

## The Use of Skype to Expose Students to A Cooperative Learning Environment Through Oral Interaction Tasks

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### ABSTRACT

This action research study aimed to reveal the practices of a group of students when exposed to a cooperative environment and its effect on the students' oral interaction through Skype. Four task-based workshops were implemented involving peer work and tasks centered on topics to enhance critical thinking. Data was gathered through video recordings, reflective diaries, a semi-structured interview and feedback checklists. The findings revealed that the participants experienced certain aspects of cooperative learning such as teamwork and goal-sharing. In addition, the tasks contributed to enhancing some characteristics of peer team work, as well as language development. While working with Skype, technological problems emerged which were solved synchronously. Backgrounds, beliefs, and problem-solving also appeared.

**Keywords:** *cooperative learning; oral interaction skills; peer work and skype.*

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# **El uso de Skype para Exponer a los Estudiantes a un Ambiente Cooperativo de Aprendizaje a través de Tareas de Interacción Oral**

## **RESUMEN**

Este estudio de investigación-acción tiene como objetivo revelar las prácticas de los estudiantes mientras están expuestos a un ambiente cooperativo y su incidencia en la interacción oral de los estudiantes a través de Skype. Se implementaron cuatro talleres basados en tareas que involucraban el trabajo entre pares y tareas basadas en temas que fortalecieran el pensamiento crítico. Los datos se recopilaron mediante grabaciones de vídeo, diarios reflexivos, una entrevista semiestructurada y listas de verificación de realimentación. Los resultados revelaron que los participantes experimentaron ciertas características de aprendizaje cooperativo tales como trabajo en equipo y compartir objetivos. Las tareas contribuyeron a mejorar algunas características del trabajo entre pares, así como progreso del idioma. Al trabajar con Skype, surgieron problemas tecnológicos que se resolvieron de forma sincronizada. También emergieron otros factores como los antecedentes, las creencias y la resolución de problemas.

**Palabras clave:** *aprendizaje cooperativo; habilidades de interacción oral; trabajo entre pares, skype.*

*Artículo recibido 15 julio 2023*

*Aceptado para publicación: 15 agosto 2023*

## INTRODUCTION

The problematic of this research study started from a sequence of teaching experiences collected after some years of guiding English in advanced levels (V-VI) in extension courses at a Language Institute in Tunja. It was evident that some students were not able to utter long sentences in English despite the level they were at. To contrast these concerns, a diagnosis survey was applied to a group of students belonging to level VI. Firstly, their answers revealed that oral interaction activities were needed; secondly, the students asked for spaces different from the classroom; and thirdly, a desire of working in small groups was also evident.

First of all, Ellis (1990) defines *interaction* as different exchanges to generate communication. Thus, interaction is responsible of the development of effective communication under real conditions. One of the skills that is responsible for effective communication is oral expression; besides Jamshidnejad (2010) states that oral problems always come from lack of language knowledge, and are also mediated by participants' construction of self/others and by the context. (p 8,12). Second of all, Slavin (1980), as cited by Tuan in 2010, defines *cooperative learning* as a set of strategies using small teams of learners to encourage peer interaction and cooperation. And finally, Vygotsky (1978) presents the *Socio- Cultural Theory* that supports the idea of computer mediated communication as a way to develop higher mental skills. As a result, this study took advantage of the existing relationship between Education and technological tools particularly when learning English.

Consequently, the main objective of this study aimed to reveal the students' practices while being exposed to a cooperative environment and its incidence in students' oral interaction through Skype. Thereby, the research question was stated as follows: **What do students experience when they are exposed to a cooperative environment through oral interaction tasks on Skype?**

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Tuan, (2010) carried out a research study based on cooperative learning in EFL classrooms. He investigated students' diversities in terms of learning styles and linguistic competence, and the extent to which students change in relation to participation, interaction and achievement through

*Cooperative Learning* activities embracing their diversities. In the findings, learners were open to change and EFL teachers should create effective activities for learners to immerse themselves in talking cooperatively instead of talking individualistically in the classrooms. In the present research study, a set of tasks were designed to engage students to work cooperatively based on their desire to work in small groups rather than individually.

In regards to the use of technology, a study carried out in a college in Taiwan by Hsieh (2012) was based on the use of technology in an English course. The findings showed that peer feedback, motivation and collaboration as well as positive language development emerged to contribute to language progress. In this study, skype was used as a tool to carry out the tasks considering it as a space different from a regular classroom.

Concerning oral interaction skills, Fonseca and Parra (2010) affirmed that students assume certain roles when they work cooperatively. The findings revealed that when learners worked together, their roles were affected by their partners, so they needed to use some strategies to succeed particularly when interacting orally. Hence, Jamshidnejad, (2010) revealed in a research study that oral problems are affected by participant's construction of self- others and by the context. In this study, the students' oral interaction skills were joined to an environment of cooperation where the oral problems could be present as part of their learning process.

### **Cooperative Learning**

Johnson & Johnson (1999) in Tuan, L. (2010) assert that cooperative learning is the use of small groups in which students can work together to maximize not only their own learning but also each other's learning. Therefore, cooperative learning is not simply placing students together in groups and giving them tasks to do, but an environment in which teachers guarantee a meaningful process.

