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Child EFL Learners' Attitudes Towards a Collaborative Writing Task: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

The way learners engage with tasks can crucially impact on learning opportunities and, therefore, more attention is now being devoted to task affect. This study examines the attitudes of an underresearched population, child EFL learners, towards a collaborative dictogloss task. Thirty-two Spanish EFL children (ages 11-12) completed the task in pairs and small groups at their school, and an attitude questionnaire one week after. Results show that learners had a positive attitude towards L1 and L2 writing, collaboration in the classroom, and the task itself, regardless of their grouping condition. Although these children did not mention in their responses any explicit grammar gains as a result of the task, they considered the blend of the written and oral mode and the opportunities for peer assistance to be beneficial. These results are encouraging for the promotion of collaborative writing tasks with young learners in communicative contexts.

145 words

Keywords: children; EFL; L2 writing; collaboration; attitudes; dictogloss

Introduction

Collaborative writing (CW) tasks have started to attract the attention of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) scholars working in the field of Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) (Storch, 2016), as these tasks have been shown to be effective in focusing learners' attention on form and, therefore, in facilitating the acquisition of a second language (L2). In the literature, the myriad of collaborative writing tasks (jigsaws, text reconstructions, text editing, etc.) has been consistently reported to lead to gains in the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary (Co-author & Author 2, 2007; Swain & Lapkin, 1998). What is more, the extent of these benefits has also been claimed to be dependent on other factors, such as learners' proficiency (Leeser, 2004) or learner set-up (i.e. pairs and small groups) (Fernández Dobao, 2012, 2014; Author 2 & Co-author, 2017).

Despite the growing interest in CW, the number of studies analysing its impact on child learners' output continues to be practically non-existent. In fact, although in the last decades

educational policies in western and eastern countries have promoted the early study of foreign languages (Enever, 2018), research has not come hand in hand with this trend, and only recently the specificities of the young population in L2 classrooms are being considered. What is more, research devoted to analysing individual differences in CW tasks with the younger population is even more scarce (Shak, 2006; Shak & Gardner, 2008). Yet, knowing what children think about these tasks is of paramount importance, since all efforts would be in vain if they did not find such tasks enjoyable or useful for their learning process. As Lambert (2017: 657) explains, “[...] a critical issue for both pedagogy and research is how teachers and course designers can expediently configure and implement communication tasks to meet learners’ affective needs”.

Bearing this objective in mind, the present study represents a first step to investigate child English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners’ attitudes towards collaborative writing after carrying out a dictogloss task (Author 2, 2018; Wajnryb, 1990) taking into consideration the learner set-up condition (pairs and small groups) (Fernández Dobao, 2012).

Literature Review

Output and Collaborative Writing

The need to produce output in an L2 has long been considered an essential part in the process of acquiring it, as just being exposed to ‘comprehensible input’ proved to be not sufficient in order to obtain a good command of certain areas of language, such as morphosyntax (Izumi, 2003). According to Swain’s Output Hypothesis (1985), output serves a number of roles in language learning, including *hypothesis-testing*, *metalinguistic* and *noticing-triggering* functions (Swain, 1993, 1995). Although studies analysing oral output have traditionally dominated SLA, there is now little doubt that writing can also fulfil all these functions (Manchón, 2011), and even so to a greater extent when it is carried out collaboratively (Storch, 2016).

CW can be defined as “the involvement of two or more writers in the production of a single text” (Storch, 2019: 40). According to the main tenets of the Socio-Cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), when learners engage in collaborative tasks, the dialogue that emerges among them may lead to the construction of knowledge. Swain (2000) argued that this was also the case for linguistic knowledge, providing examples of learners’ interaction while reconstructing a text they had just heard (similar to the dictogloss task used in our present study) as instances of language learning or consolidation of previous knowledge. Later, Swain (2006) described this dialogue as *linguaging*, and many studies since then have been devoted to describing *what* learners in different contexts *language* about and *how* they do it. The most common way to operationalise *linguaging* has been in the form of Language Related Episodes (LRE) (Swain & Lapkin, 1998). However, as the literature shows, not all kinds of CW tasks generate the same LREs (see Storch, 2019 for a review).

