

3RD YEAR SECONDARY EDUCATION STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON LANGUAGE COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND ITS IMPACT ON THEIR EFL READING COMPREHENSION

BEATRIZ CHAVES YUSTE
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginnings of printing, reading has been a common leisure activity which helps teenagers understand their surrounding world, develop critical thinking and growth. The 21st century requires individuals who are proficient in their mother tongue and, at least, in an L2, who can understand all the available information so that they can take, convey, discuss and support their views on topics and situations which may affect their lives (Uribe-Enciso, 2015). When reading in an L2, readers use their knowledge in order to process information to make meaning of the text, being able to discriminate the most important knowledge and the most convenient actions to better comprehend the given text. They need to be aware of the metalinguistic processes and the meaning of the content while dealing with other factors such as transfer and sociolinguistic variations.

Reading habits need to be fostered from early educational stages, not only in the students' mother tongue but also in the foreign languages they learn. Thus, it turns essential to include a reading plan in the foreign languages' syllabi of Secondary Education. As Colomer (2005) defends, a good reading corpus does not necessarily need to cover the classics. They need to fulfill students' needs, tastes and interests. By sharing the same reading with the teacher and the classmates, interaction, knowledge building and complicity are promoted (Colomer,

2005). This way, reading skills are improved (i.e. interpreting, inferring, making inter-textual connections, evaluating the information or monitoring reading comprehension). Moreover, students expand their lexicon, are fully aware of syntactic structures and forms of written discourse, develop their cognitive skills, learning autonomy and general linguistic competence. Reading offers new realities, cultures and times, through which students can become more open-minded, respectful and tolerant. In addition, cross curricular issues and current conflicts can be easily handled too. This is the case of the piece of fiction of this research: *Wonder*, by Palacio. Through this reading, students can feel identified with certain characters, empathize, develop their self-esteem, respect differences and learn civic values. The effects of reading in secondary education, when students are adolescents, are relevant since students are building their own identities (Colomer, 2005; Dantas, Cordón-García & Gómez-Díaz, 2017). Teenagers are used to receiving immediate feedback and thanks to reading, they can learn to be more patient and thoughtful. All these benefits can even be improved when applying active methodologies such as Language Cooperative Learning (hereafter, LCL), which has been applied in this research. Thus, through this learner-centered methodology, students learn to work cooperatively, interact with their peers, learn from each other and grow their learning autonomy.

1.1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Reading is a key skill when learning a foreign language. Through it, other skills such as writing are developed: different styles, writing strategies and discourse types are shown too and it becomes a platform through which students can also broaden their ideas, increase their lexicon and use more complex grammar structures (Navarro, 2005). It should not be regarded as a passive skill since it promotes the ability to communicate both in a written and oral way (Kroll, 1991). Moreover, in order to understand the text, the reader should be aware of the linguistic and conceptual knowledge to mentally face and understand the text (Durán, 2001).

Since one of the demands of modern education is to reestablish the values of cooperation in the current depersonalized world, LCL seems to provide the ideal wished cooperative learning with “higher-level reasoning, more frequent generation of new ideas and solutions (i.e., process gain), and greater transfer of what is learned within one situation to another (i.e., group-to-individual transfer)” (Johnson & Johnson, 1994, p. 7) when working with the reading skill. Cooperative learning activities are “organized so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners” (Olsen & Kagan, 1992, p. 8). It follows Dewey’s (1938) principles and it is a methodology based on teamwork between equals who share the responsibility of their work while building knowledge and improving social and communicative skills. Every student contributes to the cooperative group by providing the best they can do, sharing what they have discovered and helping each other. Thus, equality, tolerance and respect are promoted. It also implies the full participation and mutual assistance between the teacher and students and among students through small group activities, large group instruction or interacting in pairs. It is a “deliberate and conscious sharing of responsibility for learning on the part of child and teacher” (Oribabor, 2014, p. 151). Each member of the group is assigned a role, periods of time and clear guidelines of the tasks are established. Only by cooperating and supporting each other, the group is able to fulfill the proposed tasks successfully.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that in LCL students work in groups, it cannot be misunderstood with traditional group work, where it is frequent to find unbalanced participation. With LCL, students with different learning styles and rhythms can achieve the goals thanks to the help and support of their group peers by playing different roles. The differences between LCL and traditional group work have been summarized in the following table:

TABLE 1. Differences between traditional group work and cooperative work.

	<i>Traditional Group Work</i>	<i>LCL</i>
Profile	Group homogeneity	Group heterogeneity
Commitment	Relative lack of commitment	Strong commitment
Culture	Scarce group culture	Shared values and high team spirit
Tasks	Equal sharing of work	Work is distributed according to each student's skills and abilities.
Integration	Tendency to fragmented and divided specialization.	Integrated context learning
Dependence	Independence of individual work	Interdependence guarantees results
Achievements	Value of each student's achievements.	Value of the group's achievements.
Leadership	Leader choice	Shared leadership
Conclusions	Individual and personal	Collective nature
Assessment	The group is not assessed but the final outcome	Continuous self-assessment of the group

Source: based on Vinagre (2010)

LCL also helps to detect and neutralize prejudices, preconceived ideas, inhibitions and failures in social skills. LCL's main aim is communication, above all, spoken speech (Richards & Schmidt, 1983) which occurs in informal everyday conversational interaction and participation in cooperatively structured interactive activities.

