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Inclusivity, friendship and language learning: boosting collaboration in interactive groups

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ABSTRACT

Background: In linguistically diverse contexts, language learning and the building of quality relationships are key – and intertwined – educational goals. These aspects are particularly important in learning communities where the language of instruction may represent an additional language for most students. It is, therefore, essential to identify activities that promote quality interactions in the language to be learnt. Interactive Groups (IGs) is an educational action that aims to create conditions conducive to promoting relationships of solidarity, collaborative interaction, and effective participation for all learners. There is a need to investigate how IGs may be most beneficially used with languages of instruction that represent minority languages within the given sociolinguistic context and are a second language for most students, as is the case with the Basque language in the Basque Country.

Purpose: This exploratory case study sought (1) to explore the influence of IGs on the learning of Basque (a minority language and the language of instruction at school) as a second language for most students, and (2) to investigate the IGs in relation to students' collegial relationships.

Methods: Data were collected via a total of 14 interviews with students, teachers, school staff and volunteers, along with the consideration of material from 28 IGs. In-depth qualitative analyses were conducted.

Findings: Analysis suggested that the increased opportunities to communicate in the classroom during IGs bolstered the levels of collaborative language learning interactions. In addition, the scaffolding and supportive exchanges between students contributed to the development of collegial friendships.

Conclusion: In our small-scale study, interaction in Basque and friendly collaboration between students developed and was enabled within the IGs. This highlights the potential of IGs to foster the learning of additional and minority languages, as well as to promote the growth and flourishing of positive relationships between students involved in the activities.

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Introduction

According to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4, an important part of ensuring 'inclusive and equitable quality education' includes the provision of 'safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all' (United Nations 2015, SDG 4. a.). Indeed, students are more likely to flourish academically and socially in settings that enable violence-free relationships in which values such as love, solidarity and friendship prevail (López de Aguilera et al. 2020; Villardón-Gallego et al. 2018). Research suggests that academic goals and violence-free relations can propel each other forwards (León-Jiménez et al. 2020). Improvement in academic achievement can lead to improving school climate (García-Carrión, Molina, and Roca 2018); likewise, a favourable school climate can lead to better academic outcomes (Thapa et al. 2013), with students exhibiting prosocial attitudes displaying stronger academic performance (Caprara et al. 2000). In linguistically diverse settings, promoting effective language learning is essential for enabling meaningful communication and accessing the content of the language of instruction at school (Council of Europe 2018). It is important to note that many of the world's students are enrolled in schools where the language of instruction is not the language of their family or community (UNESCO 2016). For education to be inclusive, therefore, it must respond to the needs of all learners in a context of considerable linguistic and cultural diversity (Gogolin 2002).

In this paper, our particular focus of interest lies in situations where the language of instruction represents an additional (typically, a second) language¹ for most learners. Research on second language learning has drawn attention to the close relationship between this learning and the social context (Li and Jeong 2020). Learning a language can be conceptualised as a progression involving a cognitive and a social process through which individuals learn to use the language as a tool to cope better in the social contexts in which they are immersed (Lantolf and Thorne 2006; Van Lier 2000). Along these lines, there is increasing research aimed at analysing second language learning as a lived experience in terms of the relationship between people, as well as research analysing how the socio-cultural context provides opportunities for second language learning (Larsen-Freeman 2018).

Within this, we are interested in gaining deeper understanding of how learning environments can provide opportunities for second language learning while fostering safe and supportive classrooms. Interactive Groups (IGs hereafter) are dialogic learning environments in which small, heterogeneous groups of students are engaged in solving curricular tasks in a given subject, facilitated by non-teacher adults (Valls and Kyriakides 2013). IGs have been implemented in very diverse classroom settings, including in early childhood education (Aubert et al. 2017), primary education (García-Carrión and Díez-Palomar 2015) and secondary education (Navarro-Mateu et al. 2021). Research suggests that favourable outcomes can be evident both in instrumental learning and prosocial behaviour (Villardón-Gallego et al. 2018). However, research on the use of IGs in second language learning (Zubiri-Esnaola et al. 2020) is more limited, especially in a context where the language being learnt is a minority language.