Regarding the dictogloss task itself (Author 2, 2018; Wajnryb, 1990), the most widely used task in L2 CW research (Storch, 2016), it has been shown to promote focus on form, as learners have to reproduce a text which they have just listened to and which includes certain grammatical structures that are targeted. Although L2 proficiency has been claimed to influence its success (Leeser, 2004), since text content can constitute an obstacle when attending to grammar, making the topic and the range of vocabulary more approachable for learners can moderate the negative effect of low L2 proficiency (Co-author & Author 2, 2013).

To date dictogloss has only been used in studies involving adolescents or adults. The only exception is Shak (2006), which will be reviewed in the next section as it exclusively dealt with learners' perception about it.

Attitudes

Affective factors have started to receive a great deal of attention in L2 CW studies. A number of studies have investigated the collaborative work that arises when learners differ in proficiency and in their attitudes towards the writing activity and have shown that such work is a good predictor of L2 development (Kim & McDonough, 2008; Storch, 2002; Storch & Aldosari, 2013; Watanabe & Swain, 2007). As the study of such attitudes is the focus of our present study, we will summarize the studies that have dealt with learners' attitudes and perceptions towards L2 writing, collaborative work and CW.

Despite the difficulties in defining a complex construct such as 'attitude', it could be described as "a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to a situation, an object or an event" (Ajzen, 1988, p. 4). Translated into our context, it would be learners' disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to a CW task.

In the case of adults, Storch (2005) made the first attempt to capture students' reflections after carrying out a graph interpretation task. Eighteen international adult learners with a high command of English were interviewed some days after completing the task in pairs and showed very positive results, describing the task as a fun activity and beneficial for language learning. The few negative comments were related to the non-collaborative pattern of interaction displayed by some pairs. Shehadeh (2011) also analysed 18 United Arab Emirates low-intermediate undergraduate students' attitudes after a 16-week L2 CW program aimed at improving their paragraph level skills. The method employed was a survey, with open-ended questions. Although students were not familiar with this sort of teaching, they enjoyed it and only two commented that they should be allowed to choose between writing individually or collaboratively.

Lin and Maarof (2013) tapped into learners' attitudes towards a collaborative task, whose goal was to improve their summarizing skills. The authors used a 25-item survey with 30 Malaysian English as a Second Language (ESL) college students, and also interviewed 10 of those students. The vast majority (95.33%) had a positive response in terms of academic effects (i.e. benefits in academic areas other than language learning), and similar figures were reported with regards to the co-construction of knowledge and the collaboration process. Students in the interview also claimed that the task had helped to boost their self-confidence and that it had a positive impact on grammar. However, the negative side was related to the fact that they sometimes felt a lack of knowledge of English prevented them from discussing certain aspects. Finally, more recently, Chen and Yu (2019) examined two Chinese undergraduate EFL learners' beliefs towards collaboration through multiple sources (video recordings of the writing process, surveys, semi-structured interviews, stimulated recall, and reflective journals) in a longitudinal study, and determined that these beliefs could impact their collaborative patterns during three CW tasks they completed in pairs. In fact, they demonstrated that the learners' beliefs were not stable but could change due to CW experiences. The learners in the study, who had very contrasting attitudes towards CW at the beginning (one very favourable and the other very unfavourable), eventually shifted into very favourable and unfavourable due to the experience each had with his/her partner.

Shak (2006) is the only study to date that has investigated children's beliefs about dictogloss. She administered a dictogloss task twice, on two different days, and a posttask questionnaire to upper primary school learners, belonging to a heterogeneous ESL proficiency

class in Brunei Darussalam (aged 9-12; n= 78). It is worth noting that the procedure of the dictogloss was changed slightly. Although some of the activities prior to the reconstruction were done in collaboration (i.e. getting ideas in common from the listening stage), the actual writing stage was carried out individually. Results showed a clearly favourable attitude towards the task, despite the fact that on Day 1, when they perceived that the task was too complex or demanding, their level of interest and motivation was lower. The more familiar they became with the task, the more positive attitudes they showed. What is more, familiarity also had a positive impact on their perceived performance in the task. Regarding their preferences for different aspects of the task, they referred to the noticing stage as the one they enjoyed the most, whereas the writing stage was perceived as the least desirable. The question then arises as to how children's attitudes would have differed had the task been done in collaboration.