In this regard, Vygotsky (1962) and Piaget (1965) already highlighted the essential role of social interaction in the learning process defending that students acquire their communicative competence by speaking in social or pedagogically structured situations. LCL works along the same line by developing students' capacities for critical thinking and promoting cooperation through social interaction instead of competition (Johnson *et al.*, 1994). The specific objectives may vary depending on the context of the classroom, but it is always a learner-centered method that provides opportunities for a natural acquisition of the foreign language through the use of pair-work and small group interactive tasks that develop communicative strategies while paying attention to lexical units, linguistic structures and communicative functions. Thus,

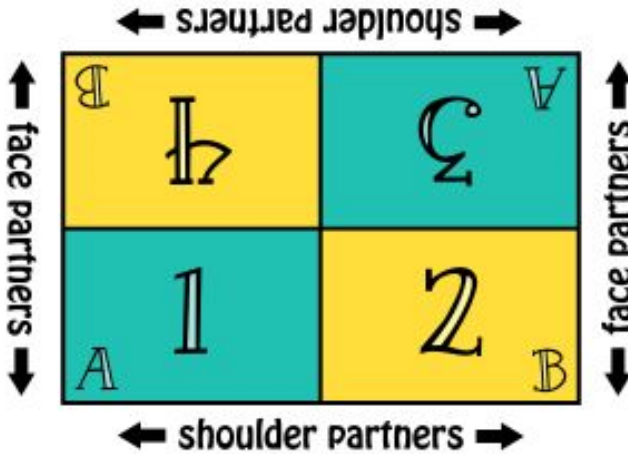
students' motivation increases, stress is reduced and a positive affective environment is created in the classroom, which eases reaching the established objectives that can be applied to different curricular environments.

In a traditional LCL lesson, following Alonso *et al.*'s (2014) guidelines, two main steps need to be followed. The first step consists of creating an appropriate classroom atmosphere (through relaxation, self-control and energy release activities) and promote the acceptance and value of the diversity of a class regarding the students' tastes, values and aptitudes. Thus, the teacher can understand students' motivations and interests and can provide team-building activities which ensure that students with different skills, experiences, interests and learning rhythms, accept and recognize themselves as members of the team to learn, cooperate and help each other. It is advisable to include activities that foster trusting themselves and others and experience feelings of empathy, acceptance and identity of their teams and those which involve active listening and complex decision making and create positive relationships. These tasks should be addressed to students' interests, not related to the curricular content and performed once or twice a week for ten or fifteen minutes.

The second step involves organizing heterogeneous teams to work in cooperation (base teams). When creating them, students' rhythms and learning styles, intelligence, social and communication skills, personality, cognitive ability and knowledge, interests, likes and motivation need to be considered. Most of the proposed tasks should be fulfilled within the base team and need to be established for a certain amount of time and suppose the reference team of each student. Students should be distributed in the class according to three categories: a) students who are better at helping and motivating other teammates, b) students with the most need of assistance who find it difficult to establish social relations, get autonomy or be responsible and committed to the task and c) intermediate students who neither need much help nor have a special predisposition to offer to others. Groups should be balanced concerning the number of boys and girls, students' different personalities and affinities. An ideal group would include four students:

one student that is able to help the others, one that needs assistance and two intermediate students.

FIGURE 1. Model of team grouping in Language Cooperative Learning.



Source: Alonso et al. (2014, p. 9)

This distribution is effective to work in shoulder pairs: students one and two, three and four, sitting down next to the other, can share resources easily, work on the same materials or do and correct exercises together. Hand pairs would be composed of two pairs of students: one and four, two and three who face each other and can communicate verbally very comfortably in dialogues, debates and interviews. Teachers should provide scaffolding and act consequently when cognitive conflicts take place.

Besides base teams, in order to accomplish specific activities and empower the possibilities of differentiating and assisting diversity within a classroom, some sporadic ad hoc teams can be established. To this respect, Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (1994) describe three types of cooperative learning groups: formal groups, informal groups (*ad hoc* groups and heterogeneous based groups).

All the teams work through cooperative structures and need to fulfill the following requirements (Pujolàs, 2004):

- a. Heterogeneous groupings: students with different skills work better together. Equal opportunities for success are offered and tasks are adapted to students' needs, cognitive skills and age. Teachers provide the necessary curricular, methodological and organizational measures to reach success. Positive interdependence is promoted since every member of the team learns through belonging to the group and through the cooperation and contribution of all others when trying to reach a common goal. To do so, the teacher should establish interdependence of goals, tasks, resources, roles, rewards, identities and environments.
- b. Individual responsibility: each member is responsible for fulfilling the assigned duties since the group's success depends on every member's work.
- c. Equal and simultaneous participation: all the members of the group interact respecting times and turns.
- d. Inter-individual information processing: students, by using informal and formal learning techniques, process and confront different points of view, explanations and interpretations and construct meaningful learning.
- e. Use of cooperative skills: students not only work on contents but also on interpersonal and group skills since they develop and practice trust-building, leadership, decision-making, communication and conflict management skills which are necessary for cooperation, communication, inter-individual information processing and constructive management of conflicts. There are four levels of cooperative skills ordered according to their complexity (Johnson *et al.*, 1994): forming skills (used to establish optimal conditions for cooperative learning groups), functioning skills (to manage group skills and keep efficient work relationships), formulating skills (to understand the resources, use reasoning strategies and maximize their knowledge) and fermenting skills (to reconceptualize the used

resources, the cognitive conflict, information research and explanation of the basis of the group's conclusions).

