

# Collaborative learning and classroom engagement: A pedagogical experience in an EFL Chilean context

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## ABSTRACT (10PT)

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In the context of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), there is growing attention towards collaborative learning and learners' engagement. Despite the interest on these topics, there is little research in Chile, in the English classroom, about both collaborative learning and learners' engagement at a school level. Therefore, this study emerged to explore and describe the impact of collaborative-based instruction on learners' engagement during an intervention of five weeks in a private-subsidized school in the city of Chillan. The participants of the study were 62 female and 70 male students, aged 15 to 17. Based on an action research methodology, the researchers used quantitative and qualitative techniques to collect data which comprised a Likert test (adapted from Alsowat, 2016) administered before and after the intervention, and unstructured observation registered in every lesson by means of field notes learnt from Efrat and Ravid (2020). Our results show that collaborative learning has a direct relationship with learners' engagement, evidenced in our four classes where behavioral engagement was predominant. Future studies may investigate whether the use of collaborative learning tasks, over a longer period, would still maintain learners' engagement in the EFL classroom as well as whether behavioral engagement is the most salient dimension among their students.



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## 1. Introduction

Undoubtedly, English language educators pursue learners' engagement in their lessons. This interest is not far from Chilean education where the school curriculum encourages EFL teachers to implement an active pedagogy not only to increase students' interests towards English language learning but also to learn it meaningfully within a social context (Mineduc, 2016). However, engaging learners in a Chilean context becomes challenging when facing multiple educational issues. One of these problems has to do with the focus of the instruction, which in Chile seems to still dominate a teacher-centered practice. A study conducted by Alarcón, Díaz and Vergara (2015) about identifying university students metaphors' reveals that pedagogy students mostly played a passive role in their education. This view is completely opposed to the communicative emphasis declared by Chilean education. Muñoz Campos (2017) reports that the focus of the EFL classroom, at some point, diverted to standardized testing though in an ill-structured way because the national expectations of attaining

an intermediate user proficiency have not yet been met. Student-centeredness may be distant from the Chilean classroom since educators must tackle different problems, leaving no time and room to innovate. For example, research studies report that Chilean teachers face serious difficulties such as misbehavior and violence (Cid et al., 2008; Espinoza & Arias, 2020; Velasco-Cortés, 2014) that threaten the optimal delivery of classes and therefore the implementation of strategies centered on the students. Another educational issue that may be hindering student-driven education is classroom size. In a study conducted by OCDE (2016), findings reveal that the average pupils per Chilean classroom is 24, being the maximum 45, which is a frequent number in Chilean urban schools. Acción Educar (2016) claims that it is vital to reduce large classes to improve the quality of Chilean education, classroom didactics and classroom management. Although the Chilean government asserts to have an ongoing class-size agenda, not to exceed 35 learners per classroom (Mayoría, 2013), no changes have yet occurred.

The research site of this study was not an exception to the educational issues discussed above, specifically in terms of classroom size and teacher-centeredness. Therefore, for this study, it was imperative to i) take a reflective role in our teaching context to bring changes to the classroom, ii) promote learners' engagement to meet the pedagogical orientations of the national curriculum, and iii) select an approach or method likely to be implemented in our context. In this endeavor, collaborative learning (CL), a student-centered method to reach a common goal (Laal & Laal, 2012) emerged from the literature review which has reported various benefits for the educational communities in different contexts. This method also matched our expectations to improve our teaching practices.

Our study was exploratory in nature given the fact that we did not find similar investigations, at the time of the investigation, focusing on collaborative learning and learners' engagement in a Chilean context. The research purpose was to implement an action plan, in this case basically translated into collaborative learning tasks, during five weeks to explore and describe its impact on the engagement of our high school learners in a school of Ñuble region, Chile. To attain this goal, we have posed the following research questions: Is there a relationship between collaborative learning and learners' engagement? In what way would collaborative learning tasks impact learners' engagement in the EFL classroom?

