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Interactive Groups: Fostering Collaborative Interactions in an Additional Language in a Multilingual Context

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Abstract

Research has shown that participating in collaborative interactions is essential both for language learning and for effective access to school content, which is even more important in multilingual contexts where a large proportion of students are in schools where the language of instruction is different from the language of the home context. However, research still needs to analyse further educational actions that succeed in generating collaborative interactions under these circumstances. This exploratory study analyses an educational action called Interactive Groups in a multilingual context in which Basque is the language of instruction and is the L2 for most pupils. Using the Communicative Methodology, twenty-one Interactive Groups were video recorded and analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. Two interviews were conducted with teachers, one with a volunteer, seven with students, and two focus groups with students. The results show that collaborative interactions in the target language prevail in these Interactive Groups, which is achieved because both the adult and the students generate a collective scaffolding that (a) encourages focusing on the academic task, (b) neutralises disruptive behaviours and (c) activates solidarity among students to overcome learning difficulties. The educational implications of the results are discussed.

Keywords

Second language, collaboration, Interactive Groups, additional language, multilingualism.

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Grupos Interactivos: Fomentado Interacciones Colaborativas en una Lengua Adicional en un Contexto Multilingüe

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Resumen

La investigación ha demostrado que participar en interacciones colaborativas es esencial tanto para el aprendizaje de la lengua como para el acceso efectivo a los contenidos escolares, sobre todo en contextos multilingües en los que gran parte del alumnado tiene como lengua de instrucción una lengua diferente a la del contexto familiar. Sin embargo, la investigación aún necesita analizar más acciones educativas que logren generar interacciones colaborativas en estas circunstancias. Este estudio exploratorio analiza los Grupos Interactivos en un contexto multilingüe en el que el euskera es la lengua de instrucción y L2 para la mayoría del alumnado. Utilizando la Metodología Comunicativa, 21 Grupos Interactivos se grabaron en vídeo y se analizaron cualitativa y cuantitativamente. Se realizaron dos entrevistas al profesorado, una al voluntariado, siete al alumnado, y dos grupos de discusión con estudiantes. Los resultados muestran que en estos Grupos Interactivos prevalecen las interacciones colaborativas en la L2, lo cual se logra porque tanto el adulto como el alumnado generan un andamiaje colectivo que (a) favorece la concentración en la tarea académica, (b) neutraliza las conductas disruptivas y (c) activa la solidaridad entre el alumnado para superar las dificultades de aprendizaje. Se discuten las implicaciones educativas de los resultados.

Palabras clave

Segunda lengua, colaboración, grupos interactivos, lengua adicional, multilingüismo.

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Sustainable Development Goal 4 aims to ensure that all children without exception, regardless of their socio-cultural background, have effective access to inclusive quality education (United Nations, 2015). This implies, according to Article 27 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989), that children's education aims to develop the fullest potential of their abilities, which is considered a basic human right. For this to occur, one of the fundamental pillars is to foster effective access to language learning in a way that ensures equality in outcomes for all children (Hawkins & Mori, 2018) taking into consideration that students who are enrolled in school in an additional language are more likely to have more difficulties in the learning process (UNESCO, 2021).

This challenge is faced in a multilingual context where about 40% of the students are enrolled in schools where the language of instruction is different from the home language (Walter & Benson, 2012). Therefore, the question relies on identifying how languages of instruction as well as content taught in additional languages can be learned more effectively, as there are studies that point out that students who have a different language of instruction than the home language tend to perform worse (Ball, 2010). Along the same lines, there is research that has linked lower proficiency in the language of instruction with worse academic outcomes (Elosua & De Boeck, 2020). However, scientific literature has shown that schools can foster equality of outcomes regardless of the origin and characteristics of the learners as long as successful educational actions are implemented at school (Flecha & Soler, 2013), which is also the case for language learning in general (Zubiri et al., 2020) as well as for minority languages (Santiago-Garabieta et al., 2021), and school contents (Valero et al., 2018).

Studying language learning from a social justice-oriented perspective is also on the agenda of additional language research (Mackey et al., 2022). This implies that research should be conducted without underestimating the learners' ability, with high expectations (Flecha, 2015). This line of research is in line with the basic idea of Chomsky's Universal Grammar (1986), which defends that every person has the innate capacity to learn languages; also with Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action (1981) and Freire's dialogism (1972), who argue that dialogue and interaction foster transformation, in line with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1980), which shows that learning starts from social interaction and is subsequently internalised. Therefore, the help received from other people facilitates achieving a certain level of learning that would not be reached individually.