According to Johnson et al. (1998) cited in Tuan, L. (2010) four elements are necessary for cooperative learning (1) *Positive interdependence* which generates the sense that "we sink or swim together" working for a common goal and caring about each other's learning. (Sharan, 1980 cited in Tuan, L. 2010). (2) *Individual accountability*: this element emerges when each learner believes that

learning her/his material is essential. Each team member has the opportunity to process externally, to work with their peers, and to share responsibility for a task. (3) *Quality of group interaction process*: in this process, learners are provided with abundant verbal and face-to-face interaction, where they can explain, discuss, elaborate and link current material which they have learned previously with. Johnson and Johnson (1989) suggest that groups should be small when learners are just beginning to work together and develop their skills. (4) *Teaching social skills*: sufficient social skills entail an explicit instruction on appropriate communication, leadership, trust and conflict resolution skills so that the team can function effectively. Here, the interaction should be a matter of discussion as well.

### **Interaction**

The effect that interactions can exert on the classroom is directly connected to the success in students' learning. In this way, teachers could plan their classes thinking about the specific purposes of the target language and the relations deployed around the learning environment as well. In accordance with Ellis (2002), interaction is just evident when there is a person-to-person relationship in the classroom. Almost always, teachers plan their classes bearing in mind three specific constructs: the syllabus, the method and the atmosphere; in other words, what to teach and how to teach it through a social relationship. Likewise, Ellis (1990) states that interaction can be considered as those kinds of relations established by participants in the classroom which produce not only a range of functions using formal instructions, but also, every communicative exchange that occurs in the classroom. Through this research study, the participants showed some connections from the development of oral interaction skills going beyond the mere use of grammar structures, vocabulary and repetition of expressions.

### **Oral Interaction Skills**

Oral interaction activities are present in EFL classroom every day. Those activities are interactive in nature but sometimes students do not get effective oral interaction skills because they may not be either fully engaged or aware of their responsibility to gain those skills. Zamora & Chaves (2013) express that oral interaction skills such as motivation, attitudes, strategies, autonomy and self-

confidence must be mastered by students if they are aware of the need of accomplishing proficiency development. In order to achieve this awareness, through the present research study, students' oral interaction skills were addressed towards the development of certain tasks by using the web 2.0.

### **Web 2.0**

Vygotsky (1978) asserts that “*socio-cultural theory* has been regarded as a fundamental theoretical framework of computer-mediated communication”. Hauck & Youngs (2007), Kidate (2000), and Simpson (2005), cited by Lee (2009) also point out that mental development can be achieved with meaningful verbal interactions with others involving complex higher mental functions. Based on the previous theory, it can be said that students can perform priceless skills by taking advantage of computer communication tools as well as maintaining interaction with other people, as it was shown with the use of Skype.

### **Skype**

Stair & Reynolds (2010) state that **Skype** is a free Voice over Internet Protocol software (VoIP). It is a collection of technologies and communications protocols that enable users to make voice and/or video calls by digitizing an analog voice signal and sending the data as IP packets using the Internet rather than the traditional telephone circuits. Skype is one of the most used tools by students not only to accomplish academic goals but also to make connections with people.

### **Research design**

This study was framed under the action research approach. Dick in French (2009) defines action research as an ongoing cycle that tends to change current realities through actions and constant reflections. This research study followed the basic components found in the cycle of action research. According to Baskerville and Wood-Harper in French (2009) the cycle entails five steps as follows: diagnosis, plan, implementation, evaluation and reflection.

## **Context and Participants**

### **Setting**

This study took place in a public university in Tunja, Boyacá particularly in its language institute. This institute offers foreign languages to students enrolled within the university and people outside the campus. This last service is called *Extension Courses*.

### **Population**

The chosen population was a group of ten students enrolled in a level VI of the English course. A consent form and general information regarding the study was sent via email. At first, only 10 students out of 20 agreed but unfortunately only one boy and three girls continued with the whole process.

### **Data Gathering Procedures**

#### **Video Recordings**

Video recordings are used to provide a bridge to digital learning- an educational approach that integrates technology, connectivity content and human resources. (Petersen, 2000). The participants of this research study performed tasks on Skype and those tasks were recorded using a program called *Camtasia*. Its main objective was to gather data in order to identify patterns of cooperative work, oral interaction skills and emergent conditions.

#### **Students' Reflective Journals**

Students' journals record how students perceive their own learning. (Freeman, 1998 cited in Chang, Ch. 2005). In this research study, the participants made use of reflective journals taking into consideration a rubric of self and peer assessment.

#### **Semi-structured Interview**

Hubbard (1999) remarks that surveys become enriching when the purpose of the researcher is to know what is behind the evident and visible information in order to have a closer point of view about students' beliefs, thoughts and deeper opinions. In here, a written semi-structured interview was applied at the end of the whole process so as to validate and support the information gathered from the other instruments.

### **Feedback Checklists**

“Checklists are valuable evaluation devices when carefully developed, validated, and applied, it aids the evaluator not to forget important criteria” (Stufflebeam, D. 2000). In this research study, the feedback checklist contained specific statements based on cooperative learning, self and peer assessment, tasks, Skype, and oral interaction skills.

### **Instructional Design**

Four oral interaction tasks with touching topics were designed in order to provide an answer to the research question and to reach the objectives. The topics were chosen from the diagnostic survey. The Task- Based Approach was considered in order to design the oral interaction tasks.

### **Task Based Approach**

Willis (1996) presents the pre task as the introduction of the topic by the teacher. Then, she presents the task cycle: (1) task, (2) planning, (3) and report. (1) Task refers to the task per se; student makes emphasis on doing the task in pairs or small groups. In this stage, teacher’s role is monitoring the task. (2) Regarding planning, students present the way they did the task. (3) As for report, students exchange and compare results to their classmates.