### 1.1. Engagement

For some, the concept of engagement is interchangeably used with the notion of involvement. To some extent this use is acceptable as these two concepts hold a positive connotation, for they imply an active participation. Nevertheless, beyond the ordinary use, researchers claim that engagement is broader than involvement as it comprises other elements such as feelings, meaning making and active participation (Harper & Quaye, 2009). The broadness in the term has allowed a categorization to serve educational purposes, specifically at a school level. Thereafter, it is not uncommon to encounter studies and books addressing different types of engagement. Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) distinguish three dimensions of engagement in the literature:

1. Behavioral engagement. It entails the active participation and engagement to successfully meet academic and extracurricular demands.
2. Emotional engagement. It is characterized by affections, bonds and willingness to commit with the educational setting and actors.
3. Cognitive engagement. It is marked by the level of participation and effort to thrive in learning and more challenging tasks.

Not far from this appraisal, Hu and Kuh (2001) define engagement as "the quality of effort students themselves devote to educationally purposeful activities that contribute directly to desired outcomes" (p.3). Similarly, Coates (2007) asserts that engagement is "a broad construct intended to encompass salient academic as well as certain non-academic aspects of the student experience" (p.122). Although these definitions are more general, they relate back to the three dimensions of engagement in Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris' work as they signal one or more elements, showing the interaction between the same.

Empirical studies on learners' engagement and collaborative learning have revealed a favorable relationship between these two areas. Huang (2021) studied the effects of a smartphone-based collaborative project on EFL students' performance and learning engagement during an eight-week intervention, where learners' speaking performance and engagement increased. Blasco-Arcas et al. (2013) used a framework including interactivity, collaborative learning and engagement to investigate the use of clickers in the classroom, yielding positive results in favor of learners' performance. Myller et al. (2009) found a positive correlation between high levels of learners' engagement and collaborative activities. In a more recent study, the researchers Qureshi et al. (2021) examined the social factors in the learning performance through collaborative learning and engagement, highlighting the importance of such elements on learners' academic achievement. Clearly, the concept of engagement possesses various definitions and empirical evidence points at being beneficial in stimulating a classroom environment that facilitates learning. For the scope of this study, engagement will be understood as "a broad construct intended to encompass salient academic as well as certain non-academic aspects of the student experience" (Coates, 2007, p.122) .

## 1.2. Collaborative learning

In a nutshell, collaborative learning (CL) is understood as learning while interacting. Barkley, Cross and Howell (2012) define CL as "group work, avoiding solo projects to achieve goals of common interest" (p. 17). Gerlach (1994) maintains that learning takes place in learners' interaction and negotiation. This socialization is facilitated by the attainment of a specific task (Gokhale, 1995) that allows learners not only to gain academic skills but also to develop group work abilities as well as affective benefits as they support each other. In other words, CL has an emotional implication (Laal & Laal, 2012) that enriches learners' academic life (Brown, 2008) as learners convey, listen and respect different ideas and beliefs.

While the concept of CL is interchangeably used with the one of cooperative learning, Barkley, et al. (2012) highlight a theoretical difference. In cooperative learning, students work in groups arranged by the instructor who maintains the role of authority and decision making as students make progress with their work and peers. Collaborative learning, on the other hand, implies students working on their own, finding and building their own learning as the teacher monitors and provides feedback on their tasks (Ibrahim et al., 2015). It might be concluded that whilst cooperative learning reinforces group work, led by the strong figure of the teacher, collaborative learning enhances teamwork from students' own organization and decision making. In Gokhale's words "the students are responsible for one another's learning as well as their own" (1995, p.1).

Particularly, in implementing collaborative learning in the classroom as tasks, Barkley, et al. (2012) state that students have a crucial role. There is no gain in collaborative learning activities if just one student does all the work. Collaborative learning activities are successful when all the group members fulfill and take responsibility for a role (Collazos & Mendoza, 2009; Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 1994). Proponents of CL assert that working collaboratively does not only entail developing social skills but also individual accountability (Collazos, & Mendoza, 2009; Johnson & Johnson, 2017; Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 1994) as learners commit to a shared goal.

It must be noted that teachers have a vital bearing as well, for they design, plan and create a cooperative environment that triggers motivation and involvement (Collazos, & Mendoza, 2009). In other words, collaborative learning has an 'intentional' implication given that "activities performed by students are specially designed by teachers for pairs or small groups" (Barkley, Cross & Howell, 2012, pp. 17-18); affecting positively students' learning experience. To enrich group work, educators must highlight the relevance of each student by assigning a role to all group members (Collazos, & Mendoza, 2009; Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 1994). Regarding this aspect, a research study exploring students' perceptions on CL conducted by Brown (2008) showed that students had negative perceptions towards CL since some group members assumed most of the work. These findings lead to a major significance to group organization and role distribution to ensure active involvement and commitment in every student.