The exploratory case study reported here offers a contribution to this need for research by considering the learning of Basque as a second language in IGs, in a situation where Basque was a minority language within its given sociolinguistic context (Zubiri 2014). In

our case study, Basque was the language of instruction at school, and a second language for most of the students. Before setting out the study itself, we seek to contextualise our research briefly within the relevant literature, and explain a little more about the study's specific setting.

Background

Dialogical perspectives on learning make clear the benefits of promoting interaction and dialogue for learning (Mercer, Wegerif, and Major 2019). In all, there is evidence to suggest that interactive methods can strengthen academic and social outcomes for learners (García-Carrión et al. 2020). Many approaches are based on the underpinning idea that, through collaborative interaction with others, learners can achieve goals that they would not otherwise be able to reach (Vygotsky 1978), combined with the understanding that all may benefit from the transformative capacity of dialogue (Habermas 1987) and participation in dialogues that serve to improve the situation of the people involved (Freire 1970).

When it comes to second language learning, several studies have highlighted the importance of exploring the social and contextual aspects of learning (e.g. Larsen-Freeman 2018) and the significance of interactions. When we discuss interactions in the context of our study, we are specifically referring to communicative acts (Soler and Flecha 2010) performed by individuals in particular socio-cultural contexts. In this sense, language can be perceived as an instrument that can help the individual to cope with the socio-cultural situation in which they are immersed. Language and language learning are, thus, instruments for developing social relations with other people: equally, social relations with other people represent a fundamental element that can help provide the scaffolding necessary to learn a language effectively (Santiago-Garabieta et al. 2021).

Interactive learning environments can assist in nurturing the cognitive, emotional and social development of learners, whatever their sociocultural background (García-Carrión, Molina-Luque, and Molina 2018) and can be of use in second language learning (Santiago-Garabieta et al. 2021). As mentioned earlier, among these approaches, IGs has been identified as a method that has the potential for promoting dialogic interactions among students, improving learning and social relationships (Flecha 2015). In a classroom organised into IGs, each small, heterogeneous group of between 5 and 7 students work on a task for approximately 15 to 20 minutes, under the supervision of an adult who guides the flow of interaction (Aubert et al. 2017). Through the interactions that emerge in this format of classroom organisation, it is possible to create an inclusive learning environment that enhances social cohesion from an early stage of education, increasing interaction and supportive guidance among peers (Khalfaoui et al. 2020). Evidence suggests that participating in this type of interactive environment can improve students' academic results (García-Carrión and Díez-Palomar 2015).

When the language of school instruction and the language(s) learned in the family and community are not the same, it is important that the development of first language(s) and second/additional language(s) are encouraged through appropriate educational actions (Cummins 1976, 1978) so that cognitive and linguistic development can be promoted effectively (Cummins 1979). In this sense, interaction in the second language is fundamental to their learning (Loewen and Sato 2018). The more that interaction is experienced, the more that learning may be enhanced (Keck et al. 2006; Mackey and Goo

2007). In line with the interaction hypothesis (Long 1981, 1983), the role of interaction in second/additional language learning is widely understood to be central (Bryfonski and McKay 2019; Gass and Mackey 2015). An important educational priority is, therefore, to identify actions that facilitate such interaction (Mackey, Abbuhl, and Gass 2012).