After this, she points out the language focus with two aspects: analysis and practice. Analysis is the step in which students discuss aspects related to language, and in the practice, the teacher addresses new knowledge to get better results. Some of the previous stages adopted and adapted in this research study were: (1) pre- task, (2), task, (3) planning (4) analysis and (5) practice. These stages were used in each one of the tasks.

### **Peer work**

Erten (2000) asserts that it is possible for peers to provide language models and to interact with each other. Peers act as natural interlocutors resulting in the availability of a much greater variety of models with whom to practice (Long and Porter, 1984). Peers are often more aware than teachers of understanding (Gillies, 2006). In this research study, the participants were chosen at random. Peer



work facilitated independent and cooperative work without the guidance of the teacher, promoting students' responsibility.

### **Self and Peer Assessment**

Mohammad (2010) states that self-assessment is used to prepare students for effectiveness and improvement in their lives. It is linked with the goal of life-long learning and integrated into various subjects and domains. It has become not only a means to an end (autonomous life-long learning), but an end itself (a crucial component of autonomy). With this, students could discern strengths and weaknesses to become better learners. These skills help them gradually develop a critical attitude toward learning throughout their lives and then achieve perfect autonomy.

This research study endeavored to investigate whether learners' self-assessment of learning process influences the development of their oral interaction skills. Self-assessment was carried out right after each one of the tasks. The participants wrote down on their journals taking into consideration the rubrics of self and peer assessment.

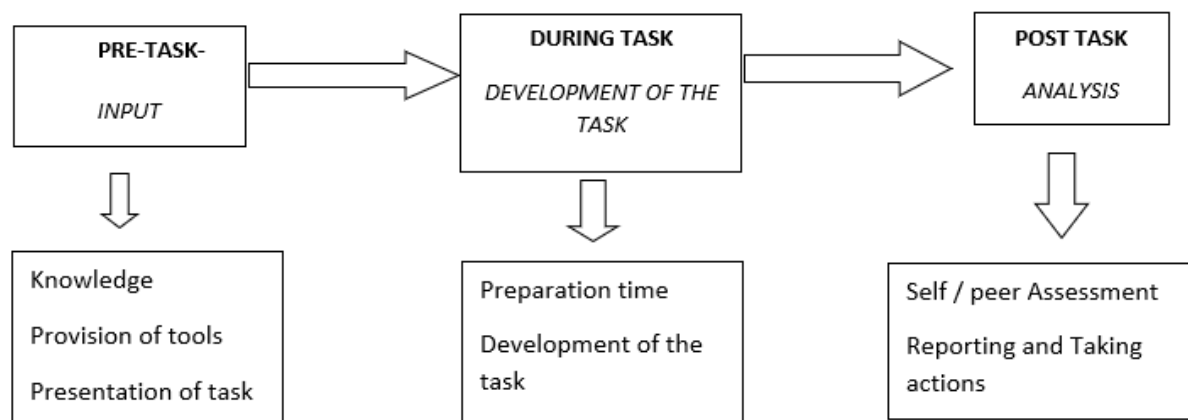
### **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology for the instructional design was based on the principles of task-based TBL proposed by Ellis (2003) as cited by Rodriguez, M & Rodriguez, J (2010) who presented a model focused on meaning and real-world activities in which learners may be able to process language for real settings. Communicative tasks reflect three main approaches: consciousness-raising activities, focused communication activities and interpretation activities; the pre-task shows students the grammar they will master in the future and form is engineered by the design of the task.

In the following chart, the researcher presents the process developed during each one of the tasks. The diagram below was designed by the researcher bearing in mind the stages mentioned above.

**Figure 1:**

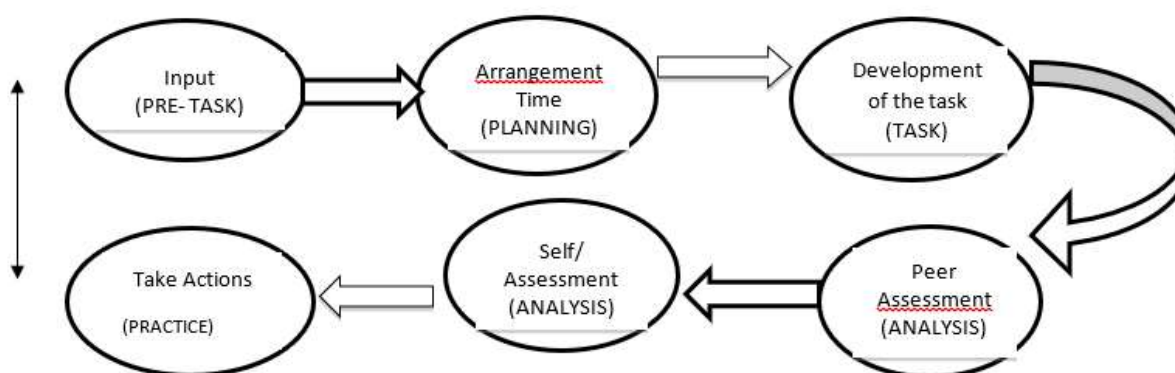
*Task based Approach. Adapted from Ellis (2003) cited by Rodriguez, M & Rodriguez, J. (2010).*



Ellis (2003) cited by Rodriguez, M & Rodriguez, J (2010) suggests that by working through tasks whose focus is communication, language development is better achieved and accomplished. In the following graphic it is illustrated the online cycle used to create tasks on an online setting. In each one of its stages, some stages of Task Based Approach were also considered

#### **ONLINE TASKS ACTIVITY DESIGN TAKEN FROM CHANG, C (2005)**

**Figure 2: Online Task Activity Model**



## **Pedagogical Proposal**

Within each task, the following aspects were considered: a touching topic, name of oral interaction task, the objectives (pragmatic, linguistic and sociolinguistic), time, resources, and assessment. (Appendix A).