In this sense, there is a broad consensus that engaging in interactions in an additional language fosters the learning of that language (Loewen & Sato, 2018). However, research has also revealed that not all interactions are equally effective. Teacher-centered lessons are poorer in interactions (LaScotte & Tarone, 2019). Also, working in smaller groups of students is less effective for additional language learning when non-collaborative interactions prevail (Storch, 2002). Other studies suggest that collaborative interactions in heterogeneous groups are the most effective for additional language learning (Watanabe & Swain, 2007). Collaborative interactions are those in which participants work together and are willing to engage with each other in a joint problem space of discussion aimed at shared resolution (Storch, 2002). Several studies point out that when collaborative interactions are generated, synergies are created to foster cognitive development and social cohesion simultaneously (García-Carrión et al., 2020). This implies that the obstacles that hinder dialogue and

participation might be neutralized, and open dialogues are built between people whose interventions mutually feed each other (Alexander, 2018).

Therefore, since engaging in collaborative interactions in the classroom is highly beneficial for both additional language learning (Watanabe & Swain, 2007) and content learning (García-Carrión et al., 2020), it is necessary to identify educational actions that can generate appropriate contexts in this regard.

Interactive Groups are one of the Successful Educational Actions (Flecha, 2015) currently implemented in more than 9,000 schools around the world (Learning Communities, 2022), and are one of the main actions of Schools as Learning Communities, a project founded by Ramón Flecha in the late 1970s (Giner, 2019). Interactive groups are based on the participation of all students, high expectations, violence-free relationships and solidarity (León-Jiménez et al., 2020). The classroom is organized into several heterogeneous groups in which collaborative interactions are generated. One adult participates in each of the groups. Their role is to ensure that all learners are involved in the task and that learners help each other to complete it successfully. Interactive Groups aim to put into practice the principles of dialogic learning (Flecha, 2000), which are (1) egalitarian dialogue, the recognition and enhancement of the (2) cultural intelligence of all participants that allows the transfer of knowledge generated from one field to another, a perspective oriented towards (3) transformation, always combining (4) instrumental learning with (5) solidarity, from the (6) equality of differences, so that all of this generates the (7) creation of meaning among participants. Following these principles, the implementation of Interactive Groups has demonstrated to improve results both in academic achievement and social cohesion in a diversity of socio-cultural contexts and with diverse types of students (García-Carrión & Díez-Palomar, 2015; Valls & Kyriakides, 2013), also when learning English as an additional language (Zubiri-Esnaola et al., 2020), and at different educational levels (Aubert et al., 2017; Valero et al., 2018).

Whereas research has shown the benefits of IG, fewer studies have explored the extent to which these foster collaborative interactions, particularly when learning minority languages. To meet this challenge, this study is set in the context of learning Basque, which is a minority language (Council of Europe 1992). Although three out of four families do not know Basque (Basque Government, 2018), three out of four students have Basque as their language of instruction in Primary and Secondary Education, and, therefore, for many students, Basque is an additional language (Basque Government, 2018). In this context, the bilingual and multilingual models offered in schools have driven remarkable progress, which is reflected, for example, in the fact that in 1991 22.5% of the population aged 16-24 was able to speak Basque, and in 2016 that number had increased to 55.4% (Basque Government et al., 2016). Nevertheless, today this school model faces major challenges such as offering all students contexts in which they can participate in interactions in Basque that allow them to overcome the role of input receivers (Zalbide & Cenoz, 2008). Another challenge, probably related to the previous one, is to facilitate higher levels of proficiency in Basque that are achieved since today slightly more than half of the student body has a very basic proficiency which greatly limits their possibilities to communicate in Basque (ISEI-IVEI, 2018).

The present study

One of the global challenges in education is to identify actions that enable all learners to be able to use the languages of instruction in school and to access the required content effectively, especially in multilingual contexts where a large proportion of pupils are enrolled in schools where the language of instruction is different from the home language (Santiago-Garabieta et al., 2021). The challenges are even greater when the language of instruction is a minority language because for many students, school is the only place where they can learn it, but also because they have to access and learn school content through that language (Santiago-Garabieta et al., 2023). Hence, participating in collaborative interactions, which has been proven to be an effective tool to foster academic achievement, can be an optimal learning context to address those challenges (Storch, 2002). For that purpose, this study explores whether Interactive Groups generate collaborative interactions aimed at promoting the learning of the additional language and content in Basque. This exploratory study tackles this challenge by answering the following research questions:

RQ1 Do Interactive Groups encourage collaborative interactions in an additional language?

RQ2 If so, how do Interactive Groups foster collaborative interactions and neutralise non-collaborative interactions in an additional language?

Method

The present study is based on the Communicative Methodology, which is recommended by the European Commission due to its effectiveness (Gómez et al., 2019). The Communicative Methodology is oriented to social impact: the aim is to provide citizens with knowledge about actions that improve people's lives in the problems identified by citizens themselves (Sordé Martí et al., 2020). To this end, the objective is the co-creation of knowledge, which is based on an egalitarian dialogue between researchers and the participants (Sordé Martí et al., 2020). The Communicative Methodology identifies exclusionary elements, which prevent improvements, and transformative elements, which drive improvements (Gómez et al., 2019). This study analyses the communicative acts that occur in Interactive Groups to shed light on how this type of classroom grouping helps to foster collaborative interactions in an additional language.