In a subsequent study, Shak and Gardner (2008) compared the results for the dictogloss task with those obtained in three other tasks (consciousness raising, grammaring and grammar interpretation) carried out by the same groups of students. The comparison shows that the only task that increased the attitude rates in all four aspects (enjoyment, perceived ease, perceived performance and motivation) from Day 1 to Day 2 was the dictogloss task. This fact led the authors to highlight the importance of familiarity with dictogloss, and contend that it supports the 'Resultative Hypothesis' (Johnson, 2008), which claims that mastery of a task can influence learner attitudes which in turn lead to further progress in task performance.

Attitudes towards L2 CW tasks have also been analysed with regards to learner grouping modes, this time, to the best of our knowledge, only with adult learners. Fernández Dobao and Blum (2013) compared groups of four students and pairs. Fifty-five L2 Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL) university students (mean age 20, L1 English) with an intermediate proficiency level carried out a picture rearrangement task in pairs (n= 28) and groups (n= 27). One week after completing the writing task, they completed a questionnaire, in the learners' L1. It included both rating scale items and open-ended questions addressing issues such as the usefulness of working with peers in class, their attitude towards working in pairs, in groups or individually, and the perceived impact of collaboration on the quality of their writing, among others.

Results showed that the grouping mode (pairs and small groups) conditioned the preference for one of the modes. The arguments in favour of working in small groups included the fact that this mode led to more resources, whereas the argument against it was that in groups of four it was easier to remain quiet and to not contribute. On the other hand, students who preferred working in pairs claimed that both members were responsible, and hence, they were under the pressure to participate. Besides, despite a general liking for working collaboratively, almost a third failed to see its positive influence on either linguistic accuracy or L2 development. In other words, collaboration was not perceived as offering many opportunities to build new knowledge, in contrast to what other authors have reported (Lin & Maarof, 2013; Shehadeh, 2011; Storch, 2005).

Last but not least, we also wondered what learners' attitudes towards L2 writing *per se* were, and whether they differed from the ones they held towards their L1 writing. The first question is considered relevant insofar as it has been demonstrated that how learners perceive themselves as writers (self-efficacy) is a good predictor of their use of metacognitive strategies in L2 writing, deemed to be essential for successful writing (Aula Blasco, 2016). The second question has been less studied, but Silva (1992) found that adult ESL learners were aware of numerous differences between L1 and L2 writing, especially with regards to the dimensions of planning, writing process, grammar and vocabulary.

In short, with the present study we attempt to shed some light on the research gap we found as so far no study has studied child EFL learners' attitudes towards an L2 collaborative dictogloss task taking into consideration the learner set-up (pairs and small groups).

Research Questions

Bearing in mind the review of the literature in the previous section, the present study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- I. What are child EFL learners' attitudes towards L1 and L2 writing and what is their writing self-efficacy?
- II. What are child EFL learners' attitudes towards collaborative work, collaborative writing and the dictogloss task? Does the learner set-up condition have an impact on these attitudes?

Material and Methods

Context and participants

The present data set consists of the responses to a questionnaire by L1 Spanish child EFL learners ($n= 32$) who were part of a larger study conducted in a public Primary School in a major city of the north of Spain. Three parallel classes (A, B, C) who were completing their 6th year of Primary Education (ages 11-12) and who were taught by the same English teacher took part. At the time of the study all students received at least 6 hours of instruction in English per week. Their English teacher informed the authors that the ordinary working dynamic in class consisted mostly of individual work, and only occasionally were students set in big groups (of more than 4 members) in order to work together for a specific assignment. Therefore, pair work was the least familiar set-up condition for them. After being granted permission from the school director, the head of studies and the parents, learners completed the Reading and Writing parts of the Cambridge Movers test (Cambridge English Language Assessment, 2014), a standardized proficiency test, in order to ensure that they all had an A1 level in English.