- f. Group processing: thanks to the assessment of the work of the group, which should cover the group functioning, the development of the skills for cooperation and the fulfillment of the proposed objectives, students can reflect and improve their future cooperative practice.

Thanks to LCL, there is a higher frequency and variety of the foreign language through different types of interaction, which contributes to cognitive and linguistic skills development. Students can act as resources for others, encountering a more active learning role (McGroarty, 1989). Sharan and Shaulov (1990) and Brecke and Jensen (2007) defend that LCL is a motivating method since it enhances students' engagement and perseverance to fulfill tasks, helps to increase students' self-esteem and handle difficult situations that may be encountered within the classroom. Alonso *et al.* (2014, p. 3) summarize the role of LCL when this occurs:

TABLE 2. Advantages of cooperative learning in certain class situations.

TYPES OF SITUATIONS	ADVANTAGES OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anxiety problems - Fear of not being accepted or to blunder in front of others - Blockage or frustration on carrying out a task or activity - Fear of failure 	Cooperative learning fosters self-esteem and self-confidence, it allows for a calm and relaxed working environment and with enough time and opportunities to practice and to get help from others.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poor social skills - Shyness - Difficulty in making friends and getting along with one's comrades and/or adults - Impulsiveness - Rejection of one's comrades - Language disorders 	Cooperative learning promotes interaction among equals while learning and provides specific activities to develop social and communication skills.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low autonomy - Need for the continued support from the teacher - Difficulties in planning an activity and in the use of time 	Cooperative learning reduces the dependence of students on the teacher because of the help of comrades, it promotes autonomy and independence and it allows the teacher more time to care for the children with the greatest needs.

- Poor monitoring of progress and difficulties in the process of learning	
- Different levels of competence	Cooperative learning benefits the students who need help as well as those who help them; it effectively encourages work among companions with different levels of competence.
- Social and cultural differences, due to origin, language, customs, culture...	Cooperative learning promotes equal participation of all; it permits children to get to know each other better and to strengthen ties as well as fostering mutual respect.

Source: Alonso *et al.* (2014, p. 3)

As it can be inferred from this table, one of the most relevant characteristics of LCL is the positive interdependence among students which stimulates interaction through interpersonal, group practice and assessment. Its versatility enables the practice of a wide range of activities.

Countless descriptions of the types of activities that can be used in LCL are available. As Coelho (1992) describes, there are three main types of cooperative tasks:

- a. Input groups (development of skills and control of the facts). All students work with the same material. The task guarantees that all the groups know the answer to a question and can explain how that material can be interpreted.
- b. Jigsaw (differentiated but predetermined input). Evaluation and synthesis of facts and opinions. Each member of the group gets a different piece of information and synthesizes the information by debating. Each student presents a task that is part of a group project or does a test to show the synthesis of all the presented information.
- c. Cooperative projects (discovery learning). Topics can be different for each group. Students research information and synthesize it for the group presentation.

Some example of LCL activities can be 'three steps interview' (students work in pairs and exchange information, 'round table' (there is a piece of paper and a pen for each team. Each student writes down

something), 'think-get a couple-share' (the teacher makes a question and students discuss their answers with a peer. Later on, they communicate their peer's answers), 'solve-get a couple-share' (the teacher proposes a problem and students get the solutions individually and explain how the problem has been solved through an interview or a circular turn or 'numbered heads' (each student represents a number and they are divided into groups. The teacher asks a question and students work together and think of an answer to the proposed question. The teacher says a number and the students who have that number answer the teacher's question (Olsen & Kagan, 1992). All these types of teaching and learning activities should be adapted to the students' needs and characteristics respecting the procedures previously described. An optimal learning atmosphere with evident team spirit and well designed and performed team structures should guarantee the best and most beneficial LCL lessons. Knowing students' abilities and interests will help teachers create motivated and engaged cooperative teams.

To optimize the internal organization of the team and the equitable sharing of responsibilities, students need to be assigned certain roles. According to Pujolàs (2004), there are two types of roles. On the one hand, those which ensure the good functioning of the team: *moderator*, who directs activities, controls time and respects the speaking time, *coordinator*, who verifies that all team members have understood the task, gives suggestions for organizing work and time, is in charge of the material, controls that the work is done and revises homework, *secretary*, who is responsible for any needs of the team, receives the instructions from the teacher, delivers the work on time, takes notes of the decisions and agreements, fill in the questionnaires and communicates with the other groups and the teacher and *supervisor*, who is in charge of maintaining an appropriate pitch of voice that does not disturb other groups and encourages participation and *observer*, who controls that every student plays the assigned role. It is advisable to introduce roles gradually. They should rotate periodically so that every student has the chance to practice all of them.

LCL fosters social values and skills that contribute to the students' self-confidence, autonomy and development as individuals, respecting

diversity, individual and collective responsibility and solidarity while enhancing active listening and critical thinking skills. Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (1994, p. 6) point out that thanks to cooperative learning “students work together to maximize their own and each other’s learning”, regardless of their learning skills or difficulties. LCL provides them with those experiences that are necessary to obtain optimal social, psychological and cognitive development.