Peer interaction can be effective in promoting second language learning (Donato 1994; Kim 2008; Kim and Emeljanova 2019; Ohta 2000; Santiago-Garabieta et al. 2022; Swain and Lapkin 1998). However, research suggests that not all types of peer interaction are equally effective (Storch 2001, 2002a, 2002b). Whilst heterogeneous groupings can be very impactful (Watanabe and Swain 2007), this does not necessarily follow for all types of grouping (Kowal and Swain 1994; Leeser 2004). Nevertheless, it does not appear to be the case that difference in levels between peers is typically a factor that causes difficulties (Storch 2001); however, what does seem to be decisive is the type of interaction (Storch 2002a). In this respect, research increasingly suggests that the most efficient interactions for second language learning may be collaborative interactions in heterogeneous groupings (Santiago-Garabieta et al. 2021; Watanabe and Swain 2007; Zubiri-Esnaola et al. 2020). For these interactions to work well, it seems that individuals' perceptions of themselves and how they are perceived by the rest of the student body is of great importance (Watanabe 2008). Accordingly, emotions that are generated in collaborative learning may greatly condition the outcome (Swain and Miccoli 1994). Although several studies have focused on the role of emotions and attitudes towards languages as a determinant factor in successful language learning (Swain 2013), research on the conditions in which minority languages are learnt as a second language is more limited (Cenoz and Gorter 2019).

Basque is a minority language that has faced a range of advancements and challenges over the past (Zalbide and Cenoz 2008). In recent decades, the Basque education system has offered three models for the teaching and learning of Basque. In the first, Spanish is the language of instruction and Basque is taught in one subject; in the second, half of the subjects are taught in Basque and the other half in Spanish; in the third, Basque is the language of instruction and Spanish is taught in only one subject (Elosua 2016). It is this third model which has prevailed, to the point that currently approximately four-fifths of students have Basque as the language of instruction in the Basque Autonomous Community (Eustat 2022). Over time, data suggest that schools with Basque as the language of instruction have contributed to increases in the number of young people aged 16–24 who can speak Basque (from 22.5% in 1991 to 55.4% in 2016 (Basque Government 2016)). However, the proportions of students who have language proficiency beyond the most basic level (i.e. where they can only understand and produce very simple oral and written language) are around 62% for students aged 9–10 and around 54% for students aged 13–14 respectively (IVEI 2018), which draws attention to the need to better understand the potential of interactive learning environments to help support the learning of Basque as a minority language in this context.

Purpose

Against this backdrop, our study sought, firstly, to explore the influence of IGs on the learning of Basque (a minority language and the language of instruction at school) as a second language for most students, and, secondly, to investigate the IGs in relation to

students' collaborative relationships. The specific research questions we wanted to address were as follows. According to students', teachers' and volunteers' perceptions: (1) *How might IGs promote the learning of Basque as a second language?* (2) *In which ways, if any, does fostering interactions in IGs in Basque contribute to generating good relationships between students?* (3) *To what extent does promoting quality relationships between learners contribute to increasing interactions in Basque in IGs?*

Methods

Ethical considerations

The Ethics Committee of the Community of Researchers on Excellence for All (CREA) reviewed and approved the ethical requirements for conducting this study (reference: 20220614). The ethical criteria for this research were based on the European Commission (2013) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000). The design of this research was approved by the management of the school in which the research was conducted. All participants (adults, minors and their legal guardians) received written information about the aims of the study, the voluntary nature of participation and it was explained that they could stop participating at any time without consequences. The document also guaranteed that the identity of the participants would be protected, and all data will be anonymised. All adult participants and the legal guardians of the participating minors gave their written consent.

Methodological approach

An exploratory case study (Yin 2014) was selected as the most suitable methodological design through which to investigate our research questions, as we intended to explore the phenomenon qualitatively, in its real-world context, through participants' perceptions and perspectives on learning Basque in the learning environment provided by IGs. In addition, our research strategy drew on communicative methodology, which starts from the premise that knowledge is co-created through dialogue between the researchers and the participants involved in the research (Gómez, Puigvert, and Flecha 2011). Accordingly, both may engage in egalitarian dialogue, creating affordances for participants to contribute their everyday knowledge in dialogue with the researcher, thereby to jointly identify socially and culturally responsive findings (Sordé et al. 2020). In this way, by identifying the elements that hinder and facilitate improvements in the context, social transformation may be pursued (Gómez et al. 2019).