Empirical studies reveal various other benefits of CL (see Table 1). There is evidence that shows that in collaborative-based work students no longer centered the attention to their grades but to self-satisfaction as the result of group work in challenging tasks (Scager, Bonstra, Peeters, Vulperhost &

Wiegant, 2016). Furthermore, and considering the social nature of learning, many studies on CL address learners' social abilities development and consolidation (Chen, 2018; Brown, 2008; Escofet & Marimon, 2012; Gómez Gutiérrez, 2018; Scager, Bonstra, Peeters, Vulperhost & Wiegant, 2016). Additionally, findings also highlight the improvement of higher levels of thought as seen in the study conducted by Gokhale (1995) where learners engaged in analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating tasks, revealing significant changes in higher order thinking skills after working collaboratively. One strand of research focuses on the impact of CL on teachers, finding positive results in broadening teaching competences. Sheldon (2002) pinpoints the importance of exposing instructors to the advantages of various teaching strategies in favor of students' learning.

Table 1. Summary empirical evidence on CL.

Authors	Empirical evidence on CL	Context
Brown F. (2008)	CL is interesting for learners in addressing academic and social skills.	Higher education
Cadavieco, Iglesias & Cabezas (2016)	CL had a positive impact on teachers' praxis.	Higher education
Escofet & Marimon (2012)	CL exerted a positive impact on learners' social skills.	Higher education
Gokhale (1995)	CL fostered students' critical thinking.	Higher education
Gómez Gutiérrez (2018)	CL had enhanced group work skills such as respect and problem solving.	Primary education
Mulligan & Garofalo (2011)	CL positive impact on learners' writing.	Higher education
Scager, Bonstra, Peeters, Vulperhost & Wiegant, (2016)	CL fostered responsibility and shared ownership.	Higher education

Source: personal elaboration

Despite the advantages that CL poses for English language teaching, most of the research studies focus on tertiary education. Furthermore, it was evidenced that there is little empirical evidence on collaborative learning in Chile especially at a high school level.

### 1.3. The EFL Classroom in High School Education

In Chile, high school education starts approximately at the age of 14, undergoing 8 semesters in 4 years. The aim of the EFL classroom at a secondary level is to use the language in communicative situations reinforcing primary school contents (Marco Curricular, 2009), which students begin mandatorily learning in 5th grade around the age of 9. In this context, at the end of the 4th semester of high school education, students are expected to attain a pre-intermediate level of English to eventually reach an intermediate level at the end of the 8th semester (Bases Curriculares, 2015). The Chilean curriculum outlines a progression of learning outcomes and linguistic complexity between grades summarized in Progresión de Objetivos de Aprendizaje. This transition requires a slow pace and time to consolidate and improve students' English proficiency (Marco Curricular, 2009). In the development of the four abilities of the English language (reading, writing, listening and speaking) with an average of three hours a week, students are expected to develop a communicative competence (Bases Curriculares, 2015). In a didactical and methodological field, the Chilean curriculum does not limit the different approaches, techniques and methods for English language teaching, yet it does stress the use of student-centered methodologies as well as the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to slowly master the target language (Bases Curriculares, 2015).

## 2. Method

This exploratory study adopted an action research methodology using both quantitative and qualitative techniques for data collection. Given the fact that the researchers of this study were teachers investigating their work and deliberately intervening in their own classroom settings to seek improvements, the most adequate methodology to employ was action research. In particular, action research is understood as a type of inquiry led by teachers who become agents of change "in their own educational setting in order to advance their practices and improve their students' learning" (Efrat & Ravid, 2020, p. 13). Furthermore, action research has a cyclical nature, which at the time is characterized by flexibility as a result of moving between action and reflection (Allan, Herbert, Peter, & Bridget, 2018). Considering this continuum, experts in the field of action research have suggested

different steps in the inquiry process. We arranged our study following the six-step put forward by Efront & Ravid (2020, p.8):