## **Data Analysis**

To organize the data gathered, the researcher made use of the material provided by Freeman (1993). The latter one asserts that the categories emerge from common patterns and four steps can be followed: naming, grouping, finding relationships and displaying the data. The data was organized in each one of the instruments. The video recordings were used as a means of identifying cooperative features. To contrast the information collected from the video recordings, the responses given in the written semi-structured interview were employed to make a comparison of what the participants experienced while doing the tasks. After this, the reflective journals information was analyzed as well. Some patterns of self and peer assessment were provided in the journals as well as aspects related to the use of Skype, Camtasia, and peer work. These aforementioned aspects were also included in the checklist. Therefore, the data gathered from the journals was compared with the checklist answers to see if what they wrote in the journals matched with the answers posted on the checklist.

The data was interpreted by relating the main category with subcategories constructed as a result of taking the information from each one of the instruments: video recordings, reflective journals, a written semi-structured interview and feedback checklists.

Having the previous considerations as point of departure, the main category and subcategories presented next intend: by one hand to report the research findings and, by the other, to answer the research questions as well.

Research question	Main category	General objective	Instruments
What do students experience when they are exposed to a cooperative environment through oral interaction tasks on skype?	<b>We sink or swim together:</b> Maximization of their own and each other' learning.	To reveal the student's practices while being exposed to a cooperative environment and its incidence in students' oral interaction tasks through skype.	Video recordings Written semi-structured interview

Research sub- questions	Sub-categories	Specific objectives	Instruments
What can be evidenced in peer work through Skype?	<b>Learning from myself:</b> Language responsibility autonomy.	To explore the emergent facts of peer work through Skype.	Reflective journals Feedback checklist
What characteristics of oral interaction development are evidenced when working cooperatively?	<b>Growing up:</b> confidence, command, attitudes, cognition growth, leadership, resolution and social skills.	Self- language motivation, growth, conflict	To define the characteristics of oral interaction skills for an online setting.
What emergent conditions may appear by using Skype for academic purposes?	<b>Blending experiences:</b> Backgrounds, problem - solving.	beliefs, evolving conditions of the use of Skype while performing tasks.	

During the reading and analyzing process of each one of the instruments, it is concluded that the general category is related to the main question in terms of experiences of the participants while being exposed to a cooperative environment and while doing oral interaction tasks as well. In regards to the subcategories, they also provide insights to the sub questions. By finding commonalities in the

data, the main purpose of this study was satisfactorily obtained. Their ability to interact orally through the development of certain tasks under certain circumstances of time, planning, training and organization boosted to a great extent. The use of Skype as a technological tool was of great help because it hindered to solve inconveniences of time and space. This was evidenced when analyzing the instrument **FEEDBACK CHECKLISTS, which showed extracts as follows:**

**Feedback checklist: Student 3**

“Permite comunicarse en cualquier momento y parte del país, enviar cualquier archivo, etc.” *[sic]*

**Feedback checklist: Student 4:**

... “is very easy your employment” *[sic]*

**Interview: Student 3**

“Facilita el horario para desarrollar las actividades y encuentros con el compañero”. *[sic]*

**Interview: Student 4**

“... es una plataforma es muy práctica, sencilla en cuanto a su manejo, la interacción por medio de imagen y audio, hace que la práctica sea más amena y por lo tanto un poco tranquila”. *[sic]*

Concerning the experiences lived through cooperation, it was evident that peers helped each other in order to succeed in the task, but most importantly, they helped each other understand and be understood. An example of this cooperation is taken from task number one (See Appendix B) with the objective of being able to express freely the things students think about a touching topic. The development of the mentioned task can be seen in the following extracts, showing the use of expressions by the participants to understand and be understood by their peer.

**Student 2:** Yes, it's very interesting. What do you think about the video?

**Student 1:** It's very interesting because it reflect the reality in Colombia *[pause]* poverty, the solution, the... the... the hard situation of Colombia.

**Student 2:** What do you say? I don't understand you.

**Student 1:** Again?

All question?

No *[Pause]* Continue, please.

**Student 2:** Oh, ok. *[Laughing]*

**Student 1:** What do you think about the poverty in Colombia?

**Student 2:** Eh, really this thing is very busy for me because this problem don't have solution, the president is very bad and he no find any solution for this problem.

**Student 1:** What do you think *[Pause]* my partner? *[Intonation]*

**Student 2:** The poverty.

**Student 1:** Yes, the poverty.

**Student 2:** It is hard situation in Colombia, I am analyzing it is problem bad education in our country it's a for corruption and the bad government, I analyze.