1.2. STATE OF THE ART

LCL is a successful practice for teaching foreign languages. Regarding its use to work the reading skill in secondary education, Finkbeiner *et al.* (2012) worked on how the adequate use of learning strategies can be eased thanks to cooperative reading tasks in EFL classrooms. To do so, two video studies were conducted with ninth-graders in two German schools. In the first group, the students’ use of strategies without the teacher’s support was studied. In the second group, students received the teacher’s support while working on the given tasks. The study shows those tasks that require the teacher’s support may be more successful and adequate. In 2014, Farzaneh and Nejadansari studied fifty-two Iranian students’ attitudes towards LCL when working with the reading skill. The findings of this research show that there was a positive view of the implementation of cooperative strategies in the EFL class. The reading comprehension of texts became easily clear, interpersonal skills were developed and students’ motivation could increase.

Besides, Khan and Ahmad (2014) worked 128 eighth graders (13 and 14 years old) in a High School in Pakistan. The findings of the research showed that LCL seems to be an effective methodology for reading comprehension for classes with a high number of students, as it is also the case in Spain. Karafkan and Aghazadeh (2015) also worked on the effects of LCL and reading comprehension with 207 sixteen, 17 and 18-year-old Iranian students. LCL was proved to be favorable for teaching reading at intermediate levels. Students received encouragement and support from their peers and felt their contributions were valued for the success of the group. Almuslimi (2016) conducted a similar research with forty ninth-graders in Yemen, where students were divided

into two groups of (experimental and control groups). The results of the study indicated that the experimental group achieved higher reading results and was significantly more motivated since they had been instructed with LCL.

Reading and storytelling were analyzed by Rosli and Idrus (2017). They tested students' readiness in using technology-aided applications in telling their stories with thirty-five eleventh graders in Malaysia. The findings of the study indicated that no matter the types of storytelling, they always benefitted students because they enhanced multiple communication skills and engaged students to improve their foreign language. Finally, Awada and Faour (2018) studied the use of Glogsters and LCL. The research was conducted at eight public schools in Lebanon with 374 eighth graders (13-15 years old). Half of the students were randomly divided into an experimental and a control group. The findings show that this methodology widened students' understanding and improved their synthesis skills and motivation. The use of glogsters and LCL provided with tiered assignments and effective scaffolding for struggling students. Students could work at their own pace and they were provided with an environment to investigate a topic that could be later presented. This student-centered method seemed to help students improve their synthesis and research skills.

These seven works show how LCL can be beneficial in numerous respects. LCL seems to be an appropriate approach to enhance interaction among students. Thanks to students' dialogic attitude, they may solve some discipline conflicts and misunderstandings and may be more socially aware. Students' personal environments and individual characteristics are considered, and in a distended and respectful atmosphere, students may achieve higher academic results and participate actively in their assessment process. Moreover, LCL is not only an efficient approach for improving the reading skills, but also to work other linguistic skills such as speaking and writing, as well as the learning of its grammatical and lexicon mechanisms, which can also be exploited with positive results. However, LCL is not always enough and can be tiring for some students that also desire to work individually or can get anxious when working with some peers they are not comfortable with.

When this occurs, other methods or approaches should be used together with LCL in order to answer all the students' needs.

2. OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this study is to show the implications of using LCL in Spanish students' EFL reading comprehension by comparing the results obtained by fifty-three third-year compulsory education students who have read the novel *Wonder* by R. J. Palacio following different methodological approaches: the control group ($n = 27$) has been instructed and assessed with Communicative Language Teaching, whereas the experimental group ($n = 26$) has been instructed and assessed following the LCL principles.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present research starts from the hypothesis that LCL could be a suitable methodology for teaching EFL in Spanish secondary education, with a positive influence for its students to improve their reading skills, and, as a consequence, their general linguistic proficiency as well. The research questions of this study aim, on the one hand, to clarify which method is more effective to foster proper reading skills: the teacher directed communicative language teaching method or LCL, and on the other hand, to analyze the learners' attitude towards the methodology experimented.

3.2. PARTICIPANTS

The sample population of this study is made up by fifty-three third-year compulsory education students of a semi-private school with three sections per grade in Madrid downtown (Spain). Participants' age range from 14 to 15 ($M: 14.39$; $SD: 0.48$) with a larger percentage of male students 54,7% versus 45,3% of female students. They have been randomly assigned into two groups: a control group ($n = 26$), which comprises 65,4% of male and 34,6% of female students with an average age of 14,5, and a second or experimental group ($n = 27$) formed with 44,5% of male participants and 55,5% of female ones, with an average

age of 14,29. All the students are Spanish with Spanish as their mother tongue language. The selection of the sample was intentional through non-probabilistic sampling by accessibility. The inclusion criteria for the sample were to be enrolled in the third year of compulsory secondary education at the school, to attend class regularly, to have signed parental/legal guardian consent and not to have a diagnosis of specific learning difficulties, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or other neurodevelopmental disorder, or sensory and/or psychological problems.