Study participants and data collection

This article presents a case study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), case studies in small group settings allow for an in-depth analysis of the interactions that occur between participants. The sample is formed by a group of fifteen 6th-grade Primary School students who were 11-12 years old at the end of the school year in June, of whom 53% have Basque as an additional language, 20% have free school meals, which indicates families' low socio-economic background, and 20% have special educational needs. The researchers chose this group because a) it was made up of a majority of students whose home language was not

Basque, b) it had been doing Interactive Groups regularly for six years and, c) in the official school assessments of the minority additional language, it had experienced a remarkable improvement in recent years (when these students were 6-7 years old, according to Basque Government data, 21% of them had only basic communicative skills, while at 9-10 years of age the number dropped to 6%), being notably above the average for the Basque Country (37,4%).

Data were collected during two academic years (2020-2021 and 2021-2022). Twenty-one Interactive Groups lasting approximately 30 minutes each were video recorded. Two interviews were conducted with teachers, one with a volunteer, seven with students, and two focus groups with students. The Interactive Groups selected were in the subjects of mathematics and Basque language. In mathematics, they carried out tasks related to multiples, factorial decomposition and mathematical problems. In Basque, they carried out tasks aimed at preparing a script for an interview and a contest for a school radio program, reading and understanding a text, working on adjectives, working on connectors, understanding proverbs, and writing texts. The students worked in small heterogenous groups facilitated by family members as volunteers and the teachers orchestrated the classroom.

Data analysis procedure

Our analysis focuses on the communicative acts that occur in Interactive Groups. Communicative acts are considered to be both verbal and non-verbal acts that involve communication between people (Soler & Flecha, 2010). It is important to take into account the set of elements that make up communication because the forces that drive or hinder the learning of additional languages are both verbal and non-verbal (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016). Moreover, words vary in meaning depending on the other non-verbal contextual elements involved in communication, and this must be considered when analysing what has been said in context (Soler & Flecha, 2010).

The recordings of the Interactive Groups have been transcribed verbatim, and the non-verbal communicative acts observed in the videos have also been noted. Each speaking turn was labeled in one of the six categories that the researchers established deductively (Table 1), derived from the scientific literature on Interactive Groups, except for category 4, which was established inductively after the first analysis of the data collected. These are the 6 categories:

Table 1*Description of the categories used for data analysis*

Category	Description	Type of interaction
1. Task-oriented	This refers to the fact that communicative acts are primarily focused on academic task. The scientific literature has pointed out that in Interactive Groups students feel more motivated toward working on the learning activities, more involved in the working environment, and they engage more in the academic task (Aubert et al., 2017, Valls & Kyriakides, 2013).	Collaborative
2. Focus on the task	This category includes the communicative acts aimed at getting students to refocus on the academic task. The scientific literature suggests that Interactive Groups promote students who have more attitude problems and those who find it more difficult to engage and focus on the academic task to focus on it (Aubert et al., 2017, Valls & Kyriakides, 2013).	Collaborative
3. Respectful and solidarity interactions.	This category includes communicative acts that explicitly foster an atmosphere of respect and solidarity, which has been highlighted by the scientific literature as one of the main characteristics of Interactive Groups (Elboj & Niemelä, 2010).	Collaborative
4. Additional personalised support.	In this category, we have included communicative acts that aim to provide extra personalised ad hoc support, beyond the usual peer scaffolding. It could have been included in the first function, but after the first analysis of the collected data, we decided inductively to distinguish this category from the first category as this kind of help was given with some frequency and it was vital for all participants to overcome moments when they were experiencing difficulties that would otherwise have prevented them from continuing with the task, and in this situation, they either explicitly asked for help or someone else did it for these learners.	Collaborative
5. Deviating from the task.	In this category, we have included communicative acts aimed at taking the group away from academic work. Studies show that exposure to disruptive behaviours tends to foster bystander disruptiveness (Valls & Kyriakides, 2012).	Non-collaborative

Category	Description	Type of interaction
6. Breaking solidarity and/or respectful relations.	Overcoming non-solidaristic individualistic behaviours and neutralising disrespectful behaviours is a key objective of the Interactive Groups (Aubert et al., 2017; Valls & Kyriakides, 2013).	Non-collaborative

The analysis of the transcripts of the twenty-one recorded IGs was carried out in three phases. In the first phase, a transcript was analysed jointly by the group of researchers, discussing and defining the correct use of the categories, as well as analysing emerging categories. When labeling turns, the context of the communicative act in which each utterance was produced has been taken into account and pertinent information about the context has also been noted. Once the adequacy of the categories described above had been verified, in a second phase, the transcripts were distributed among the researchers and analysed individually. In a third phase, the group of researchers was brought together again, exchanging the analyses carried out at the individual level so that they could be analysed by a different researcher. In this third phase, it was possible to verify the validity of the analyses. Discrepancies were identified in less than 1% of the coded turns, and in all such cases, the researchers discussed and agreed on how to label them.