In order to form the groups of the different conditions, their distribution was discussed with the learners' tutors, as they were the ones who best knew the participants. Following the procedure used by Mozaffari (2017) and Author 2 and Co-author (2019), the criterion used to form the pairs and groups was the learners' perceived collaborative performance in their regular classes rather than their friendship relationships as the latter engage less in the task. Nevertheless, it should be noted that during the stages of the study learners of the three 6th year classes (A, B, C) were not mixed, in order to facilitate the intervention schedule. In total, there were 8 dyads and 6 small groups (25 females and 9 males). All the small groups consisted of three students, so that there would be adequate opportunities to all members for participation. The statistical analysis conducted afterwards confirmed that the two groups were equal in terms of their proficiency scores in the Movers Test. Nonetheless, the day when the attitude questionnaire was distributed, two learners did not attend class and so did not complete it. Therefore, in the end data from 32 learners were gathered ($n= 15$ from pairs, and $n= 17$ from small groups).

Design and procedures

The data collection for the present study was carried out over a period of two weeks. In Week 1, on the first day, the English teacher agreed to use an individual pilot dictogloss task designed by the first author in her lessons with groups A, B and C, so that students could get familiarized with the task procedures, as this had been shown by Shak (2006) and Shak and Gardner (2008)

to boost learners' attitudes towards the task. On the second day, the participants carried out the dictogloss task in their respective groups (pairs and small groups). They completed it during their English class time in a different classroom supervised by the first author.

The dictogloss consisted of a 153-word passage about a Chinese girl's school routines. The embedded grammatical features were the 3rd person singular *-s* (Co-author & Author 2, 2013) and articles (Author 2, 2008), two aspects which have been found problematic for L1 Spanish learners of English (Author 2 & Co-author, 2011). Regarding task procedure, before the listening stage, children were given a photocopy including pictures related to the vocabulary of the text. The first author posed questions (e.g. "How old do you think the girl is?, Where do you think she's from?", Have you been to the Eiffel tower?") in order to elicit those words from them. In fact, as Co-author & Author 2 (2013) showed, providing lexical items can lessen the cognitive load and can lead to a greater attention to grammar. After this stage, the first author read the text at a normal pace twice. Following the procedure in Wajnryb (1990), the first time learners only listened to it, while the second time they could take down some notes of the key ideas of the text. Finally, they had 20 minutes to reconstruct the text as faithfully as possible. Although children were free to use Spanish during the task, they were encouraged to speak in English as much as possible.

In Week 2, the attitude questionnaire (see appendix) was administered. The attitude questionnaire consisted of 12 question items blocked in 4 parts: (i) Writing (x 3), (ii) Collaborative work (x 4), (iii) Collaborative Writing (x 3) and (iv) Dictogloss (x 2). Blocks (ii) and (iii) were based on the questionnaire used by Fernández Dobao and Blum (2013). They consisted of seven items that were identically worded in Spanish for the present study. Besides, for blocks (i) and (iv) five more items were added. In (i), two of them addressed their attitudes towards L1 and L2 writing, and a third item was designed to categorize the writing self-efficacy of the students. Finally, in (iv) the two items asked what they thought of the dictogloss task and whether they would like to repeat it in the future. As the instructions and the items were provided in Spanish, learners were also asked to express their thoughts in this language.

All four parts contained a combination of rating scale (from 3 to 5 options in a Likert-scale) and open-ended questions to justify their answers. Participants were informed that their responses would remain anonymous to encourage them to express their views freely.

Data analysis

The answers to the 32 attitude questionnaires were transferred onto an Excel document and the participants' open-ended answers were also transcribed. Finally, the statistical analyses (two paired mean tests and independent samples T-tests) were run on SPSS 24 (IBM Corp, 2016) software package.

Results

This section presents the results for the two research questions.

- I. What are child EFL learners' attitudes towards L1 and L2 writing and what is their writing self-efficacy?

The following results correspond to the first block of the questionnaire. The items consisted of two five-point Likert-scale questions addressing the learners' attitude towards writing in L1 (Q1) and writing in English (Q2), and a multiple choice item (Q3), which included four options regarding learners' writing habits. Table 2 summarizes the mean scores, standard deviations and the two paired mean test results for Q1 and Q2:

Table 1
Learners' attitudes towards L1 and L2 writing

	Q1 Writing in L1		Q2 Writing in L2		Two paired mean test		
	M	SD	M	SD	t	df	p
<i>Students (n = 32)</i>	3.84	0.98	3.4	1.01	2.61	31	0.014*

The mean results show that these children had a more positive attitude toward L1 writing than toward writing in English. In fact, the statistical analysis revealed that there was a significant difference in their perception towards the two sorts of writing. It should be noted that in both cases the mean rate was above the middle range of the scale, indicating an overall positive perception.