3.3. INSTRUMENTS

As instruments for data collection, the grades obtained in six different tasks developed throughout the term and the grades obtained at the end of the term were analyzed. The six tasks assessed in both groups will be described below:

- Task 1: the control group needs to do an individual writing focusing on the first part of the book. To do so, they need to talk about one of the topics provided by the teacher which are, somehow, reflected in this section of the book. The experimental group needs to do the same assignment but following the LCL principles.
- Task 2: the control group does a ten multiple-choice question and four open-ended question reading comprehension quiz. On their part, the experimental group, after having listened to the song *Space Oddity* by David Bowie, whose lyrics are cited at the beginning of part two, students use the group activity of analysis discussion-small group-comprehension. They exchange ideas and explain in their own words the relationship between the musical and fictional pieces.
- Task 3: the control group fills in the gaps of six sentences with certain vocabulary provided by the teacher. If the meaning of the words is not understood, students may go back to the book to read the word with more context. If they still do not understand, they can use a dictionary or thesaurus. When

doing so, they need to write the meaning of the words. The experimental group is given the same words whose meanings need to be explained without using a dictionary. Students use the application group activity of solving problems since the vocabulary selected is unknown and they need to apply formulas to understand the meaning of these words. They discuss as a group until they reach an agreement and they all understand the meaning of the words. Then, they write sentences using the words within an understandable context.

- Task 4: the control group does a quiz with five open-ended questions in which their reading comprehension and the written expression are assessed. Besides, the experimental group reads part four following the jigsaw reading technique, which is a group activity for knowledge and comprehension. Students are assigned different excerpts of chapter four, since the contents included in this chapter have been divided in four parts. The members of the different teams who have the same section form 'expert' groups, read and study their parts together. Then, each of them returns to his or her team and teaches that section to his or her teammates. Thus, the teams cognitively rehearse information by discussing and summarizing the major points of their material, teaching their part to the partners of other groups and their teammates. To ensure all the information is understood, they need to relate the quote of *The Little Prince* which appears at the beginning of chapter 4: "And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye" (Saint-Exupéry, cited in Palacio, 2012, p. 97). First, students need to think the relationship between this quote and the fourth chapter of the book individually. After that, they are asked to brainstorm their ideas with another teammate, and later on, all the four members of the team discuss about it together. Once they have reached an agreement, they write what characteristics they personally believe are invisible to others' eyes. This way, they are using the

technique of defining categories from experiences in order to build shared meaning around a category that everyone has experienced but may not be clearly defined.

- Task 5: both, the control and the experimental group need to do a quiz with ten open-ended questions on chapters 5 and 6. The control group answers the quiz individually whereas the experimental group works in cooperative teams. First, as a rally quiz. Secondly, all the group together, as a kind of brainstorming, need to present their own opinions about the comprehension of the different passages depicted in the questions of the quiz. After interacting and discussing for some minutes, they reach an agreement and the secretary writes down the answers.
- Task 6: the control group does a quiz with two sections. In the first one, they are asked for six words used constantly in the last part of the book (chapters seven and eight) and they need to explain their meanings. In the second section, they are presented eight simple sentences found in the last two chapters of the book. Students are asked to make complex sentences using certain subordinating conjunctions. This way, students' syntax is not only assessed, but their reading comprehension too since they need to have understood the two chapters to be able to join the simple sentences with the correct conjunction. On their part, the experimental group is also presented some key sentences or precepts included in the last two chapters. Students are asked to develop an analogy in order to foster their creativity and lateral thinking about the topics included in the book. First, the teacher explains what precepts are and tells students to write their precepts. They need to be connected to both, the book and their own school reality. Thus, they link their personal experiences with the content information presented in the literary piece.

Also, in order to identify the participants' perceptions once the experimentation was finished, an attitude toward LCL Questionnaire

(adapted from Farzaneh & Nejadansari, 2014) was administered to the experimental group (see appendix 1). The questionnaire was composed of twelve Likert-scale close-ended items through which students were asked about the LCL assignments, personal achievements and socialization.

3.4. PROCEDURE

The English department agreed on the proposal of applying an active methodology for third-year compulsory secondary education students. After being accepted by the principal of the school, parental consent forms were sent to all the families whose children were part of the experimentation. They were also informed they had withdrawal possibility at any stage. The different tasks were scheduled considering students' timetables. In the meantime, all the necessary materials are prepared. Students of the experimental group are arranged in heterogeneous cooperative groups. To do so, the students' linguistic competence, cognitive and social skills are considered. They are assigned certain cooperative roles, which are linked to the different characters of the book: the coordinator or Mr. Tushman, the secretary or Auggie, the speaker or Summer, and the supervisor or mom (Isabel).

All the data were collected in compliance with the ethical guidelines of Helsinki Declaration and the confidentiality of the data was guaranteed. All the contents worked in this experimentation always respected the curriculum established by the State and the Madrid community, the Royal Decree 1105/ 2014 of December 26th, 2014 (Spanish Ministry of Education) through which the minimal teachings are established which is further developed by the Madrid Community in the Royal Decrees 48/2015 of May 14th (BOCM May 20th) and 52/2015 of May 21st (BOCM 22nd May).

This educational experience took place during the second term of the school year 2020-2021, from March until May 2021. Eighteen sessions, taking approximately fifty minutes, were distributed along the weeks, holding two sessions per week:

- Session 1: reading part 1.