Once the utterances in the Interactive Group transcripts had been coded, we proceeded to quantitatively count: a) the collaborative turns (categories 1, 2, 3 and 4) and the non-collaborative turns (categories 5 and 6), b) the turns taken by adults and those taken by students, c) the turns taken in Basque, Spanish or a mixture of both, and d) the turns coded in each of the 6 categories.

The recordings of the interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim and coded according to the 6 categories mentioned above. They helped to deepen our understanding of how and why collaborative interactions in a minority additional language occur in Interactive Groups.

Ethics

The research was conducted in accordance with the European Commission's Ethics Review Procedure (2013) and Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and the Council. Participants, or their guardians in the case of minors, were informed that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could stop participating at any time. They were also informed that the data would be processed in a way that would maintain the anonymity of the participants. All participants, or their guardians in the case of minors, signed a written consent form. The researchers asked CREA (Community of Research on Excellence for All) Ethics Committee to review the study, which approved it under reference number 20220815.

Results

Collaborative interactions prevail

The first research question aims to analyse whether communicative acts in Interactive Groups foster collaborative interactions in the additional language being this the language of instruction. The quantitative analysis of the utterances in the context of the communicative act shows that in 19 out of 21 of the Interactive Groups studied an average of 97,3% of the turns were collaborative, and in the remaining 2 Interactive Groups 88% of the turns were collaborative. 98% of the interactions were in Basque, and the rest in Spanish or a mixture of Basque and Spanish.

The number of turns taken by adults and students in the Interactive Groups was also counted. In 20 out of the 21 Interactive Groups, most of the turns were taken by students. Therefore, in the Interactive Groups, not only collaborative interactions prevailed, but also the speaking turns were largely taken by the students. In 13 of the 21 Interactive Groups analysed, between 71% and 94% of the speaking turns were from the students; in 7 of the 21, students have around 60% of the turns; while in 1 of the 22 students have almost half of the turns.

The data analysed in the interviews and focus groups are consistent with the observation of the Interactive Groups as a context where collaborative interactions in the additional minority language are fostered. For example, teacher 2 emphasizes that in the Interactive Groups all the productive and receptive skills of the additional language are worked on by encouraging an intense dynamic of communicative interactions:

“In the Interactive Groups, speaking, listening, reading and writing in Basque are strongly encouraged. Production and reception are strongly encouraged. You are encouraging as many interactions as possible in this group and that these interactions are in Basque. You are encouraging communication in mathematics or the subject of Basque.” (Teacher 2)

And she adds: "It's the group that has to get the job done, and it's the group that carries it. We have to do this together. But all of us have to do it. If someone is lagging behind, the team takes every student with them".

In the same sense, teacher 1 explained that, for example, "in the Interactive Groups in mathematics, you are working on comprehension in Basque from beginning to end, and that to the extent that you are understanding it, you are working on both the language and the content". The pupils stated that the Interactive Groups generated collaborative interactions that enable all students to clarify doubts and do academic tasks with competence. For example, student 7 said in a focus group that "those who find it more difficult have more opportunities because whenever there are things to clarify, the group has to make an effort to make them clear." In the other focus group, two students gave examples of how in the written production activities they benefited from the dynamics of the Interactive Groups. Student 12 said "I get very confused with "ts" and "tx" because I think they are pronounced the same, and I find it difficult, but I ask in the group, and they tell me". And student 10 added: "And the same thing happens with the h [because we are not clear when to put it and when not to]".