**Student 1:** How do you help the poverty in Colombia?

**Student 2:** Please repeat again?

**Student 1:** How do you help the poverty in Colombia?

**Student 1:** Hear it?

**Student 2:** Help?

**Student 1:** Yes, help.

**Student 2:** Ah, ok.

**Student 1:** I don't cannot help to Colombia in the poor poverty because I am a poor girl *[laughing]*

**Student 1:** Do you... if you have many money no excuse me money, what do you do?

**Student 1:** If you have many money, what do you do for the pover in the Colombia?

**Student 2:** I give the money for the poor people, I don't know, I...

**Student 1:** Ok, do you give money at the people in the street?

**Student 1:** No, because I disagrrre with this situation because I think the solution is change the government in this country.

**Student 2:** Ok, yes, I think so.

**Student 2:** Do you think that tunja is a poor city?

**Student 1:** I... so, so, in the outside yes, it is very poor, but in the down town is well, it is well no, I don't...

**Student 2:** I don't understand good.

**Student 2:** I don't hear good.

**Student 1:** Ok my partner, any question for me?

**Student 1:** If you can change any situation in Colombia, what will be?

**Student 2:** I would like to have education free education because I don't have money, I am poor and I need to continue my studies and doctor.

**Student 2:** Free education.

**Student 1:** Oh yes / right.

**Student 2:** Yes, I think so.

**Student 1:** Anything else?

**Student 2:** No more.

**Student 1:** Ok my partner, see you next week.

In these extracts, the task exemplifies that short questions such as: *you want me to repeat? I don't understand you, repeat please or short answers such as yes* were valuable for them to help their partner to understand the questions and succeed not only in the task but also in the oral interaction part. In here, it is necessary to clarify that English vocabulary was the only means of communication, grammar was not well used but they conveyed their messages properly. Confidence and interests are also aspects of cooperative learning. This is evidenced in the previous task in the way they laughed at each other, the way they spoke with no attention to grammar or pronunciation errors.

Based on the students' answers posted in the interviews in terms of cooperation features, in the following extracts it is evident that working in pairs was a strategy that helped them not only to work as team but also to practice, and to learn from each other.

**Student 1:** "La estrategia es excelente, didáctica y muy interesante ya que contribuye a mejorar el nivel de inglés, así como resaltar el trabajo en equipo y aprender del compañero y mejorar". *[sic]*

**Student 3:** “Fue provechosa, formamos un buen equipo con mi compañero de trabajo y siempre tratamos de colaborarnos, considero que si es una buena estrategia, de hecho es una muy buena idea para mejorar el nivel de inglés de cada uno, necesariamente para cada encuentro en Skype es necesario desarrollar las actividades programadas y eso exige un grado de preparación que obliga al aprendiz a practicar y mejorar su nivel de pronunciación, gramática y vocabulario.” *[sic]*

**Student 4:** ... “fue una experiencia motivadora, ya que si bien es cierto se utilizaba Skype para comunicarme con mis familiares, viéndolo como una herramienta didáctica educativa, es un excelente medio para la práctica del idioma inglés, me contribuyo en lo personal a utilizar las redes sociales con fines educativos, ahorrando tiempo, desplazamientos, dinero y sobre todo lo mejor interactuando personalmente con el entorno nos rodea”. *[sic]*

Another aspect that arose from the data gathered has to do with some features related to oral interaction. This subcategory was named **LEARNING FROM MYSELF** (Independence, language models, responsibility and autonomy, social skills). These are characteristics of peer work. (Erten, 2000 & Long and Porter, 1984 & Willies, 2006)

Tuan (2010) defines classroom interaction as an important tool of second language pedagogy. This interaction can be performed between the teacher and learners, and between learners themselves, either collectively or individually. The next samples taken from the interview express not only language models themselves but also independence, autonomy and cooperation.

#### **Interviews:**

**Student 1:** “Además ayuda a practicar y a ayudar a la otra persona”. *[sic]*

**Student 3:** “Es un proyecto innovador, que maneja el tema del auto aprendizaje, ya que para el desarrollo de las tareas y los encuentros con los compañeros es necesario practicar la gramática y pronunciación, aprender nuevo vocabulario, etc”. *[sic]*

**Student 4:** “ El ejercicio me funciono en cuanto al desarrollo de las actividades pedagógicas, tales como vocabulario, enriquecí el mismo con la búsqueda de términos en mi diccionario con el ánimo de hacer mas amena y duradera la conversación, de la misma manera me gusto interactuar a través



del sistema Skype en otro idioma fue una experiencia, de la misma forma el dialogo me ayudó a utilizar verbos de manera acertada y encontrar errores de los cuales tenía algún tipo de inconveniente en el desarrollo de mi dialogo” *[sic]*

Regarding the task number 2, having the same objective as the first one (see Appendix B), the following extracts show some highlighted expressions which, on one hand, express ideas in relation to the first sub category (LEARNING FROM MYSELF: Language models), and on the other hand express social skills and empathy evidenced in the pairs.

**Student 2:** Yes, of course. I have a Facebook **acc** *[pause]* **account** and you? Do you have eh Facebook acc... aaccount? Hehe.