1. Identify a problem
2. Gather background information
3. Design the study
4. Collect data
5. Analyze and interpret data
6. Implement and share the findings

The researchers were four preservice teachers of English in charge of the four class groups of the 10th grade in a private-subsidized school in the city of Chillan as part of their pedagogical training program. The researchers were in their 20s and received pedagogical guidance by their mentor, an in-service teacher in her 30s with 8 years of teaching experience in English teaching in different educational contexts. Prior to the investigation, the researchers took some actions including the familiarization with the research site, detection of a pedagogical issue, and tailoring an action plan in response to the issue. After two weeks of observation, the researchers concluded that learners' engagement was an area to explore and likely to be targeted with collaborative-based instruction.

The research site in which the study was conducted is located in a rural area of the city of Chillan, Ñuble region of Chile. The universe of students attending the school are from a lower- to middle-class socioeconomic community, mainly living in the schools' surroundings. The educational institution, private-subsidized, is part of one of the Adventists schools of Chile and has approximately 640 students in high school education.

The participants of our study included 132 students, 70 male and 62 female, aged 15-17, divided into four class groups (A, B, C, and D). At the moment of the study, they were undergoing their fourth semester (10th grade) of high school education. The observed level of English was basic, implying that learners decoded messages and were able to communicate ideas with the help of the teacher; students' behavior ranged from moderate to normal, and they had EFL lessons twice a week, one lesson of 90 minutes and the other of 45 minutes.

### **2.1. Ethical considerations**

Before conducting the study and tailoring the action plan, the researchers socialized their investigation interests with the school's director and teachers of English. After the school's approval, the researchers introduced themselves to the four class groups and communicated their basic research plan that by then consisted of research site observation to plan an intervention. Once the researchers detected the pedagogical issue, they provided more details to participants, informing that they would take over the English lessons during five weeks where they would implement an action plan comprising four phases embedded in their regular lessons. The researchers also explained that they document the experience by collecting data to which participants could decide whether to participate or not. The investigation and intervention was also communicated through a written letter attached with a consent letter to be signed by the participants' parents. These documents were distributed in Spanish to avoid misunderstandings.

### **2.3. Intervention design**

Once we had problematized the issue and found background information, we moved to the third step of our research cycle, designing the study. This step underpinned a complex process because we needed to find a way to organize, share and present the detailed actions of the intervention with the schools' stakeholders. Consequently, we design our own procedures to illustrate our action plan which basically comprises four phases as shown in [Figure 1](#): Planning, Induction, Development and Closure. The Planning phase, executed by the researchers, encompassed administrative work and the validation of pedagogical material with the appointed teacher of English of the school so as to meet curricular and institutional requirements.

