Plenty of peace and calm is available to town dwellers. People are not in a hurry to be anywhere; frowning faces can be less seen. This kind of peace and calm is contagious, it instantly affects you and you can feel burdens lifting away.</p> <p>You can feel a lot of difference between the natures of city and town dwellers. City inhabitants are unfriendly, rude, are always in a hurry and no form of sense of community can be seen in cities. In small towns people have more time to be engaged in others' lives. They are genuinely interested in you and have the time to talk to you.</p> | <p>Life is much slower in a small town. It sometimes frustrates the younger generation. All they can think about is getting out of this boring and dreary life. There are less forms of entertainment found in a small town. People have the same routines to follow each day which fill teenagers with frustration. Sometimes they try to indulge in an adventure leading to catastrophic results. Fewer opportunities in the form of careers and jobs can also push people towards cities.</p> <p>Forms of transport are conventional in small towns. Public transport is also not very reliable in small towns. It leads to many difficulties. People have to pay high prices for gas if they have a job in the city. Hospitals and better education is not available in small towns. In cases of emergency, patients have to shift to city hospitals.</p> <p>Families might be living close to each other that make small towns the hubs of gossip. People do not have much to occupy their time which leads to gossip being circulated more often than you want. Interference can also be a big problem as people consider it their right to give you their opinion about everything you do.</p> <p>Lack of job opportunities and lack of motivation also lead to high rate of high school dropouts in small towns. Mostly the students who are educated in cities are given much preference due to higher standard of education. Students of small towns are not ambitious and mostly consider following the lines which their grandfathers had set.</p> | |

Taken from Pitlane Magazine

Appendix # 9

Inside-outside Circle (15 minutes for preparation & a 5 minute-presentation)

| | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <p>Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia</p> | <p>UNIVERSIDAD COOPERATIVA DE COLOMBIA</p> <p>THE USE OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING AS A WAY TO FOSTER STUDENTS' ENGLISH ORAL SKILLS</p> <p>Inside – outside Circle</p> |  <p>OPEN LINGUA</p> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

What do you do in your free time?

What do you like doing at the weekend

Do you play a musical instrument?

What is your favorite sport?

I like football and tennis

Which sport would you like to practice one day?

Which is your favorite soccer team?

What do you do after class?

Do you practice any extreme sport? Which?

I love listening to salsa or rock

I enjoy spending time with my family at home

Who is your favorite sports person?

I'd like to practice snowboarding

What is your favorite music?

I normally study or do my homework