**Student 1:** Account.

**Student 1:** Ah, ok, great! Do you have a lot of friends in Facebook?

**Student 2:** Eh *[Laughing]* No, so so *[Laughing]*.

**Student 2:** Best friends, ah, **mee too**, only my best friends, no more, ah, any family, family too.

**Student 1:** Ah, yeah, yes, What, eh, time do...

**Student 2:** How Much?

**Student 1:** Ah, yes, how much time do you spend in Facebook?

**Student 2:** *[Laughs]*.

**Student 2:** More Time?

*[Heads moving up and down]*

**Student 2:** Communication *[Intonation]*.

**Student 2:** Ok.

**Student 1:** Y... What do you think about advantages *[wrong pronunciation]* *[laughs]* **How do you say...?**

**Student 2:** Advantages.

**Student 2:** Ok.

**Student 2:** What more else, anything else? *[Intonation]*

**Student 1:** *Ah...si, eh... no, no, no more.*

**Student 1:** It's all.

**Student 2:** See you on Facebook most later *[Laughing]*.

In this part of the task, it was evident that this pair acted together; they understood what the other was saying. If one of them did not understand what the other was saying she/ he used the strategy of repeating the word anew. Expressions such as: *ok, great* and repetition of how a word is pronounced correctly showed that peer work contributed to gain social skills. Language models were also evident in the way they helped each other in pronunciation or grammar matters. It is possible for peers to provide language models and to interact with each other (Erten, 2000). Body language was also a sign of interaction. The way they moved their heads is also a sign of interaction and communication. Moore (1995) cited by Caliskan, N. (2009) states that "[...] the movements of other organs like head, hands and arms generate an important part of tacit communication". Besides, He points out that "[...] Word choice and intonation are important in terms of interaction and communication. Messages are generally sent with intonation." (Moore, 1995, p. 116 cited by Caliskan, N, 2009)

In regards to independence, autonomy and responsibility, the students in task three were assigned with a job in which they had to answer to a forum of questions based on a touching topic. To post on the forum was not mandatory, they had to do it as part of the input stage; however, they did it, and it showed responsibility and autonomy on doing their job. (See Appendix B)

It was undeniable that interacting in pairs helped the participants to get many benefits in terms of language and cooperation skills. Open discussion in cooperative groups can make clarification of ideas and perspectives in a context free of the perpetual scrutiny of the teacher and the wider class group (Gillies, 2006). In this research study, key aspects of cooperation were used such as: clarification, repetition, eye contact, listening to their pair, less anxiety, nervousness, respect, exchanges of information, negotiation, etc. Some of them were more in favor than others, but at the end, they all contributed to get better results for exposing the students to the development of the

language. In order to gather the students' insights on this aspect, a peer assessment format was created (see Appendix C), which threw some outcomes as follows:

**Peer Assessment: Student 2**

“Mucha tranquilidad a la hora de hablar, esto es un componente muy importante a la hora de hablar inglés, porque si no se tiene tranquilidad es fácil olvidarlo todo.”

In regards to oral interaction development **GROWING UP**, Language development, self-confidence, motivation, attitudes, cognition growth, leadership, conflict resolution and social skills are aspects that are evidenced when working cooperatively.

By means of a process of reflection written in the journal, the participants expressed that their level of vocabulary and fluency improved as long as the process was advancing because throughout the first two tasks the participants still continued expressing lack of language command. (See Appendix D).

**Peer Assessment : Student 2**

“La conversación fue muy agradable...” *[sic]*

**Peer Assessment : Student 1**

“Existió mas fluidez a la hora de hablar a comparación del ejercicio anterior” *[sic]*

**Sample Interview:**

**Student 1:** “Creo que tuve progreso en la habilidad oral, en cuanto a fluidez a lo largo de las actividades, recordé estructuras gramaticales mediante las ayudas y videos, además me ayudo con la parte de listening”. *[sic]*

**Student 3:** “Teniendo en cuenta los temas que tratamos en las tareas, un aspecto en el cual progresé fue en cuanto a vocabulario, utilice palabras que cotidianamente no hubiere utilizado y que además contribuyen en mi enriquecimiento como profesional ya que tienen que ver con mi carrera. También practique un poco la pronunciación, no digo que mi pronunciación ahora es perfecta, de hecho sé que es regular, pero tener la oportunidad de realizar las tareas y hablar con mi compañero por eskype me exige practicar y esforzarme por mejorar”. *[sic]*

Another aspect that is necessary for oral interaction development has to do with problem solving and leadership. In the two groups of pairs, one of the participants displayed more leadership than the other, and it allowed the other participant to be more motivated on learning from his/her peer.

The last aspect of this research study deals with **BLENDING EXPERIENCES** (Backgrounds, beliefs, problem and solving). These are some emergent conditions that the participants brought into the whole process of the project. One of them has to do with the participants' time availability. Despite the short time of encounter, they could not do the tasks every time they scheduled them. They expressed they had problems using Skype and Camtasia but they solved them by finding other alternatives (problem – solving). Some of the participants knew the use of Skype thus it was easier for them to work with this tool. (See Appendix D).

**Peer Assessment: Student 4**

“Al inicio tuvimos algunos inconvenientes con Camtasia.” *[sic]*

“Esta vez no tuvimos problemas”. *[sic]*

**Peer Assessment: Student 4**

“Trabajar con Skype no fue difícil, Camtasia mientras lo aprendimos a manejar tuvimos unos inconvenientes”. *[sic]*

**Peer Assessment: Student 1**

“A pesar de no tener el programa listo para la tarea (vencimiento de los 30 días gratis) hubo un esfuerzo por lograr reinstalar el programa en el computador, buscando diferentes medios para solucionar el problema.” *[sic]*

**Sample Interview:**

**Student 1:** “La mejor manera de aprender es con estrategias diferentes a las convencionales, por eso skipe es una buena herramienta para este proceso en el ámbito educativo, así como las demás ayudas como videos, entrevistas, películas etc”. *[sic]*