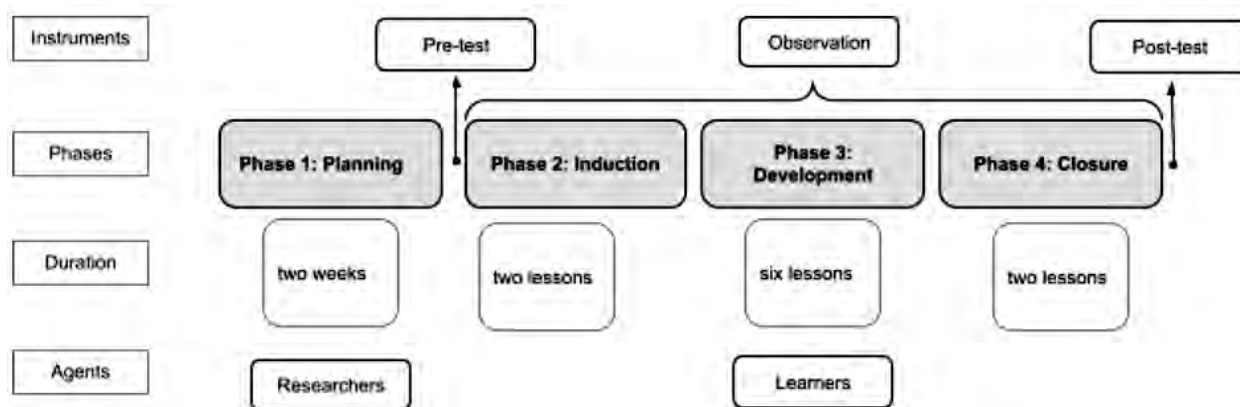


Fig. 1. Intervention design

The Induction phase, marked by the first interaction with the learners in instructional mode, took place with a threefold purpose carried out in two lessons where participants 1) explored the characteristics and major aspects of collaborative learning activities, 2) examined their assessment criteria to complete a portfolio, and 3) distinguished the importance of group work roles to ensure cooperation and commitment (Barkley et al., 2012; Collazos, & Mendoza, 2009) in every lesson. In this phase, learners took responsibility for the roles of organizer, speaker, assistant, summarizer, recorder and elaborator. Students themselves selected their roles and used sticky labels to remind and identify their roles throughout the intervention. Role importance and team organization were learned from Villa, Thousand and Nevin (1994). It is worth noting that we excluded the role of ‘leader’ because it might have been thought as more protagonic or important over other roles. Regarding group formation, learners were grouped with their closest classmates not to alter classroom arrangement.

In the Development phase, learners engaged in collaborative learning tasks tailored to their EFL curriculum and school’s guidelines during six lessons. Learners worked with the same teammates and everybody maintained their roles. In every lesson, learners and their groups completed challenging tasks that resulted in a product that was added to their portfolios. This phase also encompassed self-assessment scales that were also added to their portfolios.

The final phase, Closure, comprised two lessons. In the first lesson, learners reflected upon the various tasks of their portfolios and collaborative work, and in the second lesson, learners were individually tested using an end-of-unit written assessment.

#### 2.4. Data Collection

As it may be seen in Figure 1, data collection happened in different moments that responded to the techniques employed. On the one hand, it was imperative to reach a large number of students in a short time, and it was also crucial to compare the initial engagement with the engagement after the intervention. Therefore, we decided to collect quantitative data, surveying participants’ engagement before and after the implementation of collaborative learning tasks using a Likert test (adapted from Alsowat, 2016). The instrument, administered by the investigators, displayed 19 indicators to which learners reacted in terms of totally agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, totally disagree, in a scale from 5 to 1. Consequently, we administered a pre-test to measure the engagement of learners prior to collaborative-based instruction, manifested for learners from the Induction phase to Closure phase. Once we finished the intervention, we used the same instrument to gauge students’ engagement after our intervention.

On the other hand, we wanted to keep a record of how collaborative learning was impacting learners in every lesson within a natural context. Therefore, we decided to employ a qualitative tool, observation, as in Efron and Ravid’s words it “provides a powerful insight into the authentic life of schools and classrooms” (2020, p.91). This observation process extended from the Induction to the Closure (see Figure 1). Given that we did not have a predetermined agenda to observe, we opted for unstructured observation, for it gives “an overall description of social settings and social dynamics in

the research site” (Lecompte & Schensul, 1999, p.19). The observation protocol was learnt from Efron and Ravid (2020), comprising the use of field notes to register descriptive and reflecting comments. We designed an ad hoc observation sheet, displaying the features of class group, time, date, observer’s name, sheet number and notes (See Figure 2).

Class group		Date		Sheet N°	
Observer		Time			
Notes	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>				

Source: personal elaboration

Fig. 2. Sample observation sheet

It is worth mentioning that, in every lesson, there were two researchers where one was in charge of the instruction and the other one was appointed to document the observation process during the classroom time and breaks.

## 2.5. Data analysis and results

This step involved analyzing data emanating from two different sources. Quantitative data, gathered with a Likert test adapted from Alsowat (2016), was analyzed using the software SPSS v23. In this test, engagement was measured regarding the frequency in reaction to 19 indicators ranging from totally agree to totally disagree, in a scale from 5 to 1 respectively.

Table 2 shows the contrast between the scores obtained before and after the intervention, applied on a scale of 100 to measure learners’ engagement. The overall scores in all the class groups (A, B, C, D) were higher in the post-test.

Table 2. Overall scores of pre- and post-tests on learners’ engagement.

	N	Mean	Low	High
Overall pre-test	132	66,69	39,05	87,62
Overall post-test	113	70,72	42,00	95,00

Figure 3 illustrates the overall results of pre-and post-tests in t test, showing a difference ( $p < ,000$ ) between both tests.

