

# Technology and Telenovelas: Incorporating Culture and Group Work in the L2 Classroom<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Utilizing Walker and Baets' (2009) Instructional Design Framework, this study qualitatively investigated the utilization of technology as a means to introduce cultural context in small group learning activities to support second language learning (L2) in the classroom. Five intermediate-level learners of L2 Spanish ( $n = 5$ ) worked in groups via Zoom, a video conferencing tool, to complete activities based on their understanding of a telenovela (soap opera), *La Reina del Sur*, in the Spanish language. By analyzing pre- and post-surveys of all participants' opinions regarding technology, culture, and group work as well as the coding of two groups' Zoom transcripts with NVivo 10 software, this study investigated whether exposure to the L2 culture, via technology, influenced L2 learners. Also, this study examined online small group work activity (Gass 1997; Long, 1996; Pica 1991, 1994) and in what ways media and technology impacted L2 participants' interaction in this medium. Although participants identified the areas of difficulty with understanding the telenovela in the post-survey, participants also commented that they improved in language skills and culture from participation in the telenovela activity. Results from the coding of Zoom sessions revealed that students benefitted from small-group work and exposure to the target language's culture through the integration of technology. Although results revealed that learner engagement can decrease when a leader in the group emerges, they also revealed that minimal contributions are meaningful.

## Resumen

Utilizando el Marco de Diseño de Aprendizaje de Walker y Baets (2009), este estudio investiga cuantitativamente la utilización de la tecnología como un medio para introducir un contexto cultural en actividades de aprendizaje en grupos reducidos para apoyar el aprendizaje de un idioma extranjero en el salón de clase. Cinco estudiantes de nivel intermedio de español como lengua extranjera ( $n=5$ ) trabajaron en grupos vía Zoom, una herramienta de video-conferencia para llevar a cabo actividades basadas en su comprensión de la telenovela *La Reina del Sur* en el idioma español. Analizando las encuestas acerca de las opiniones de los participantes con referencia a la tecnología, la cultura y el trabajo en grupos, aplicadas antes y después de las actividades, tanto como el *coding* de los transcritos de los dos grupos con la paquetería NVivo 10, este estudio investigó si la exposición a la cultura de la lengua extranjera, vía la tecnología, influyó en el aprendizaje de los participantes. Asimismo, este estudio examinó directamente la actividad de los grupos pequeños en línea (Gass 1997; Long, 1996; Pica 1991, 1994) para ver cómo impactaba la tecnología en su interacción en este medio. Aunque en la encuesta posterior los participantes identificaron áreas de dificultad con la comprensión de la telenovela, también comentaron que su participación en la actividad de la telenovela había mejorado su manejo del lenguaje y de la cultura. Los resultados de las sesiones *coding* of Zoom mostraron que los estudiantes sacaron provecho de los trabajos en grupos pequeños y de su exposición a la cultura del idioma extranjero a través de la integración a la tecnología. Aunque los resultados mostraron que el involucramiento del estudiante puede disminuir cuando surge un líder en el grupo, también mostraron que las contribuciones mínimas son relevantes.

## Introduction

The digital age has reorganized the educational system (Starkey, 2012) and in turn, the ways in which instructors and students teach and learn a second language (L2). There has

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been increased research on the advantages of using technology (Kim & Rissel, 2008) in the L2 classroom and how authentic and meaningful learning environments (Ellis, 1985; Gass, 1997; Gass, Mackey, & Pica, 1998; Hall & Verplaetse, 2000) can be supported through technology.

Teaching methods, such as the integration of group work, and opportunities for participant learning, are tied to technological advances. As technology continues to advance, there is an ongoing shift of instruction from the physical to the virtual classroom, which has increased the scope of teaching opportunities for group work (Hiltz, 1994), via synchronous (real-time) and asynchronous (non real-time) modes of communication, and finding a variety of authentic materials. Small groups can meet virtually and complete an activity, have an online discussion, record a meeting to view at a later date, and find a myriad of cultural resources all through technological means (Bohinski, 2014). This combination of technology and group work facilitates the sharing of knowledge and understanding within the group and increases interaction between students and supports higher order learning (Harasim, 1989; Järvela & Häkkinen, 2002; Meyer, 2003; Salmon, 2000; Walker & Baets, 2009).

Small groups provide language learners with many and varied opportunities to interact directly with the target language, and it has been suggested that only through interaction can facility with a language be achieved (Gass 1997; Long, 1996; Pica, 1991, 1994). While in small groups, students act as conversational partners when learning an L2 and use behaviors such as nodding, rephrasing, and asking for clarification (Hatch, 1983). Small groups also encourage greater participation and interaction, allowing students to have two-way interpersonal communication and opportunities to negotiate meaning amongst partners (Doughty & Pica, 1986; Walker & Baets, 2009).