- Sessions 2 and 3: task 1. Writing essays analyzing given topics, idiomatic expressions or verbs used in the first section of the book.
- Session 4: reading part 2.
- Sessions 5 and 6:
 - Control group: reading comprehension group discussion and quiz.
 - Experimental group: listening activity of *Space Oddity* by David Bowie, discussion small group comprehension and oral presentations.
- Session 7: reading part 3.
- Sessions 8 and 9:
 - Control group: work on lexicon. Filling in the gaps, understanding of the meaning of the words within the context of the book. If not, use of dictionaries.
 - Experimental group: work on lexicon. Solving problems and application of formulas to understand the meaning of the words without using a dictionary. Reaching an agreement.
- Session 10: reading part 4.
- Sessions 11 and 12:
 - Control group: reading comprehension group discussion and quiz.
 - Experimental group: jigsaw reading. Expert groups, discussion and summary of the major points. Relationship of the reading with the quote of *The Little Prince* by Saint-Exupéry.
- Session 13: reading parts 5 and 6.
- Sessions 14 and 15:

- Control group: reading comprehension group discussion and quiz.
- Experimental group: rally quiz, brainstorming and quiz.
- Session 16: reading parts 7 and 8.
- Sessions 17 and 18:
 - Control group: quizzes on lexicon and subordinating conjunctions.
 - Experimental group: development of an analogy. Creation of their own precepts linking the reality depicted in the book with their own school life. The material read is connected to their own contexts.

During the eighteen sessions, grades are obtained from the results of the different tasks and from the observation of the group work. To do so, an observation rubric is used to assess the work done during the cooperative work sessions (see appendix 2). Also, the writing assignments are assessed using a rubric (see appendix 3) and the oral presentations are peer-assessed using a tailor-made rubric (see appendix 4).

The methodology used in the control group follows the principles of communicative language teaching. Assignments are individually assessed despite some class discussion may have taken place first. On the contrary, in the experimental group LCL is implemented. Both groups have the same number of grades and the same rubrics are used to assess their written assignments, but whereas in the control group only the outcomes are assessed, in the experimental group the procedure and the process of learning are also evaluated with an LCL observation rubric.

The teaching of both groups took place in the students' usual classrooms with optimal lighting, ventilation and sound conditions.

4. RESULTS

The Social Science Statistical Package SPSS (Windows version 25) was used to carry out the analyses. First, descriptive statistics were used to

find out the means and standard deviation of the studied variables. Provided the sample size, the Kolmogorov-Smirnoff test was used for normality, obtaining 0.028 for all of them, which requires the use of non-parametric coefficients and inferential test (López-Roldán & Fachelli, 2015). Therefore, to analyze the effect of LCL on the participants' academic results, a binomial independent sample T-Student test was applied. The grades obtained in the different tasks as well as the final grade of the term obtained by the participants of the two groups were analyzed. The descriptive statistics of the first task shows that the control group has a mean of 5.27 and the experimental group 6.79. Considering that the variables did not meet normality criteria, a non-parametric T-student independent test was applied. The results of the grades of the first task show there is a significant difference of $p = .000$. For the second task, the control group has a mean of 4.46 whereas the experimental group that of 6.14. There is no significant difference between the results of the two groups in this task, since the difference is that of $p = .085$. Regarding the third task, the mean for the control group is 4.20 versus 6.91 of the experimental group. In this task, there is a significant difference of $p = .001$. Task four offers a mean of 4.29 for the control group and 6.82 for the experimental group with a difference of $p = .007$. Task 5 means are 5.75 and 6.26 for the control and the experimental groups, with a slight difference of $p = .059$. Task 6 does show distant results since the mean for the control group is 4.12 and for the experimental group is 8. Thus, there is a significant difference of $p = .016$. Finally, the mean of the final term grade for the control group is 5.6 and 6.31 for the experimental group. These results obtain a significant difference of $p = .021$. The descriptive statistics of the categorized variables as well as the comparison between the grades obtained in the two groups are presented in tables 3 and 4 respectively. Thus, despite two of the six tasks (tasks two and five) do not report meaningful favorable results for the experimental group, these results confirm the hypothesis: a significant difference is observed in the contrast of the data in favor of the experimental group which obtains higher results in the different tasks performed (average score of the

control group 4.79 versus 6.82 of the experimental group) and the final grade of the term ($p = .021$).

TABLE 3. Mean (*M*) and standard deviation (*SD*) of categorized variables (six tasks, their mean and final term grade) of the control group (*CG*) and experimental group (*EG*).

			EG	
	M	SD	M	SD
Task 1	5.27	3.57	6.79	2.51
Task 2	4.46	2.26	6.14	2.90
Task 3	4.20	3.29	6.91	2.47
Task 4	4.29	3.34	6.82	2.49
Task 5	5.75	3.4	6.26	2.74
Task 6	4.12	2.80	8	2.26
Mean 6 tasks	4.79	2.42	6.82	2.13
Final term grade	5.6	2.11	6.31	1.69

Source: Prepared by the author

TABLE 4. *T*-Student for independent samples analysis of categorized variables (six tasks, and final term grade).

	F	Sig	T	Sig (bilateral)
Task 1	5,113	.033	-4.55	.000
Task 2	.775	.387	-1.817	.085
Task 3	.664	.423	-4.010	.001
Task 4	1.402	.247	-2.93	.007
Task 5	.492	.489	-1.98	.059
Task 6	.880	.357	-2.59	.016
Final term	.481	.495	-2.47	.021