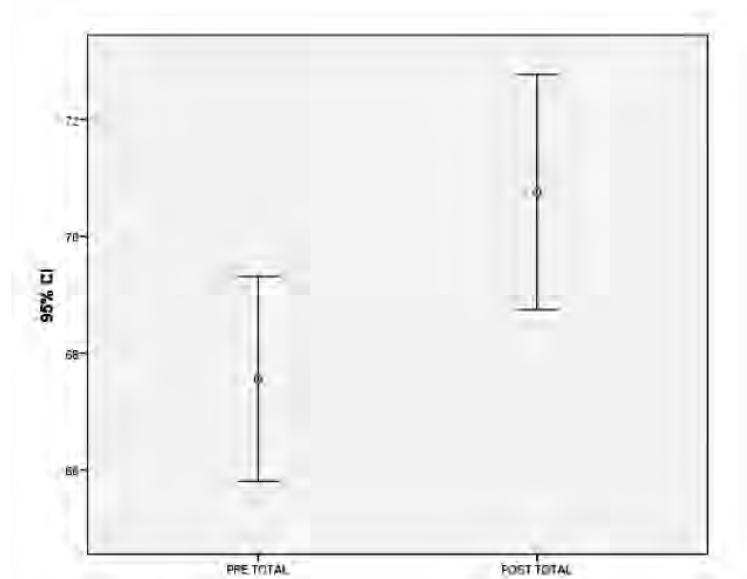


Fig. 3. Overall scores of pre-test and post-test in t-test.

Among the scores obtained per group as seen in Table 3, it was observed that Group B obtained a greater difference in scores; the mean was 68,80 in the pre-test and 75,95 in the post-test, increasing 7,15 points. It was also observed that Group D maintained similar scores during the pre-test with a mean of 71,61 and 71,26 in the post-test, observing a small drop between the two tests.

Table 3. Overall scores of pre and post-tests by class group on learners’ engagement

Class groups	N	Mean	Low	High	
A	36	61,56	39,05	80,95	
B	29	68,8	45,71	84,76	
C	31	64,97	45,71	80,00	
Overall pre-test	D	36	71,61	46,67	87,62
A	31	66,93	42,00	88,00	
B	24	75,95	47,00	95,00	
C	24	69,62	53,00	92,00	
Overall post-test	D	34	71,26	46,00	88,00

Qualitative data from our field notes yielded a total of 40 observations sheets. Before organizing the data, we examined the comments evaluating a possible way to sort them into categories. At this point, we received methodological guidance from an experienced professor who informed us that it was possible to use predetermined categories drawn from the literature review. Therefore, we manually divided our data into the dimensions of engagement as addressed by the authors Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004). We designed a table ad hoc with the three categories or dimensions: behavioral engagement, emotional engagement and cognitive engagement. Table 4 shows an excerpt of the data organization per category.



Table 4. Data division based on Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris' (2004) dimensions of engagement.

Data	Dimensions
arranging groups by their own initiative checking their notes prior to the lesson waiting for the teacher in groups raising their hand to answer participating communicative showing interest organizing group work asking questions to the teacher helping classmates distributing tasks willingness to participate	behavioral
curious glad at the arrival sense of making a contribution satisfied with their roles showing responsibility expressing satisfaction towards collaborative learning	emotional
different attempts to complete tasks attentive trying to use English to answer making extra efforts to complete tasks on time tasks	cognitive

After dividing our data into categories, we created a concept map since this allows researchers to establish the relationship among them (Efrat & Ravid, 2020). In this process, it was crucial to go back to our research questions and to the implementation design to establish the interconnections and have more grounded interpretations. We decided to present our interpretations by the engagement dimensions that grouped most of the data.

### Behavioral

This dimension grouped the majority of the observed data. We believe that the Induction phase is directly related to the behavioral dimension of engagement. Observations including actions such as distributing tasks, organizing group work, revising notes and grouping before the teacher arrived were actions spontaneously maintained and repeated throughout the lessons by learners in all the class groups. We believe that these common actions were the result of raising awareness on the implications of collaborative work on the first day of instruction. It might also be possible that learners reacted proactively to the methodological change from a traditional approach to a student-centered one.