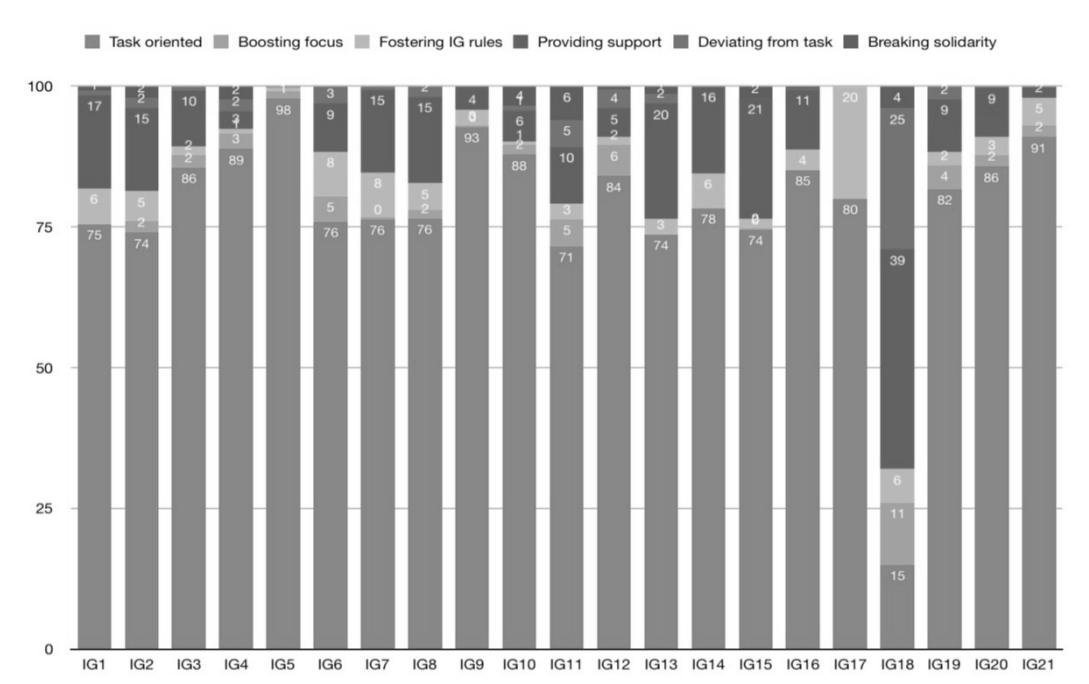
The volunteer interviewed corroborated that "in the Interactive Groups everyone is given the opportunity to talk, to listen to each other, and they are enriched a lot by it".

Collaborative communicative acts

Once the first research question had been answered affirmatively, the second research question aimed to analyse how Interactive Groups fostered collaborative interactions in an additional language and neutralise non-collaborative interactions. To answer this question, we first analysed quantitatively which categories prevail in the interactions of the studied Interactive Groups (Figure 1). The most prevalent category was Task-oriented communicative acts: more than 70% of the turns fall into this category, in 20 of the 21 Interactive Groups. This implies that most communicative acts are directly aimed at performing academic tasks. Next comes category 4, which includes communicative acts aimed at providing language support and/or clarifying aspects that have not been understood: in 14 of the 21 Interactive Groups analysed, between 9% and 21% of the turns were performed in this way. This means that this category is considerably prevalent in the Interactive Groups analysed. Category 3 (Respectful and solidarity interactions) and category 2 (Focusing on the task) are the 3rd and 4th most prevalent categories, both below 10% of the turns in 20 of the 21 Interactive Groups analysed. Finally, the least prevalent categories, below 7% of turns in 20 of the 21 studied Interactive Groups, are category 5 (Deviating from the task) and category 6 (Breaking solidarity and/or respectful relations). Although small in number, these results indicate that these types of communicative acts exist in the studied Interactive Groups, but they are not widespread, at least quantitatively, they remain isolated.

Figure 1

Type of communicative actions in each Interactive Group (percentages)



Communicative acts oriented to academic work

By analysing each category qualitatively, several clues have been identified that help to better understand the success of the Interactive Groups studied. When analysing the turns labeled in category 1 (Task-oriented), which is the most prevalent category, we find dialogues that scaffold participants' learning, as in this example of an Interactive Group (IG18) in which students are writing a text together:

- Line 1 Unai: Erabaki zuten [= they decided]
- Line 2 Mikel: Bai, eta? [= yes... and?]
- Line 3 Giorgina: Irakasleak [= the teacher]
- Line 4 Mikel: Eta irakasleak... e... irakaslea [= And the teacher... e... the teacher]
- Line 5 Aisha: Irakaslea ados zegoen, baina esan zuen... [= The teacher agreed, but said...]
- Line 6 Mikel: irakaslea ados zegoen eta esan zien e... [= The teacher agreed and said...]
- Line 7 Giorgina: Irakasleei [= To the teachers]
- Line 8 Mikel: Ikasleei... [= To the students]
- Line 9 Giorgina: Bai, ikasleei [= Yes, to the students]
- Line 10 Mikel: Suero pixka bat ekartzeko [= To bring some saline solution]
- Line 11 Aisha: Ados [= I agree]
- Line 12 Mikel: Horreraino [= Until then]
- Line 13 Aisha: Erabaki... [= Decided...]
- Line 14 Giovana: Erabaki zuten... irakasleari... [= Decided... to the teacher...]
- Line 15 Unai: Irakaslea ados zegoen [= The teacher agreed]