Source: Prepared by the author

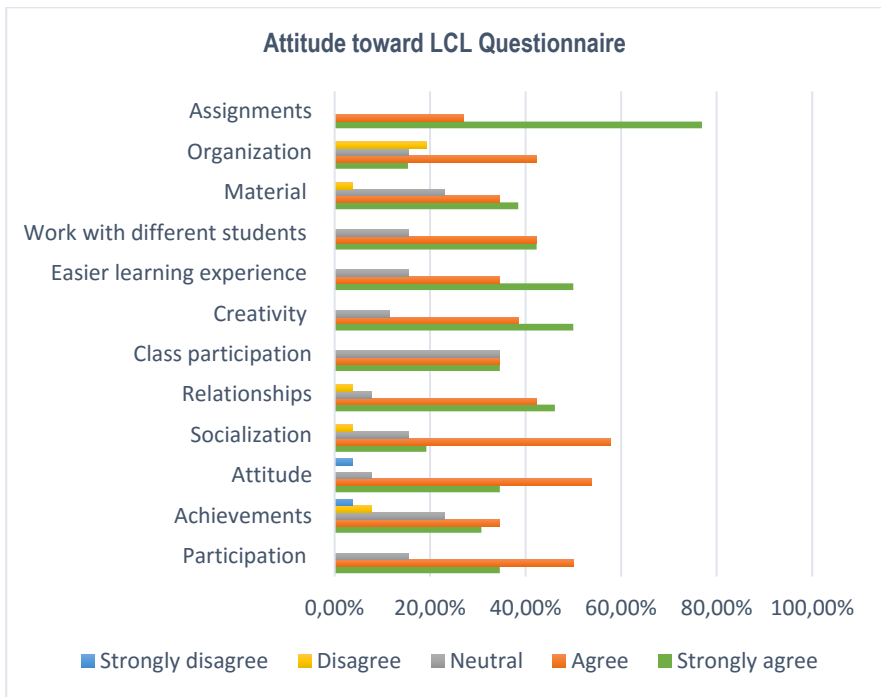
The perception of the LCL questionnaire, which was administered to the experimental group ($n = 26$), has drawn positive results. The bulk of the sample shows a positive attitude towards the use of LCL (see figure 2). The results of the twelve statements will be discussed in detail below.

In the first item, (I willingly participate in language cooperative learning activities –participation–), 84,61% of students agree on this

statement (34,61% strongly agree and 50% agree), so it can be stated that the vast majority of the respondents believe they are perfectly looking forward to participating in such learning activities. 65,37% of students agree with item 2 (when I work with other students, I achieve more than when I work alone, –achievements–). Despite it is more than half of the whole number of students, this figure shows it is also necessary to offer students tasks to be fulfilled individually that can work well in combination with LCL tasks. This way, the instructor would address all the students' needs and learning styles. Most of students (88,45%) agreed on item 3: LCL can improve my attitude towards work (attitude). They felt their attitude towards learning EFL which can result in mostly positive outcomes. More than three fourths of the students (76,92%) agreed on item 4: LCL helps me to socialize more (socialization). Thanks to LCL, students with different abilities, talents and background work together with the aim of fulfilling a common goal. Almost all the students (88.45%) supported item 5: LCL enhances good working relationships among students (relationships). Considering one of the core principles of LCL is positive interdependence, through which students feel they depend on each other in order to complete the assigned tasks, this figure is quite positive. A good and distended working atmosphere always contributes very positively to the fulfillment of the proposed tasks. As it can be observed in figure 2, 69,22% of the participants agreed on item 6: LCL enhances class participation (class participation). LCL promotes interaction among students, socialization and diminishes inhibition. Almost all the participants of the study, 88,46% agreed on item 7: Creativity is facilitated in the group setting (creativity). It is one of the items in which at least, half of the students, strongly agree on the statement. As it occurs in item 7, most of the students agree on item 8 (84,61%): group activities make the learning experience easier (easier learning experience). As it can be observed in figure 2, half of the students strongly agree on this assumption. It seems that students with different abilities and background work better together. 84,60% of students agreed on item 9: I learn to work with students who are different from me (work with different students). Regarding item 10: I enjoy the material more when I

work with other students (material), 73,07% of the participants supported this statement. As noted in the literature (Farzaneh & Nejadansari, 2014), item 11: my work is better organized when I am in a group (organization), reveals the lowest score, since just 57,68% of students agreed on this item. Considering the teacher's observation, this score must be due to the fact that all the students need to adjust to each other's rhythms. Thus, very organized and responsible students may feel worried about the pace of the group until they get used to working with their teammates. Finally, as figure 2 shows, all the students (100%) agreed on item 12: I prefer that my teachers use more group activities/assignments (assignments). It seems that they enjoy working in cooperative groups because of their multiple benefits.

FIGURE 2. Attitude toward LCL Questionnaire.



Source: Prepared by the author

5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research is to analyze to what extent LCL could be a suitable methodology for teaching EFL in Spanish secondary education, specifically, to improve their reading skills, and, as a consequence, their general linguistic proficiency too. The study aimed to, first, clarify which method is more effective to foster proper reading skills: communicative language teaching method or LCL, and secondly, to analyze the learners' attitude towards the methodology experimented.

Regarding the first issue, the analysis of the results obtained in the six different tasks concluded that those students who belonged to the experimental group obtained higher results in the different proposed tasks, so therefore, they improved their reading skills more. LCL seems to be efficient when working with reading comprehension since students collect ideas from the teammates, which may contribute to ease the concepts studied. When studying the relationship between the use of LCL and EFL academic performance, the results are also positive, so the hypotheses outlined above are both verified by the data obtained in this research. The results show that students instructed with LCL have higher academic performance than students with the communicative language teaching methodology. The second term grades of the students in the experimental group are significantly higher than the ones of the control group, which indicates that those students who were instructed with LCL had higher final second term grades.