It can also be concluded that the behavioral dimension was more visible because it was evidenced from the first day of implementation, collecting more observable actions. Similarly, we reckon that behavioral engagement was more prominent because learners adopted the same or similar actions as they observed other groups. For example, the student organizer in one group asked their teammates to arrive a few minutes before the break so that she could make sure that everybody had their school materials and tasks. As other groups observed this type of organization, they followed it. Consequently, almost everybody was already in the classroom at the instructor's arrival.

### Emotional

This dimension was the second area of major impact. We observed and documented many actions that denoted an emotional engagement such as satisfaction to work in groups, curiosity towards the tasks, group commitment, enjoyment and pride. After exploring the implications and duties of every

role, learners selected their own roles based on their skills and preferences which might have contributed to feeling motivated towards something they had chosen. For instance, there were participants who expressed that they had selected the role of speaker because they enjoyed communicating with their peers and teachers.

We believe such role accountability contributed to peer acceptance as well as group commitment. It was observed that before the intervention there were some learners that were at the margin of interacting with their classmates and were somehow uncomfortable when told to check their exercises with their peers. During the intervention, we observed satisfaction towards group work in those learners. Although these students kept introverted during collaborative work, they seemed to be enjoying their participation and contribution to their groups. It was also evidenced that students made an effort to comply with the duties of their roles. We observed different strategies that emerged from the same learners to comply with their roles. Some of them had a notebook specially designated to keep a record of what occurred during the lesson. Others used a checklist to monitor their teammates' work while others used graphic organizers to make plans about the completion of tasks.

### Cognitive

Making efforts to use English in the classroom as well as to complete assignments, marked the engagement patterns in this dimension. Although cognitive engagement grouped the least number of observable data, it must be considered that measuring cognitive engagement by means of observation methods in large groups might not be the best technique to employ. However, our observations before the intervention shed light on the actions that were notoriously different such as students' effort to speak in English and time spent on the completion of their tasks. Moreover, and compared to the other dimensions, cognitive engagement was not substantially evidenced until the second and third week of intervention that corresponds to the Development phase.

### Conclusions

The present study described the implementation of collaborative learning tasks and their impact on learners' engagement in the Chilean EFL classroom. Our results show a direct relationship between classroom engagement and collaborative work evidenced in our four class groups of large size where behavioral engagement was notoriously predominant. During this pedagogical experience, it was not expected that group organization and role accountability would have such relevance for the participants and the investigation.

Quantitative data reveals a high engagement after the implementation of collaborative-based instruction. Our pedagogical experience showed an overall increase in learners' engagement; however, there was a class group, Group D, that maintained the initial level of engagement, 71, in both pre and post engagement tests, presenting a slight drop reflected in decimals. A plausible explanation might be connected to the class prior engagement levels that once high, improvements turn more complex to be increased.

Qualitative data also shows that collaborative work has an important bearing in learners' engagement. We could evidence that engagement was maintained in every lesson and that behavioral engagement was the most salient dimension followed by emotional and cognitive engagement respectively. We believe that behavioral engagement is connected to one of the phases of our methodological design, the Induction phase that set expectations, organization and raised awareness on the implications of collaborative learning.

We noticed that accounting for a specific role in the completion of collaborative tasks was paramount for the whole intervention. We had learnt from empirical studies that implementing CL without assigning roles may generate negative perceptions on students (Brown, 2008; Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 1994). Therefore, we included this indication in our methodological design applied to large class groups ranging from 31 to 36 students where they show satisfaction and willingness to work. Participants did not feel individually overwhelmed nor showed reluctance to work with their classmates. Therefore, our results match the favorable findings of CL implemented in other studies (Collazos & Mendoza, 2009; Scager, Bonstra, Peeters, Vulperhost & Wiegant, 2016; Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 1994). This fact leads us to conclude that collaborative learning, in its student-centered nature, helps learners gain meaningful knowledge and self-confidence. In this sense, literature broadly

discusses that a student-driven instruction has the potential to develop and consolidate learners' affective factors and social skills (Gokhale, 1995; Laal & Laal, 2012; Scager, Bonstra, Peeters, Vulperhost & Wiegant, 2016).