With regards to learners' own categorization of their writing self-efficacy, they were given four options: (a) "I do the writing in the last minute and I forget about it", (b) "I do the writing one or two days in advance but I never revise it", (c) "I do the writing one or two days in advance and I always revise it", and (d) "I do the writing much a long time in advance, I revise it carefully and I consult different resources (dictionaries, I ask somebody to read it, etc.)". The following table shows the distribution of the learners' responses:

Table 2
Q3 Learners' writing self-efficacy

	A		B		C		D	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>Students (n= 32)</i>	0	0	2	6.3	11	34.4	19	59.4

The majority of the learners (93.8%) placed the efficacy in options C or D, that is, they claimed to allow some time for revision or monitoring of the output, either from themselves or from others. Only a few admitted to omitting any revision on the written production, although they also devoted enough time to completing it. Finally, none of the students considered delaying completing the writing task until the last minute.

- II. What are child EFL learners' attitudes towards collaborative work, collaborative writing and the dictogloss task? Does learner set-up condition have an impact on these attitudes?

The answers to the first two 5-point Likert-scale questions of Block 2 (Collaborative Work) are displayed in Table 3:

Table 3
Learners' perception on the usefulness of two modes of collaborative work

	Learners in pairs (n= 15)		Learners in small groups (n= 17)		Independent samples T-test		
	M	SD	M	SD	t	df	p
<i>Q4 Pair work</i>	4.06	1.1	4.41	0.71	-1.06	30	0.29
<i>Q5 Group work</i>	3.8	1.26	4.18	1.07	-0.91	30	0.37

When asked about the usefulness of the two modes of collaborative work, results show that these children were slightly more positively inclined toward pair work. Nonetheless, on average, both modes were perceived to help ‘quite a lot’ in class. Looking at the intergroup differences, although learners in small groups seemed to be more positive about both modes of collaborative work than their counterparts in dyads, the differences were not statistically significant.

Their general disposition to collaborate was also mirrored in their open-ended comments. In an attempt to quantify the open-ended answers of learners, we classified their opinions as positive or negative. Although the vast majority of the participants’ comments were positive (90.6% in pair work and 75% in group work), there were a few examples of negative ones. The following statements illustrate both stances on pair work and group work:

(1) *Participants’ positive views on pair work (Q4)*

Porque puedes aprender muchas cosas de la otra persona (Because you can learn many things from your partner), 22C

Porque me parece más divertido trabajar con un compañero (Because I think it’s more fun to work with a partner), 50P

(2) *Participants’ negative views on pair work (Q4)*

Porque a veces puede llegar a haber problemas (Because sometimes there can be problems), 19A

Porque estás hablando más de otras cosas que del trabajo y para mí eso es perder el tiempo. (Because sometimes you are talking more about other things than just work, and to me that’s a waste of time), 32A

(3) *Participants’ positive views on group work (Q5)*

Porque cuanto más gente es más fácil hacer las cosas (Because the more people there are, the easier it is to work), 8G

Porque los que tienen vergüenza para participar o preguntar cosas pueden hablar sin problemas (Because those who are shy to participate or ask questions can do so without any problem), 21A

(4) *Participants’ negative views on group work (Q5)*

Porque algunos no trabajan (Because some people don’t work), 27M

Porque en clase trabajamos en grupos y yo prefiero en parejas porque es más fácil (Because in class we work in groups and I prefer in pairs because it’s easier), 29N

In question 6 (Q6), learners were asked how comfortable they felt when completing the dictogloss task working in teacher-assigned dyads and small groups. The following table displays the results:

Table 4

Learners’ perception about teacher-assigned pairs and dyads.