“La experiencia en general fue buena, Skype brinda herramientas útiles, pero tuvimos dificultades con camtasia por la instalación y el periodo de prueba” *[sic]*

**Student 3:** “En general, es fácil manejar ambos programas, sin embargo en algunas oportunidades la plataforma de Skype no nos permitía acceder a la plataforma, lo que nos obligó aplazar el encuentro, en otra oportunidad la imagen se trabó, por lo cual tuvimos que volver a grabar, pero en conclusión fue buena la experiencia y no es difícil manejar los programas, requieren tener internet rápido y un computador que soporten los programas”. *[sic]*

**Student 4:** “...utilizar las redes sociales con fines educativos, ahorrando tiempo, desplazamiento, dinero...” *[sic]*

Another condition that appeared when working with an online setting had to do with time and organization of the tasks; this can be found in the FEEDBACK CHECKLISTS, showing the following results:

**SAMPLE OF CHECKLIST: Task and its organization**

**STUDENT 1:** The time is very important, in the composition of task

**STUDENT 1:** The development of the task is appropriate for the topic

**STUDENT 1:** The instruction given by the teacher is daily, in the question, and the video correspond with topic.

**STUDENT 1:** Yes, the time is appropriate, eight days.

Considering the participants' beliefs and backgrounds, brought while being immersed in the project and also evidenced in the feedback checklists, the respect to the other's opinion and the time, which was a condition that appeared along the process, it could be stated that the participants involved respected their work, as well as their partners' so as to accomplish their goals and succeed in the task.

**Feedback Checklist: Student 3**

“Respeto los puntos de vista de cada uno.”

“Siempre es amable y colaborador”

“Siempre trabajamos en los mejores términos.” *[sic]*

As a result, responsibility is the core of peer work. First, the characteristics of oral interaction dealt with a great development of the language command, new use of vocabulary, acquisition and

reinforcement of grammar bases. Second, sharing was also an oral interaction progress; the participants shared ideas and asked for help, for understanding. Interaction is more meaningful if both understand what is being done; the “I” was important but “YOU” was more important. Third, when participants became confident in what they were doing, it was also transmitted to their peer. It was perceived through the video recordings: body language was naturally expressed conveying security in a friendly and relaxing atmosphere. Finally, using Skype under academic purposes showed that it must not necessarily be used under these circumstances due to friendship ties and respect that emerged. Technological problems, time management, planning problems can also arise by working on an online setting. Thus, preparation and organization were crucial to succeed in the tasks.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The participants experienced good results not only when developing their tasks but also in the development of oral interaction skills by working together, by sharing the same responsibility and by understanding the way one’s partner thinks, behaves and reflects upon different situations.

These experiences allowed participants to take tasks seriously, to be responsible on their duties, to succeed not only in the tasks but also to gain extra help in their oral interaction development, something that they were really interested in and they considered needed the most.

The participants concluded that their language command improved significantly every time they did the task. Besides, their confidence and security when interacting were also the heart of their personal and academic growth.

The participants were doing the tasks on Skype and they were doing exactly what they were asked to do. Besides, the academic conditions allowed an environment of respect towards their partner.

The participants also expressed that despite many problems along the process: lack of time, difficulties with technology, the expiration time of Camtasia, training was not enough, other duties and use of Skype tools, they were able to develop the tasks.

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## **APPENDIX A: FEEDBACK CHECKLIST**

### **FEEDBACK CHECKLIST**

#### **COOPERATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: ORAL INTERACTION TASKS THROUGH SKYPE.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE USE THE FOLLOWING CHECKILIST TO EVALUATE THE ASPECTS BELOW.**

**TICK ONE OF THE ITEMS IN THE FOLLOWING SCALE.**

#### **TASKS AND ORGANIZATION**

	<b>Excelent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Needs improvement</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Commnents</b>
The organization of the tasks						
The topics presented in the tasks were well chosen						
The variety of tasks						
The stages of the tasks						
The instructions given by the teacher-researcher						
The degree of difficulty of each one the tasks						
The time was appropriate for the development of each one the tasks						
The materials used were informative						

## ASSESSMENT AND COMMITMENT / SELF LEARNING / ICT TOOLS

	Excele nt	Goo d	Fai r	Poo r	Needs improveme nt	Othe r	Commnen ts
The instructions of self-rubric assessment given by the teacher- researcher							
The instructions of peer rubric assessment							
Your commitment							
Your desire of communication							
Your understanding to your partner contributions							
Your work as a member of a team							
You did Confirmation/Comprehension/ Clarification request							
You were affectively engage (smiling, laughing, frowning, changing tone pitch, and so on)							
Your Interpersonal relationships							
Your growth as a human being							
The overcoming of your personal goals							
The overcoming of your group goals							
You show respect for you own partners opinion							
Helping or correcting your peers							
The use Skype							
Designing tasks on an online setting to have a continuous learning process							
The audio and video recording activities help me convey messages, negotiate the meaning of words, and cooperate with my peer to accomplish our tasks.							
Skype is a tool to work independently and solve problems.							