Data collection

The study was carried out in an urban area within the Basque Autonomous Community, northern Spain. The school selected as the basis for our in-depth case study had the following characteristics that made it relevant and appropriate for our research investigation: (a) the majority of students had Basque as a second language; (b) the school performed highly in the learning of Basque; (c) the school had at least five years of experience undertaking IGs; (d) around one third of students came from disadvantaged

backgrounds. The sociolinguistic characteristics of the case study school were common to many schools in the Basque Autonomous Community. One of the researchers contacted the school, based on a previous collaboration, and explained the proposal to the senior leadership team, who accepted the invitation to take part in the study.

Participant students (16) were from a 5th-grade classroom (approximate age range 10 to 11 years) in which Basque was the language of instruction. Just over half were from families who did not speak Basque. Slightly under one third (31%) were of heritage outside Spain (including Africa and South America). Slightly over one third of the students were in receipt of free school meals (i.e. an indicator of their socioeconomic status). As a group, the participants had made a notable improvement in Basque proficiency: during the 2017–2018 academic year, around one-fifth of students were at the initial level, with the proportion decreasing to around one-twentieth in subsequent years (in comparison, just under two-fifths of students in the Basque Autonomous Community are at the initial level (IVEI 2018)).

A total of 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted during the 2020–2021 academic year, with students, school staff and volunteers. Eight of the interviews were with 16 5th-grade students (approximate ages 10 to 11 years). These were conducted in pairs and each took between 10 and 24 minutes. There were six semi-structured interviews with school staff and volunteers: one with the teacher who was the tutor of the participant group, four with teachers who were participating as volunteers, and one with a volunteer from the school staff who was not a teacher. These interviews took between 35 and 55 minutes each. All of the interviews, which were audio-recorded, were conducted in Basque and were carried out by one of the researchers. The interviewing took place in the office of the educational counsellors in the school. The interview sessions were semi-structured and included questions aimed at exploring the students', teachers' and volunteers' perceptions. Areas of questioning included: the opportunities that IGs generated for students of all linguistic profiles to interact in Basque; the impact of IGs on the learning of Basque for all types of students; and the impact of IGs on fostering quality relationships between students.

In addition, as part of the in-depth data collection, researchers visited the school on a weekly basis. They spent time in the classroom, conducting 14 observations in IGs when the subject was mathematics and 14 observations in IGs when the subject was the Basque language. These classroom observations were carried out between October and November, during the academic years 2020–2021 and 2021–2022. The observations of the IGs focused on collecting data in terms of the extent to which the Basque language was used for interaction and utilised as a tool to undertake academic tasks, and the extent to which students appeared to support each other (i.e. demonstrated solidarity towards each other). The observations were all audio-recorded.

Data analysis

The audio-recordings of the interview sessions and the classroom observations were transcribed verbatim. The data were then coded inductively as the first stage of thematic analysis. During the first phase, the coding was carried out independently by two researchers. When the coding judgements were compared, any decisions that did not coincide were identified. At this stage, each case of discrepancy was discussed and

decided upon together with the other researchers (Duque et al. 2020). The categories of analysis were considered sufficiently consistent only when a) there was consensus among the interviewees' perceptions and b) the researchers' observations supported the interviewees' statements. Working in this iterative way, the emergent groupings were classified thematically into major categories.

Findings

By undertaking the stages of qualitative analysis described above, it was possible to address our research questions. Overall, the main themes that emerged from the data were identified as follows: (1) the influence of IGs on Basque language learning; (2) Basque as a tool for communicative interaction in IGs; (3) Collective scaffolding in IGs; and (4) Friendship-learning synergies. In the subsections below, the key findings are presented, in turn, for each of these themes. Where useful to illustrate and contextualise main points, anonymised, translated quotations from the data have been included.