In order to control that the groups were similar in academic performance and that there were no significant differences in L2, the inferential analysis of the first term grade was performed. These data show that LCL as an active methodology prepares students to improve academic performance in exams, a fact that is observed not only by comparing the control group with the experimental group but also with the increase of half point in the grade from the first term to the second term of the students in the experimental group; in addition, the average of the grades of the exercises is remarkable and is similar to that obtained in the grade of the second term.

As far as the second issue is concerned, the results of this study indicate that participants hold a very positive view of LCL in their EFL context. Students feel they can rely on others' abilities and this may give them confidence to solve problems. Their positive attitude towards LCL may indirectly influence their attitude and interest towards EFL learning. As item 2 reflects, 34,63% of students seem to prefer individual assignments so it would be convenient to work LCL side by side with other active methodologies that also promote individual work.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In the light of the results obtained in this exploratory research, and the scarce studies focused on LCL and EFL at the secondary education level, it would be suitable for EFL secondary education teachers to choose the use of active methodologies, such as LCL to improve students' reading skills, learning process and academic performance. As Rodríguez and Arias (2018) state, secondary education teachers seem to use traditional teacher-centered methods more than in other educational stages due to their scientific-technical training of this body of teachers. Besides, the institutional limitations such as the large ratio of students per classroom or the lack of resources hinder the application of active methodologies (Castejón & Santos, 2011).

The main limitations of this exploratory research are the sample size and the *ad hoc* tests and tasks, so any generalization to other populations should be made cautiously. In future research it would be advisable to increase the sample size and extend the duration of the application of the LCL methodology throughout the whole school year. Based on the findings of this study, it may be advisable to use the LCL instruction with other types of texts and other skills such as writing or speaking. The constant interaction among the teammates, the development of interpersonal skills and its easy management with large classes make LCL a beneficial and motivating active methodology in the EFL secondary education classroom and it may also be beneficial to apply it in other curricular subjects.

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8. APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1. *Attitude toward Language Cooperative Learning Questionnaire.*

To respond to this questionnaire, please put a check mark (√) in the appropriate box to indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the statements: 1 (strongly disagree); 2 (disagree); 3 (neutral); 4 (agree); and 5 (strongly agree)

Statement	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)
1. I willingly participate in language cooperative learning activities					
2. When I work with other students, I achieve more than when I work alone					
3. Language cooperative learning can improve my attitude towards work					
4. Language cooperative learning helps me to socialize more					
5. Language cooperative learning enhances good working relationships among students					
6. Language cooperative learning enhances class participation					
7. Creativity is facilitated in the group setting					
8. Group activities make the learning experience easier					
9. I learn to work with students who are different from me					
10. I enjoy the material more when I work with other students					
11. My work is better organized when I am in a group					
12. I prefer that my teachers use more group activities / assignments					

Source: Adapted from Farzaneh & Nejadansari (2014)

APPENDIX 2. Language Cooperative Learning Observation Rubric.

1. SOCIAL SKILLS	Excellent	Good	Ok	Weak	Very weak
1.1. Seeking and sharing information					
1.1.1. Admits uncertainty about what to do					
1.1.2. Asks questions that help understand lessons					
1.1.3. Helps by explaining or reviewing lessons					
1.1.4. Refers to reading materials during discussions					
1.2. Communicating with teammates					
1.2.1. Shares feelings, ideas or opinions					
1.2.2. Speaks clearly with acceptable vocabulary					
1.2.3. Limits length of comments so others can talk					
1.2.4. Listens to everyone and respects their views					
1.2.5. Recognizes individual contributions					
1.3. Thinking critically and creatively					
1.3.1. Evaluates evidence for different opinions					
1.3.2. Uses logic to challenge group thinking					
1.3.3. Thinks carefully before reaching conclusions					
1.3.4. Combines and builds on the ideas of others					
1.3.5. Offers new ways of looking at problems					
1.4. Getting along with teammates					

1.4.1. Takes criticism in a friendly way					
1.4.2. Avoids using put-downs or blaming others					
1.4.3. Accepts compromise to deal with conflict					
1.4.4. Keeps trying when a task becomes difficult					
1.4.5. Expresses hope about group success					

Source: Adapted from Casal (2016)

APPENDIX 3. Peer Assessment Oral Presentation Rubric.

	Needs work	Fair	Good	Very Good	Score
Content The explanation is thoughtful, showed imagination and effort. The connections between the song and the movie are correct.	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-20	___/20
Pronunciation The student's pronunciation ...	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-20	___/20
Structure The presentation was easy to follow and made sense.	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-20	___/20
Grammar The student used the target grammar, specifically the narrative tenses. Past Simple, Past Continuous and some Past Perfect.	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-20	___/20
Vocabulary The student's vocabulary was appropriate to B1/B2 level	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-20	___/20

Source: Adapted from Chaves (2021)

APPENDIX 4. Written Assignment Assessment Rubric.

	Excellent	Good	Ok	Weak	Very weak
CONTENT					
1. The essay has a title					
2. The essay has an introduction, a development and a conclusion					
3. The text is divided into paragraphs					
4. Each paragraph develops a coherent idea					
5. Ideas flow well and the text is cohesive					
6. Linking devices are used properly					
7. The length of the essay comprises the length requirement					
8. The text summarizes the use of the given topic in the chapter of the book					
LANGUAGE					
9. Grammar (there are not important grammar mistakes)					
10. Vocabulary (correct use of the lexicon used)					
11. Spelling (there are not important spelling and/or punctuation mistakes)					

Source: Adapted from Casal (2016)