Learners in pairs (n=15)	Learners in small groups (n=17)	Independent samples T-test
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	M	SD	M	SD	t	df	p
<i>Q6 Comfort</i>	3.87	1.13	3.94	1.03	-0.196	30	0.846

We can see that the mean results were very close to 4 in both groups (“Quite a lot”), indicating that participants in both pairs and small groups felt quite comfortable working with partners assigned by their teacher. In fact, there were no between-group statistical differences. The classification of their open-ended comments into positive or negative also showed this favourable trend as the vast majority (84.4%) fell under the former category. Some of their comments are shown below:

(5) *Participants’ positive views on teacher-selected peers (Q6)*

La verdad es que pensaba que funcionaría peor, pero funcionó muy bien. Colaboramos bastante y creo que entre las dos hicimos un buen trabajo (To be honest, I thought it would work worse, but it worked very well. We collaborated quite a lot and I think that the two of us did a good job), 12L

Es trabajadora y entre las dos hicimos que funcionara, ya que no somos muy amigas, pero somos compañeras. Colaboramos todo lo que pudimos. (She is hard-working, and both of us made the task possible, since we are not close friends, but we are still classmates. We collaborated as much as we could), 31Y

(6) *Participants’ negative views on teacher-selected peers (Q6)*

Muy malo, lo hacía todo yo y él no escribía ni aportaba ideas ni nada (Very bad, I did all the work myself and he didn’t do or suggest anything), 19A

No funcionó bien porque todo lo que escribimos lo dije yo y los demás no aportaron nada (It didn’t work at all, because all we wrote was what I said and the rest didn’t contribute anything), 37A

Finally, in the last question item from Block 2 (Q7), learners were asked how they would like to repeat the task (individually, in pairs or in small groups). Both experimental groups showed a clear preference for their original set-up condition. Thus, 47% of learners in pairs wanted to carry it out in the same condition (33% in small groups and 20% individually), and 70% of the learners in small groups expressed their desire to work in the same set-up (18% in pairs and 12% individually).

We will now turn to the results from Block 3 (Collaborative Writing). In Q8 and Q9, learners were given a 3-point Likert scale (worse, the same, better) to rate the perceived effects of carrying out an individual writing on the output in terms of content and grammar. In Q10, conversely, they had to rate on a 5-point Likert scale the benefits of CW on the development of their knowledge of English grammar.

Table 5
Learners’ perceptions on CW

		Learners in pairs (n=15)		Learners in small groups (n=17)		Independent samples T-test		
		M	SD	M	SD	t	df	p
<i>Q8</i>	<i>Text content</i>	1.67	0.62	1.59	0.71	0.33	30	0.743

<i>Q9</i>	<i>Text grammar</i>	1.87	0.52	1.82	0.64	0.21	30	0.836
<i>Q10</i>	<i>Grammar knowledge</i>	3.27	1.33	3.65	0.86	-0.96	30	0.34

Regarding Q8 and Q9, child EFL learners considered that doing the task individually would barely affect the content or the grammar of the final text, as means range from 1.5 to 2. In this case, pairs and small groups shared the same perception. Conversely, learners believed that the collaborative dictogloss task led to gains in their knowledge of English grammar (Q10) as both groups show means above 3, with no significant difference.

With respect to the last block (the dictogloss task), learners first had indicate on a 5-point Likert scale how much they liked the task.

Table 6
Learners' attitudes towards the dictogloss task

		Learners in pairs (n=15)		Learners in small groups (n=17)		Independent samples T-test		
		M	SD	M	SD	t	df	p
<i>Q11</i>	<i>Dictogloss</i>	4.13	0.92	3.88	0.99	0.74	30	0.465

Their attitude towards the task (Q11) was generally positive, close to 4 in the case of small groups and over 4 in pairs, without significant differences. Finally, when asked about their willingness to continue with activities such as the collaborative dictogloss task (Q12), a large majority of the learners in both conditions (73% in pairs and 71% in small groups) expressed a favourable disposition. Their open-ended answers in Q12 reflected this positive attitude:

(7) *Participants' views on dictogloss*

Porque me he dado cuenta de que soy capaz de más cosas en inglés como hablar más en este idioma, también me ha ayudado mucho en la escritura (Because I have realized that I am able to do more things in English, such as speaking more in this language, and it has also helped me a lot with writing), 22C