In general terms, we are satisfied to have been able to provide an answer to our research question which is translated into a direct relationship between collaborative work and learners' engagement. We could also determine that collaborative-based instruction had an impact on learners' actions and attitudes in the classroom as they showed self-initiative and satisfaction towards collaborative work as well as proactivity in the completion of their tasks.

It is worth noting that the final step to complete the full cycle of our investigation comprised the dissemination of our work. We shared our findings in a formal presentation held by the English language department of our faculty, and we also wrote the present report in the hope that it can be a contribution for our fellow pre-service teachers. Beyond doubts, the hard work to design and implement the action plan was worth it, for we enriched our teaching practices and were able to tackle an educational issue in our national and regional context. The next step is to take this experience and knowledge to our future classrooms.

### **Recommendation**

This experience has allowed us to draw some recommendations for our fellow pre-service teachers, or in-service educators that teach English as a foreign language. First, in numerous classes, collaborative tasks are avoided to not trigger misbehavior or chaos. Yet, if collaborative work is planned ahead and learners are assigned roles, it is possible to have an organized learning environment (Collazos & Mendoza, 2009; Thousand & Nevin, 1994) that is likely to positively impact learners' attitudes and perceptions about collaborative learning as evidenced in our study. Second, in groups showing a lack of engagement towards the English language, the constant incorporation of collaborative tasks that imply the execution of meaningful activities rather than being passive about a topic has the potential to motivate learners as they will not just listen but do. Our action plan comprised varied and challenging tasks to solve in groups in every lesson. Our field notes indicate that not in a single lesson learners showed boredom or lack of interest to complete their challenges. Third, collaborative work can be the stepping stone to strengthen learners' autonomy since by establishing a collaborative routine where every student takes responsibility for a role is likely to bring an increasing level of proactivity in the whole class as we were able to experience with our class groups.

### **Limitations and suggestions for further research**

It is worth mentioning that the significance of this study was limited due to time; therefore, our students could not further explore collaborative tasks on other topics. Consequently, it is expected that further studies are able to implement collaborative-based work over a longer period. Likewise, it would be interesting to know if the level of engagement decreases in this period, and whether it increases again. It is also expected that this study could be improved and implemented with large groups to determine whether the design plays the same importance as it occurred in this pedagogical experience and whether some phases are more determining than others. In the same trend, future investigators could use other instruments to collect data and thus bring more substantial results. Finally, it is expected that experienced teachers could test our methodological procedures since their expertise in teaching English could bring further areas or results that are worth exploring.

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### **Declarations**

Author contribution: Jessica Vega-Abarzúa led the research group, adapted and elaborated the research tools, analyzed the data and revised the final manuscript. Javiera

Pastene-Fuentes, Constanza Pastene-Fuentes, Camila Ortega-Jiménez identified the research problem, conducted the literature review, intervention, and collected the research data. Tamar Castillo-Rodríguez identified the research problem and complemented the literature review.

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## Appendix

### Questionnaire addressed to students

Mark with an X the box that best reflects your perception considering the following criteria:

- Totally agree = 5
- Agree = 4
- Neither agree nor disagree = 3
- Disagree = 2
- Totally disagree = 1

No.	Indicator	Score				
		5	4	3	2	1
1.	Group activities are more attractive than traditional tasks.					
2.	Group activities give me more opportunities to communicate with my classmates.					
3.	I feel that group activities improve my understanding in the English language.					
4.	It motivates me to learn English when working with my classmates.					
5.	I listen carefully when I am in the English class.					

6.	I show a job attitude when I am in the English class.					
7.	I enjoy learning new things in the English class.					
8.	I feel supported in group work tasks.					
9.	I underline information we study in the class to help me study.					
10.	I ask myself questions to make sure I understand the contents.					
11.	Before starting a project or task, I organize the work with classmates to determine how we are going to do it.					
12.	When I have a project or some homework for the English class, I worry a lot about that.					
13.	I pay attention in the English class.					
14.	I am interested in doing my tasks and activities in the English class.					
15.	When I read in English, I ask myself questions to make sure that I understand the text.					
16.	The assessment in the English class can evaluate in a good way what I am able to do.					
17.	I do more than what I am required in the English class.					
18.	I enjoy talking about the topics discussed in the English class with my classmates outside the classroom.					
19.	The English class makes me want to learn the topics discussed more thoroughly.					