The influence of IGs on Basque language learning

According to the data, students and teachers alike concurred that the students who had Basque as their second language did not practise it outside of school. Likewise, they agreed that the students' progression in Basque language learning was considerable, and that IGs had a notable influence on that progress. For example, during the interviews, one student expressed the view that participating in the IG led to the constant practice of the language over time: by sharing a space where communicative interactions prevailed, students felt supported to improve their language skills. As this student observed, '[in IGs] you learn more, we talk better, you can learn things you don't know, you understand what you are doing'. In a similar way, one of the teachers observed that IGs created very efficient conditions for working on oracy, as students were able to receive and provide task-related content in the context of supporting each other's ideas and listening with respect, all of which led to improvements in vocabulary and understanding. Furthermore, participants felt that, during the IGs, shared interactions boosted motivation and allowed the development of group language learning, by multiplying the co-construction of knowledge. As another teacher pointed out, by way of contrast, 'if [students] leave the classroom with the specialist language teacher [to work separately in regular class time], they make less effort. They lack the will'.

Basque as a tool for communicative interaction in IGs

It was evident from the data analysis that the IGs offered numerous opportunities for interaction in Basque as a second language. As explained above, IGs were carried out in the subject of Basque and also in mathematics. In the case of the IGs in mathematics, students' interactions were aimed at understanding the mathematical problems posed, discussing the operations required to solve the problems and sharing both solutions and explanations supporting their reasons for these solutions. In terms of the IG in the subject of Basque, the sessions observed were devoted to writing a radio script collaboratively. In both situations, the students had to make use of collaborative interactions in their second

language (i.e. Basque) in order to work as an inclusive group to solve the tasks in the given time. One of the teachers reflected on the collaborative nature of the activities as follows:

In the IG, the key is interaction. You have to get the task done together. You have to reach a consensus. If you don't understand, I'll explain it to you. But (...) by the end of time, we all have to understand it (...). It's very important to be in a group and to go with the group.

Another teacher expressed the view that, thanks to the constant and active use of the language to express and share students' ideas together in the IG, the use of the Basque language had been boosted by positioning it as the vehicular tool for learning and thinking. Thus, irrespective of whether it might have been students' first or second language, all had the opportunity to make use of the language in order to communicate. As this teacher put it, 'Basque is very useful as an instrument in IGs'. Therefore, in addition to improving the knowledge of the language, the IG enhanced its validity as a tool for thinking and learning in the classroom: what was a second language for most of the students became, in effect, an integral aspect of the activity developed by the students.

Collective scaffolding in IGs

In line with the classroom observations conducted by researchers during the IGs, the interviewees also indicated a sense that a collective 'scaffolding' was generated by the group, which responded to the diverse needs of the students. According to the participants, learners who had had notable difficulties with Basque as a second language acquired skills within the IGs that they would have had difficulty learning individually. Participants felt that, through such scaffolding interactions, the development of communicative competences was nurtured via the dialogic approach to teaching and learning.

Within the constant communicative actions that the students carried out within the IGs, there were continuous scaffolding interactions between the group participants. As one of the students remarked, 'We learn to work in a group, and that we have to help each other. To be honest, I feel very good in the IG. They help me a lot when I don't understand something'.

All IG participants emphasised the team unity that they felt emerged when working within this type of classroom organisation. These collaborative interactions led to collective and individual reflections. For example, students came to reinforce their own learning by trying to help others: as one of the teachers observed, 'We realised that the students who usually explain more also learn more in this dynamic'. According to a volunteer, an extremely inclusive environment was created, whereby even the less able students could participate with the rest of the group members, thanks to the group awareness developed: 'Some students pull the group, and other students, those who have difficulties, follow the task thanks to the group. They help each other a lot'. Typically, the helping interactions referred to by the volunteer stemmed from group members' help requests and spontaneous help.