Students personalised about the grammatical cases they have to assign. In Basque, the ergative case, which is practically non-existent in the rest of the languages spoken in Western Europe, is particularly challenging. In ergative-absolutive languages, the subject is assigned the ergative case mostly when the verb is transitive, and consequently, in the excerpt, learners have to decide whether to add /-k/ to the subject or not (lines 3, 4, 5 and 6). On the other hand, they also have doubts about what is and therefore what to mark as an indirect object, which should be "ikasleei" (to students), and some confuse the subject and the object (lines 7, 8, 9, 14 and 15). They also have doubts about the auxiliary verbs of the verb "esan" (lines 5 and 6), which should be "esan zien", and the verb "erabaki" (lines 13 and 14), which should be "erabaki zuen". This is one example of many that backbone the dialogues in the Interactive Groups studied. These dialogues work as mutual scaffolding in which doubts arise and are clarified in the collaborative interaction between students. Two students interviewed described it as follows: "In the Interactive Groups, I say one idea, another says another idea, and so, all together, we discover it more easily" (S10). And student 11 added that "in the Interactive Groups you understand it more easily (...) In the group they help you to understand it. It's better in a group".

Thanks to this dynamic, students can orient most of their communicative acts to the academic task. The result can be seen in the perception of teacher 2, who relates that "in the Interactive Groups, in the time we have, we dedicate ourselves to work, all of us, in an active

way. That is the objective. My perception is that as soon as I sit down, the students become active.”

For this to happen, the role of the adult is fundamental in the Interactive Groups studied. This is what the people interviewed affirm. Teacher 2, for example, says that "sometimes it seems that they don't need you. They take turns, they work... But then the adult makes things dynamic and brings it all together. Did you hear what he said? What did you say? (...) You can manage the traffic jams (...) If you are not there, there will be many things that will remain without appearing". It is common for the adult to make use of phrases such as "come on, what have we understood?"(IG6), "let's see, how are we going to understand?"(IG6), "so far are we all clear?"(IG6), "yes, everybody agrees?"(IG7), or "do we understand what we have to do?"(IG8). But the adult also scaffolds learning by fostering the dialogue to thrive considerably, to achieve goals that students would not accomplish on their own, as in this example (IG13):

Line 1 Unai: Iñakiren ama musikara apuntatu zion [= Iñaki's mother singed him up for music lessons]

Line 2 Adult: Esaldi hori ondo dago? Nola esan behar da esaldia? [= Is that sentence correct? How should it be said?]

Line 3 Unai: Iñakiren amak musika apuntatu zion [= Iñaki's mother signed him up music]

Line 4 Mikel: Musikara [= For music]

Line 5 Adult: Apuntatu zuen Iñaki. Berriro: ez al da hobea... [...] [= Signed Iñaki up. Again: isn't it better...]

Line 6 Mikel: Iñakiren amak musikara apuntatu zuen [= Iñaki's mother signed him up for music]

Line 7 Adult: Nor apuntatu zuen? Esaldia ez da... [= Who was signed up? The sentence is not...]

Line 8 Unai: Amak musikara apuntatu zuen Iñaki [= The mother signed Iñaki up for music]

Line 9 Adult: Amak musikara apuntatu zuen Iñaki. Askoz hobeto. [= The mother signed Iñaki up for music. Much better]

In line 1, the subject is not marked with the /-k/ of the ergative case (it should be "Iñakiren amak") and the auxiliary verb is also incorrect (it should be "apuntatu zuen"). In line 3, Unai tries again, but does not mark "musika" correctly (it should be "musikara"). However, in line 9 he manages to say it correctly: "Amak musikara apuntatu zuen". He succeeds because the interactions prompted by the adult, helped by another student, enable the dialogue to clarify how the sentence should be. In the turns of the excerpt, three people appear, but in this Interactive Group, there were three more students who could benefit from this collaborative interaction.

Communicative acts oriented to provide additional personalised support

Category 4, which includes communicative acts oriented to provide additional personalised support, is the second most prevalent in 20 of the 21 Interactive Groups studied. Although the dialogue is prevalent in the Interactive Groups studied that facilitates the scaffolding of

learning in a very effective way, in 20 of the 21 Interactive Groups studied, at times there are students who cannot follow the task. Without additional help, these students would be left behind, removed from the academic task at hand. Personalised extra help is key to coping with many of these moments in the Interactive Groups studied. This is a unanimous opinion in the interviews and focus groups. Student 5, for example, expresses it clearly: "When I don't understand something in the Interactive Groups, they explain it to me, so I can do it".

These additional personalised aids are given once the group dialogue has clarified how to solve a step of the task but there are still students who have not understood it. In these situations, the need of these students is answered by additional personalised help aimed at explaining what is not known or clarifying doubts. This additional personalised help can be activated when a student requests it, when another student notices the need, or when the adult in the group notices and asks the group to help the student who is having difficulties at that moment, as in the following example (IG16) in which the adult notices that a student has not understood the operation in the mathematics area (the dialogue is mostly in Basque):

Adult: Do you know what this is?