Taking the importance of small group work into consideration, together with the fact that technology provides learners with a variety of opportunities to interact with the target language and authentic materials, this study investigated a small group activity, using Walker and Baets' (2009) Instructional Design Framework. Through the watching of a telenovela, *La Reina del Sur*, in the Spanish language and subsequent group meetings on Zoom, a video conferencing tool, this study explored the ways in which technology can impact L2 learner participation and interaction.

## Literature Review

Through technology, students have the ability to enhance their language skills and cultural understanding by interacting with other language speakers (El Omari, 2015; Kern, 2014). Today, the goal of language learning is acquiring proficiency in the language, not information about the language. In order to focus on this communicative proficiency, classrooms should be student-centered and provide students with interactive activities where they are able to utilize the language (Allen, 2006; Cohen, 1986; Walker & Baets, 2009). The development of technology has resulted in tools that are now available and support these interactive environments (Anderson & Speck, 2001; Leu, 1996; Wang, 2005). Through synchronous and asynchronous computer-mediated communication, group work can be transformed. Synchronous activities are those in which the participants are able to communicate in real time, such as video conferencing, while asynchronous are activities where there is a time delay between the participants' interactions, such as email (Bernard et al., 2004).

According to Cohen (1986), group work is defined as “students working together in a group small enough so that everyone can participate on a task that has been clearly assigned” (p.1). Not only can knowledge building and experience sharing occur in group work activities (Walker & Baets, 2009), but students also have indicated that they prefer working in small groups (Ballman, 1988). Studies have shown that small group work results in environments where students speak more freely, negotiate meaning with their partners (Bailey, Daley, & Onuwuegbuzie, 1999; Ballman, 1988; Ford 1991; Long & Porter, 1985), increase performance, strengthen motivation, and have better student-teacher relationships (Ballman, 1988; Dörnyei, 1997; Johnson, 1995; Julkunen & Borzova, 1996; Olsen & Kagan, 1992; Slavin, 1996; Ushioda, 1996).

Although difficulties have been reported while using technology, when e-tools are clearly explained and efficient to use, they help students reflect on their individual work experiences and make effective use of their knowledge in knowledge-sharing and knowledge-building tasks. Therefore, it is important that technology utilized for class purposes is efficient and easy to use so that students can have opportunities to share (Walker & Baets, 2009). For the present study, the researchers chose Zoom, a video conferencing tool, to facilitate group work. Not only is it user-friendly, but its basic plan is a free and includes 40-minute group sessions for up to 50 participants. Furthermore, only the meeting host needs to have an account and participants can simply join the meeting by accessing a link.

In order create an effective learning environment not only for group work (Dörnyei, 1997) but also for online interaction, Walker and Baets’ (2009) Instructional Design Framework indicates that the best learning environment for students can be achieved by following these five steps: 1) Prepare the blended learning pathway (design phase); 2) Socialize the learners (articulating rationale, goals, and benefits of the blended approach); 3) Support the online participation (establishing virtual presence online and a framework of support, feedback, and activity for course participants); 4) Sustain the online interaction; and 5) Sum up the learning outcomes. This framework was central to the present study as researchers choose to implement it in the research design in order to ensure the best online learning environment for students.

Not only can technology be utilized as a means to expand group work opportunities and to foster collaborative work environments, it can also provide ways to expose students to culture (Kramsch, 2011). Technology allows its users to access a variety of authentic materials through the click of a button (Bohinski, 2014; El Omari, 2015; Kern, 2014). This is crucial as culture, a fundamental element of any language, has “a humanizing and motivating effect on both the language learner and learning process” (Bada & Genc, 2005, p.75). Awareness of cultural values and societal characteristics on their own do not necessarily invite the learner to conform to such values (Bada, 2000), but it is important that native speakers of the target language are conceived as real people. An L2 learner might gradually imitate tendencies of native speakers and form attitudes towards the L2 group, all of which can lead to motivation to learn the L2 and his/her success in acquiring it. Therefore, a successful learner should identify with language users of the target language (Anisfeld & Lambert, 1961; Lambert, 1963). However, this is often difficult as students create a third culture (Kramsch, 2009) while navigating between their L1 culture and the L2 cultures that they are learning. For the present study, the researchers chose to use a telenovela as a way of to have L2 learners identify with native speakers.