Porque me gusta escribir pero no en inglés y ha sido una mezcla de hablar y escribir para ayudarme con el inglés (Because I like writing but not in English, and it has been a mixture of speaking and writing to help me with English), 43J

Discussion

The analysis of the attitude questionnaire confirms that the EFL children participating in this study displayed a general positive attitude towards writing, collaboration and the dictogloss task itself. Firstly, regarding attitudes toward L1 and L2 writing, the significant difference between the two languages might be explained by the fact that although mastering writing skills is complex even in the mother tongue, it is even tougher in an L2 (Gil, 2002), and child EFL learners are well aware of that. Nonetheless, the fairly positive attitudes (over 3) displayed in the L1 and L2 might be related to their responses in Q3. In fact, looking at their writing self-

efficacy, we can see that generally these children had a positive or very positive impression of their own writing self-regulatory strategies. Therefore, it could be that as learners perceive themselves as efficient writers, they enjoy the activity of writing in any language. Previous literature (Aula Blasco, 2016) has shown that in the case of EFL Spanish adolescent students self-efficacy was positively correlated with the success in their own writing. Thus, we wonder if this could also be the case with younger learners.

Turning now to their perception of collaboration in the classroom, it is interesting to note the children's inclination towards pair work as opposed to group work, indicated by the more numerous negative comments towards the latter and the lower mean scores (Q4 and Q5). Even though the EFL child learners in this study were more used to working in groups in their classroom, they indicated that group work could be disorganized and that some members tended to avoid participating. This contradicts the potential benefits of group work for pooling more resources reported by adult participants' in the study by Fernández Dobao and Blum (2013). However, when asked specifically about what grouping condition they would prefer for another dictogloss task, learners showed a preference for that condition in which they had already carried it out. This aligns with the aforementioned study, and as in the case of Storch (2005) and Shehadeh (2011), only a small percentage expressed their wish to write individually next time. The fact that these children did not have the chance to experience the task in a different grouping setup could possibly account for their wish to remain in the same one.

The lack of statistical differences between pairs and small groups in all items of the questionnaire suggests that grouping mode was not a decisive factor when determining participants' attitudes. This could be related to the fact of introducing a break in their school routines (i.e. a new task, a new teacher, being recorded, etc.), which is usually considered to be fun by young learners (Author 2, forthcoming). Finally, the fact that they were grouped in teacher-assigned dyads and small groups, which had already been shown to be beneficial for more task-centred interaction (Author 2 & Co-author, 2019; Mozaffari, 2017), did not prevent these learners from feeling at ease.

The modest perception of the usefulness of collaboration shown by participants in Q8 and Q9 seems to be at odds with their responses to Q10 (perceived benefits for improving the knowledge of grammar). However, from their answers in the open-ended section, these results should be taken with caution, as some learners did not have a clear concept of grammar and tended to confuse it with the learning of new vocabulary, as the following comment suggests: *Porque he aprendido palabras nuevas y cosas nuevas* (Because I have learnt new words and new things), 16U. This issue is indicative of certain limitations of the instrument employed to tap learners' perceptions as will be commented in the concluding remarks. Moreover, the fact that no learner stated improving their knowledge of the two target forms (3rd -s and articles) can also be linked to the nature of the dictogloss task itself, whose communicative goal (reconstructing a passage) makes learners pay less attention to specific grammatical features' than in other types of CW tasks, such as text editing tasks (Co-author & Author 2, 2007).

Finally, there is less room for doubt as to the learners' attitudes to the dictogloss task. These results replicate those of the only study so far where this task was used with Primary school learners (Shak, 2006). As can be seen from both the high mean rates and the positive comments, learners demonstrated awareness of their own abilities in the foreign language, praised the fact that both modes (oral and written) were involved in performing the task and found the task entertaining and a change from their normal EFL classroom routines. Indeed, a clear majority of students (over 70%) expressed their willingness to continue doing activities such as dictogloss in their regular English lessons. As explained before, we should acknowledge that these encouraging responses could be motivated not only by the learners' positive attitudes towards other variables tapped by the questionnaire (L2 writing, self-efficacy, comfort working with teacher-assigned peers, etc.) but also by the novelty introduced in their school life by participating in this study.

Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

The present study set out to investigate child EFL learners' attitudes towards a CW task. The clearest conclusion is that dictogloss seems to be perfectly suitable for child EFL learners, as they enjoyed collaborating and managing their own work. CW is not a widespread pedagogical tool in Spanish EFL classrooms which, as claimed by one of the teachers from the school involved in our study, on occasions can be too teacher-centred. As seen above, learners tended to favour pair work over group work, although their set-up condition did not have a strong effect on their perceptions. Likewise, being assigned a partner, an issue that occasionally concerns instructors when implementing CW in their classrooms, did not have a strong influence either. In short, the present study demonstrates that writing, a somewhat neglected mode in early foreign language instruction (Becker & Roos, 2016) and EFL in general in Spain (European Commission, 2012), may turn into an enjoyable practice for child EFL learners.

Therefore, foreign language instructors might want to consider tasks such as dictogloss to break down the mental barriers which can constrain writing in an L2 for a child learner. Furthermore, the fact that they are communicative in nature and that they provide opportunities for the production of oral and written L2 output is also a great advantage, as in EFL settings learners have barely any chance to use the target language outside the classroom (Author 2 & Co-author, 2016). Finally, as child EFL learners in this study did not seem to be completely aware of the linguistic benefits (morphosyntactic gains) generated by CW, it would also be advisable to carry out awareness raising activities, such as discussing after the task what forms they found most problematic or what aspects were new to them.

Despite these encouraging findings, we acknowledge the exploratory nature of the present study, as it contained a number of limitations. Firstly, the limited number of items per block, which if increased could provide more robust findings and also enable the running of correlation analyses between responses to the items in the different blocks. However, as this was part of a larger study and the subjects were children, we had to limit the number of questions so that they did not find it too demanding or exhausting (Pinter, 2011). Secondly, a larger sample of participants would allow us to draw more generalizable conclusions. To conclude, future research should consider supplementing the information obtained through the questionnaire by adding structured interviews in focus groups selected as representative of the sample.

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Appendix
Attitude questionnaire

*Please answer the questions by choosing the right **answer** or by explaining your thoughts as fully as possible, where necessary. Remember that the questionnaire is **anonymous**. Your name will never be published, as it will be replaced by a code.*

Block 1 - Writing

1. Do you like writing in Spanish?

Not at all	Not so much	So-so	Quite a lot	Very much
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2. Do you enjoy writing in English?

Not at all	Not so much	So-so	Quite a lot	Very much
------------	-------------	-------	-------------	-----------

3. When I have to do a piece of writing for homework...

- I do it in the last minute and I forget about it
- I do it one or two days in advance and I never revise it
- I do it one or two days in advance and I always revise it
- I do it much a long time in advance, I revise it carefully and I consult different resources (dictionaries, I ask somebody to read it, etc.)

Block 2 - Collaborative work

4. How helpful do you think it is to work in pairs in class?

Not at all	Not so much	So-so	Quite a lot	Very much
------------	-------------	-------	-------------	-----------

▪ **Why?**

5. How helpful do you think it is to work in small groups (groups of three or four students) in class?

Not at all	Not so much	So-so	Quite a lot	Very much
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▪ **Why?**

6. How comfortable were you working with a partner/the partners that the teacher assigned?

Not at all	Not so much	So-so	Quite a lot	Very much
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How would you describe the group or pair in which you worked? Did it work well? How much did collaborate?

Did you all get to contribute in a balanced way?

7. This writing task can be done in groups of four, in pairs, or individually. Which of these three options would you have preferred?

- In groups
- In pairs
- Individually

Block 3 - Collaborative writing

8. If you had written the text individually instead of in a group or a pair, how do you think its **content** would have been?

Worse	More or less the same	Better
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Why?

9. If you had written the text individually instead of in a group or a pair, how do you think its **grammar** would have been?

Worse	More or less the same	Better
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Why?

10. How helpful do you think this collaborative writing task was for **improving your grammar knowledge**?

Not at all	Not so much	So-so	Quite a lot	Very much
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Why?

Block 4 - Dictogloss

11. Did you enjoy the task?

Not at all	Not so much	So-so	Quite a lot	Very much
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Why?

12. Would you like the teacher to continue using this type of activity?

Yes	No
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Why?

Done! Thank you for your collaboration!

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