In this context of mutual support between learners with very different linguistic profiles, the possibilities for collective modelling emerged. Indeed, according to one of the teachers interviewed, reciprocal interactions allowed them to model their learning process positively:

There are very different levels of Basque and you can see it immediately. But in IGs you have a space to give and to receive, and the more [language] models the better. It can happen that you have only one model, that of the teacher. [The teacher] may be a good model, but it's just that one person giving and giving.

Furthermore, the analysis suggested that IGs created a space in which interactions were greatly increased. This, in turn, facilitated the visibility of diverse linguistic models whose examples could be practised in a safe learning environment by those most in need of such training. As another teacher remarked:

Little by little they will dare more and more, and so they will improve their level of Basque, without being afraid, because in other situations people who don't speak so well may participate much less, (...) but if the relationship is one of respect, it's easier.

Friendship-learning synergies

The synergies and inter-relations between positive relationships on the one hand and learning Basque on the other were clearly evident through the perceptions of student and teacher participants during the interviews. For instance, the students emphasised how, during group work, relations between students and learning were interwoven through the dynamics of the IG. These synergies, fostered in the IGs, helped create the conditions for overcoming difficulties both in the area of relationships and in the field of learning.

Specifically, the perceptions of participants suggested that the IGs were valued for helping relationships thrive, or even in transforming previously established relationships for the better. It seemed that relationships were capable of change in the IG context because the interaction format encouraged supportive dialogue between participants. For example, even those who previously did not speak to each other began to talk and support each other: it was evident that this type of interaction had the potential to generate strong, collaborative relationships and cement friendships. This perspective was widely shared by the interviewees, and was summed up in the following way by one of the students:

Yes, maybe you don't get on well with a person, but in the group, you gradually help them, or they help you, and you become friends with that person, and you start talking more and more.

According to the interviewees, interactions based on solidarity fostered quality relationships that made participants feel better. As another student explained: 'When someone doesn't know and someone else helps them, they feel better, and that improves the relationship'. Interviewees suggested that IG ground rules helped increase enriching interactions. In this way, the environment within the IG, regulated by egalitarian dialogue, solidarity and mutual respect, helped the students feel freer.

As they felt that they were within an environment of trust and freedom in which they could express their opinions, students considered that they could make contributions in a safe space that allowed them to break down barriers and progress further in joint learning. This links to one teacher's comments in an interview:

You are free to give your opinion, and others will respect it. They may say they don't agree, but with respect and explanation. (...) They are useful to walk towards good and healthy relationships. (...) When you feel good in a group, when you feel accepted, if you have good relationships, you will have good self-esteem and you will be ready to learn.

In all, the analysis suggests that participants believed the IGs led to friendships as well as academic achievements. For instance, one student explained that participation in IGs contributed to creating inclusive groups so effectively that it impacted classroom dynamics and transcended the lessons themselves, such that '[With the IG] I have had the opportunity to talk to more people, and so I have been able to be with more people outside of class as well'.

Discussion

Our findings highlight the potential for IGs to support second language learning and engender quality relationships between students. In the case study school, where Basque was the language of instruction and also a second language for most learners, students had diverse sociolinguistic profiles. Participants perceived that the IGs were capable of supporting learners regardless of their linguistic profiles. This resonates with previous studies suggesting that IGs could improve students' learning outcomes in subjects such as mathematics or literacy, in schools serving culturally and linguistically diverse student populations (García-Carrión and Díez-Palomar 2015; Valls and Kyriakides 2013). Similar benefits have been reported in learning gains and collaboration in the context of IGs in a foreign language (Zubiri-Esnaola et al. 2020), as well as in relation to improvements in prosocial behaviour (Villardón-Gallego et al. 2018), fostering collaborative and solidarity-based relationships (Khalfaoui et al. 2020).