**PLEASE USE THE FOLLOWING SCALE TO EVALUATE THE ASPECTS ABOVE. DO NOT FORGET TO SUPPORT YOUR ANSWER**

<b>1. Yes</b>	<b>2. No</b>
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**ENGLISH LEVEL, SELF- CONFIDENCE AND IMPROVEMENT**

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Comments</b>
I speak more often than before				
I feel more secure when interacting				
My amount of vocabulary has increased				
New knowledge has emerged				
I speak faster				
When I am giving my opinions I think more in English than in Spanish				
I am not afraid of making mistakes				

**Thanks for your time!**

**APPENDIX B: ORAL INTERACTION TASKS**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Oral interaction task 1</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Resources</b>	<b>Assessment</b>
<b>POVERTY</b>	<b>HOW SENSITIVE AM I WITH...?</b>	INPUT STAGE (pre-task): The teacher will send a video about poverty in Colombia. Some questions are asked right	<b>Pragmatics:</b> To be able to express freely about the things students think about a	Input: 15 minutes Arrangement time: 10 minutes Development of the tasks: 5 minutes	Computer, Skype, sheet of papers, and Camtasia a program.	PEER-SELF ASSESSMENT (analysis Right after the conversation on Skype, students have to write on the journal the self-assessment and

		after the video. These questions will be answered individually.	touching topic.	Take Actions: 10 minutes		peer-assessment of the things they did well and the things that deserved improvement. They have to follow the rubric of assessment provided by the teacher/researcher.
		1. What do you think about the video? 2. What is the main focus of the video? 3. What are some other aspects related to the video?	<b>Linguistic</b> : To be able to ask and answer questions about poverty in their home country/town using <del>would and</del> if, and expressions for opinions.			<b>TAKE ACTIONS</b> (practice): In the following pre-task, students have to share with their peer what they wrote on their journal so they can take actions in the following tasks.
		The participants will send the answers via e-mail, so the teacher will provide them feedback.	<b>Socio-linguistic</b> : To get to know my pair's view-points and be able to respect their opinions under friendly arguments			
		<b>TASK 1</b> In pairs, students will reflect upon the situation of poverty in their home towns and related it with the video				

		<p>already watched.</p> <p>They will generate a conversation of questions and answers back and forth. (Video conferencing)</p> <p>Example of questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you perceive poverty in your hometown?</li> <li>• What would you do to help poor people?</li> <li>• If you have a magic wand what would you do?</li> </ul>				
		<p>ARRANGEMENT TIME (planning): In pairs, students will take some time after the input stage to</p>				

		<p>arrange the task. They will schedule the time to find each other on Skype.</p> <p>Individually, each student will write the questions to be asked to his/her pair on Skype.</p>				
		<p>DEVELOPMENT OF THE TASK (task):</p> <p>Students will record their conversations and the video recordings have to be sent via email to the teacher or deliver them personally.</p>				

## APPENDIX C: RUBRICS OF PEER AND SELF ASSESSMENT

### Peer Assessment Format

Adapted from Cambridge University Press and Peng, J. (2009)

and Donato , R. (2004)

Partner's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of task: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Assessing your peers is not an easy task. You need to try to be fair and objective. Use the following scale when assessing your peer.

0: Needs improvement

1= poor

2= Good

3= Excellent

Criteria	Scores	Comments
Quality of Preparation/ Planning		
Language (Pronunciation (intonation, stress, clarity, speed, Vocabulary, oral interaction,)		
Comprehension and understanding to your partner		
Your contributions to the task		
Attention/ listening to the other group member.		
Positive social interactions during the activities		
Kindness		
Use of Skype / email/ Camtasia		
Quality of feedback/ peer assessment		



## SELF ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

ADAPTED FROM Schmitz, H in Zusammenarbeit with S Schmitz, R. (2004) and Donato , R. (2004)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Task: \_\_\_\_\_ date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please use the following scale to evaluate the aspects below. Tick one of the items in the following scale.

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Poor	Needs improvement	Comments
Personal contribution to my peer					
Language(Vocabulary/ Pronunciation/ Grammar, oral interaction)					
Preparation of the task					
Your contributions to the task					
Attention/ listening to the other group member.					
Positive social interactions during the activities					
Kindness					
Use of Skype / email/ Camtasia					
Quality of feedback/ self-assessment					

## APPENDIX D: SAMPLE OF REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

### SELF ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

ADAPTED FROM Schmitz, H in Zusammenarbeit with S Schmitz, R. (2004) and Donato, R. (2004)

Name: Alma Claudia Alvarado Ortiz

Task: Swedish Task date:           

Please use the following scale to evaluate the aspects below. Tick one of the items in the following scale.

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Poor	Needs improvement	Comments
Personal contribution to my peer	3				Siempre intento ser la mejor disponible posible, para que durante la preparación de la tarea y el encuentro con mi compañero sean productivos.
Language (Vocabulary/ Pronunciation/ Grammar, oral interaction)			X		Soy consciente que aunque en esta tarea he ido mejorando mi pronunciación y gramática me falta seguir mucho para lograr que mi compañero me entienda bien.
Preparation of the task		X			Siempre antes del encuentro con mi compañero yo siempre preparo mi tarea y practico la pronunciación porque él me entiende.
Your contributions to the task	3				Intento siempre la que más pueda para que el encuentro con mi compañero y sea agradable y productivo.
Attention/ listening to the other group member.	3				Durante todo encuentro siempre trato de prestar atención para no perderme o malinterpretar.
Positive social interactions during the activities		X			En compañía y yo tratamos de que durante el encuentro interactuemos y en la preparación ya antes siempre estamos en contacto.
Kindness	3				Siempre trato de tener la mejor disposición con mi compañero.
Use of Skype / email/ fantasia	3				No tuvimos ningún problema.
Quality of feedback/ self assessment		X			Considero que es buena aunque podría ser mejor.