Ana: No

Adult: OK, can you explain to Ana what this is?

Lucia: Look, a pronoun is like "we", "you". [says "pronoun" in Basque: "izenordaina"].

Lier: "They", and...

Lucia: "I", "You", "We" [she says it in Basque]. As in "erdaraz" [= Spanish, said in Basque] "yo", "tu", "él", "ella"... [she says it in Spanish]. This way [says it in Basque].

Adult: In Spanish, it's called "pronombre" [says the term in Spanish].

Ana: Wait... between us? [is the answer to the exercise, Ana has understood].

Lier: Yes

Adult: Yes

As in the example above, there are occasions when additional personalised aids are triggered by verbal requests. However, it is also common for it to occur through non-verbal communicative acts, as in this example of an Interactive Group in mathematics (IG1) in which the adult asks if everyone agrees, and without a word, just by looking at each other's notebooks, Rosa starts to go over Lucia's notebook together with her, and Ane does the same with Julen: Ane points out an error in the mathematical operation, explains something, and Julen ends up nodding his head. They seem to have understood because these students continue to do the exercises in the group.

Fostering task-focused, supportive and respectful interactions

The quantitative data (see table 1) indicate that in 19 of the 21 Interactive Groups, the sum of communicative acts aimed at diverting attention from the academic task (category 5) and those aimed at breaking up supportive or respectful interactions (category 6) account for less than 6% of utterances. In the other 2 Interactive Groups, they account for 11% and 29% of utterances. It was observed, for example, that Julen deliberately tried to interrupt the academic work with constant and unnecessary comments and questions about the class work

material (Do you have a green marker pen? My pencil tip broke. Can I borrow the pencil sharpener?) (IG1, IG21), Unai and Julen were joking to interrupt the dialogue about the homework (G18), or Lucia scornfully told Julen that it was "weird that he got that exercise right" (G10).

However, it has also been detected that disruptive acts are usually accompanied by other communicative acts that neutralise them. Furthermore, it seems that communicative acts that divert attention from the academic task, seek to disrespect or break solidarity are usually neutralized by communicative acts that propel to focus on the task, (category 2) or foster respectful and/or solidarity interactions (category 3). The quantitative analysis reveals that communicative acts aimed at promoting focusing on tasks, supportive interactions and respectful relations are present in all the Interactive Groups and have a considerable frequency: the sum of categories 3 and 4 accounts for between 2% and 6% of the interactions in 12 of the 21 Interactive Groups and between 7% and 20% in 9 of the 21 Interactive Groups.

The qualitative analysis reveals that the communicative acts in categories 3 (respectful and solidarity interactions) and 4 (additional personalised support) are essential to prevent the disruptive communicative acts (categories 5 and 6) from expanding and prevailing in the Interactive Groups. The interviews and focus groups point in this direction. Teacher 1, for example, said that the Interactive Groups do a containment job. According to the interviewees, sometimes the adult in the group intervenes or sometimes students ask the teacher for help, as Lucia, a student, explained: "If you see someone doing something stupid, we tell them, and if they don't listen, we tell the teacher." However, it is often the students themselves who neutralise the situation. Ana explains: "Sometimes there is a person who is bothering someone else, and we tell his or her to stop, because, of course, we can't work that way. There is a person who is feeling bad because somebody is bothering him or her." In the interviews, this perspective prevails in which the person who diverts attention is portrayed as a person unsupportive or disrespectful because he/she does not let others work and treats others badly. Therefore, the interview considers that disruptive acts rarely achieve any kind of complicity with the group, and, as a consequence, disruptive communicative acts do not spread and do not prevail.

The qualitative analysis of the transcripts points in the same direction. Although the turns labelled in category 2, Focusing on the task, seem to be of paramount importance, since they tackle from the outset the impulses to move away from academic work. They are both verbal and non-verbal communicative acts. They are performed both by adults with phrases such as "Get ready", "Let's go", "Listen, I don't see you active in this" or "Come on, Julen, what have you understood?", and by the students, along the lines that, for example, teacher 2 comments in the interview:

“When the students see that someone is straying, it is the students themselves who push them back to work. For example, when we sit down and they see that someone is not ready, that they have still gone to get the book or something like that, they start to get nervous, they call out to them: we have to get to work! I don't have to be the one to tell the group. They're waiting.” Teacher 2

In the same vein, the communicative acts coded under category 3, those aimed at fostering respectful and solidarity interactions, are also not very prevalent but seem critical to promoting dialogic learning principles in the studied Interactive Groups. Teacher 2 interviewed said that "Interactive Groups are a protected place for all students. If it is all about survival, some will survive in all circumstances. Others, however, will not. But in Interactive Groups, the support is for all students." In the Interactive Groups studied, respectful and supportive interactions are encouraged through both verbal and nonverbal communicative acts by both adults and students, and when equal participation is promoted through turn sharing; when it is reminded that the task is over only when everyone completes the task and ensures that this happens; when questions are asked to encourage the participation of specific students; when it is ensured that answers are not copied but explained through arguments; when the positive contribution of less visible students is praised; and when the disrespectful or unsupportive attitude of a student is pointed out.