In the Basque language-learning context, considering that many students can only understand and produce very simple oral and written language (ISEI-IVEI Villardón-Gallego et al. 2018), these findings are of value when considering how best to support language study and, at the same time, help students develop supportive, collaborative relationships. The interactions created in the IGs in Basque enabled students to access a collective scaffolding (Donato 1994) that helped them to develop their participation in interactions and, thus, improve their competence. The interactive format offered by IGs, based on mutual respect and solidarity (Khalfaoui et al. 2020), contributed to promoting positive relationships between students. A key point here is that the promotion of the learning of the minority second language and the building of strong peer relations were not dynamics that developed in parallel, independently of each other: rather, the evidence collected and analysed in this case study suggests that furthering the learning of Basque as a minority second language and promoting quality peer relations were two mutually reinforcing dynamics that generated synergy.

The development of scaffolding networks between learners promoted interactions in the minority second language from a communicative orientation (Santiago-Garabieta et al. 2021). In this way, the second language became a valid instrument which could be used for developing social relationships. In turn, the intensification of collaborative interactions in the second language brought about the development of higher-quality relationships. Incrementally, the IGs in Basque generated an interweave between

instrumental learning on the one hand, and solidarity and friendship on the other. More generally, this draws attention to how space for dialogic interaction can offer real opportunities for all types of students, irrespective of their linguistic or sociocultural profile (García-Carrión et al. 2020).

This valuable combination created suitable conditions in the classroom for the language learning and relationship-building aspects to boost each other. As a consequence, the motivation of students in the classroom appeared to be supported. In the case study, IGs could be said to address the challenge of identifying actions that effectively promote interaction in a second language (Mackey, Abbuhl, and Gass 2012) and, at the same time, respond to the goal of fostering quality relationships between people.

This study, thus, offers a contribution to the line of research that places interaction between people as the cornerstone of learning (Flecha 2015). Meaningful interaction in the classroom has the potential to promote not only instrumental learning but also the learning of values that can lead to a healthier and more enriching coexistence for all students. Further, increasing the diversity of people who participate in collaborative interactions can lead to improvements in learning (Light 2001). A noteworthy implication here is that to have a diversity of adults included in the classroom is of benefit to all students and also to the adults involved in the interactions (Molina et al. 2021).

Limitations and future research

This paper reports an in-depth qualitative analysis of case study data which can help to understand, in detail, phenomena that arise in this type of setting – i.e. in schools in the Basque Autonomous Community. The findings will be of interest more widely to those interested in the teaching and learning of a minority language which is the language of instruction, as is the case with Basque. Generalisation from this small case study is not intended: rather, the strength of the study lies in the insights gained from the deep, qualitative exploration of rich data from the participant interviews and classroom observations. Further research will be needed to investigate whether the educational actions analysed in the present study work as successfully in other contexts in which knowledge of a minority second language may be greater or more limited.

Conclusions

The vital importance of creating inclusive spaces where all students can learn competences as well as develop values and feelings that promote happy and healthy life trajectories is not in doubt (United Nations 2015; López de Aguilera et al. 2020; Villardón et al. 2018). To this end, it is essential that research identifies educational actions that support this aim. The case study reported in this paper focused on a learning situation involving IGs where the language of instruction was a minority language which represented an additional, typically second, language for most learners. According to the participants' perceptions, student activities in the IGs strengthened the levels of collaborative learning interactions and contributed to the development of collegial friendship between the students. This draws attention to the potential of IGs to offer an approach to learning which not only fosters the learning of additional and

minority languages but also promotes, simultaneously, the growth and flourishing of positive relationships within a learning community.

Note

1. It is, of course, recognised that, for some learners, there will be more than one language of family/community, in which case the language of instruction being learnt will represent an additional (third, fourth, fifth, etc.) language rather than a second language. The term 'second language' is used in this article where relevant to the literature and where relevant to the situation described (i.e. the study setting in which the language of instruction was, typically, a second language for most of the learners).

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