Of the many examples that reflect how Interactive Groups neutralise non-collaborative communicative acts and encourage collaborative ones, in one Interactive Group in mathematics (IG1) Lier, who has already finished the task, instead of helping his classmates, tries to deviate attention out of the task, but the group ignores him and continues in solidarity with the task they were doing. At another point, Ane makes an important contribution to the task, but it goes rather unnoticed, at which point the adult says: "Did you hear what Ane said?", and that attracts the attention of all participants in the group, just as Lier does at times when he behaves in solidarity.

Another example can be found in an Interactive Group in Basque Language lessons (IG15) in which Lucia does not treat Ahmed with respect, and at that moment Amets takes a position in favour of Ahmed:

Ahmed: In another language... What? [He doesn't understand Lucia's gesture].

Lucia: What are you doing! It's our turn! [It is not their turn]

Ahmed: Oh, okay.

Amets: Don't talk like that. Besides, it's not your turn.

Lucia: I didn't speak badly to him.

Amets: Yes.

[Lucia gives in and lets Ahmed continue]

This excerpt also shows how the students themselves take a stand against disrespectful attitudes towards classmates. These upstander communicative acts reinforce the validity of the principles of dialogic learning in Interactive Groups.

Discussion

The results of the present study contribute to the challenge of identifying educational actions that generate collaborative interactions in additional minority languages in a multilingual context. Hence, the Interactive Groups offer this opportunity to primary students when Basque and mathematics, as reported in our study. Therefore, our results are consistent with

previous research that suggests that Interactive Groups have provided positive results across many diverse contexts (Aubert et al., 2017; Valls & Kyriakides, 2013). Particularly, this study shows how Interactive Groups conducted in an additional minority language offer an interactive learning environment in which all participating learners access collaborative interactions successfully. Specifically, in this context, some learners have the language of instruction as their home language, while for most learners the home language is different from the language of instruction. The scientific literature shows that participating in the interactions of the target language is a key factor for language learning (Loewen & Sato, 2018), and that collaborative interactions in heterogeneous groups are particularly beneficial (Watanabe & Swain, 2007). Therefore, identifying an educational action such as Interactive Groups that generate real opportunities for all learners when students have such diverse sociolinguistic profiles is an important finding. Furthermore, previous research demonstrated that the greater the access to learning opportunities in additional languages, the greater the investment the learner tends to make (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

The evidence presented in this research also shows that the success of Interactive Groups does not depend solely on separating learners into small groups with an adult accompanying them. The principles of dialogic learning are the basis of Interactive Groups, and therefore its successful implementation also depends to a large extent on putting into practice those principles such as egalitarian dialogue, solidarity and equality of differences, as demonstrated in previous research (Aubert et al., 2017; Valls & Kyriakides, 2013). The evidence presented suggests if the ideas of dialogic learning are embodied in the communicative acts of Interactive Groups, these can foster collaborative interactions that are inclusive for all learners, regardless of their profile. Evidence suggests that it is essential to involve both teachers and students to promote an environment of respectful and supportive relationships that values pro-social communicative acts as positive while depicting disruptive communicative acts as unattractive, thus discouraging ill-treatment and lack of solidarity from generating social benefits. The literature on additional languages also emphasises the importance of the type of community that is built and the social norms on which it operates for the learning of additional languages (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016). Learning contexts shape participants, their interactions and their outcomes, just as participants' actions shape the context (Hawkins & Mori, 2018).

On the other hand, the present study also sheds light on the debate about suitable groupings for additional language learning. Research has shown that group work can be very effective (Fernandez Dobao, 2012). It has also been shown that heterogeneous groupings can be a good option but not necessarily when they are not collaborative (Kim & McDonough, 2008; Storch, 2002). Therefore the opportunity to apply Interactive Groups in the classroom is promising, as, in line with the existing literature, Interactive Groups offer a successful model of small-group classroom model for language learning in highly diverse contexts, adding to previous research (Watanabe & Swain, 2007; Zubiri et al., 2020) and providing evidence of its potential for learning additional minority languages.

Limitations

This article presents an in-depth exploratory study of a small-scale sample. Therefore, the aim of the present research is not to generalise the results. Further research is needed to elucidate whether the results are transferable to other contexts.

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Supplementary materials

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