Accessing authentic film and then integrating it into lessons is a way that instructors can effectively integrate a visual representation of the L2 culture (Bueno, 2009). Not only is it appealing to students, but it also uses an environment that is commonplace to the 21<sup>st</sup> century student (Sherman, 2003; Sturm, 2011). Film is easily accessible and often free, via the Internet (Sturm, 2011). It also allows students to engage with the L2 culture through authentic means, have the opportunity to discuss real-life topics, and reach objectives related to the five Cs of Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities (Byrnes, 2008; Kern, 2008; Magnan, 2004; Melin, 2010; MLA, 2007; Omaggio Hadley, 2001; Rifkin, 2000; Sturm, 2011). In addition, using film in L2 classrooms is beneficial in improving students' cultural knowledge at introductory and intermediate levels (Herron, Cole, Corrie, & Dubreil, 1999; Herron, Dubreil, Cole, & Corrie, 2000; Herron, Dubreil, Corrie, & Cole, 2002).

Based on the technological tools available that support L2 learning, the essentialness of group work, and the importance of exposing L2 learners to culture, and using Walker and Baets' (2009) Instructional Design Framework, this study will answer the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What kinds of participation and interaction patterns are favored by learners working with the target medium and technology?

RQ2: In what ways does exposure to the L2 culture, via technology and small group work, influence L2 learners' understanding of culture?

## **Procedure**

### *Overview*

During each week of the 2-week treatment period, university-level participants from an intermediate Spanish course were instructed to individually view two parts of the first episode of the telenovela *La Reina del Sur*. After watching each 2-part segment, participants were instructed to complete a video conferencing discussion activity with their assigned group. Participants were instructed to speak in the target language (Spanish) and critically think about what happened in the telenovela segments. Participants were also given researcher-created questions to use in order to aid in conversation.

### *Participants and Pairings*

Seventeen registered students for an intermediate Spanish course at a large, public research university in the United States consented to participate in the study. By using a random number generator, the researchers randomly created a total of six discussion groups, with two groups of two participants each, three groups of three participants each, and one group of four participants. Groups were originally formed with two, three, or four members in order to potentially observe the similarities and differences between groups.

Due to having more than one group member miss at least one of the virtual sessions and/or technical difficulties encountered when using Blackboard to upload and share the video files, the researchers only included Zoom meetings of two of the six groups in the data analysis. These two groups were different in size; one consisted of three members and the other of two members. All members of these two groups were present at both Zoom sessions, except for one member of the 3-person small group. Since only one group member missed one meeting, the data from this group were still used for data analysis.

Out of the five participants, all were English native speakers and on average each participant was 18.6 years old (ages ranged from 18-20).

### *Technology Used*

The telenovela *La Reina del Sur* was chosen because it was a contemporary show and therefore the production value was more modern. Its subject matter was relevant and provided for a well-received action/drama premise, which was popular among Spanish-speaking audiences around the world. In addition, participants were able to access the telenovela from the *Telemundo* website (<http://www.telemundo.com>) with optional subtitles to provide visual support to the audio (Baumgarten, 2008; Sturm, 2011).

The researchers chose Zoom (<http://www.zoom.us>), a free video conferencing tool, for synchronous virtual meetings. Since video conferencing allows for spontaneity and it imitates face-to-face interaction (Gass, 1997; Long, 1996; Pica, 1991, 1994), participants were able to discuss weekly topics in real-time related to the telenovela. Prior to the treatment period, all participants completed a Zoom test activity to ensure that they knew how to schedule a meeting on Zoom and record videos properly.

Participants were already using Blackboard (<http://www.blackboard.com>), a learning management system (LMS), for their intermediate Spanish course. Because of this, researchers used this platform to post telenovela weekly activities for participants. In addition, participants received a hard copy of all instructions for the telenovela activities in class.

### *Instructional Design Framework*

As mentioned in the literature review, Walker and Baets' (2009) Instructional Design Framework was used in planning the research design in order to ensure the best learning environment for the students. The five steps of the framework were realized through careful planning by the researchers. Step 1 (Design phase) of the framework was accomplished by clearly detailing a vision and procedure for the activities before implementing them in-class and online. Step 2 (Socialize learners) was carried out in a classroom setting where researchers discussed the uses of technology and group work to the participants and participants later practiced using the technologies to be implemented in the study. Step 3 (Support online participation) was achieved by establishing a virtual presence through email communication and Blackboard where researchers uploaded detailed instructions about the technology to be used during the study. Step 4 (Sustain online interaction) was fulfilled by having virtual group meetings during the 2-week duration of the study and utilizing the Internet to access and view the telenovela, complete online surveys, and meet the course professor during virtual office hours. Step 5 (Sum up learning outcomes) was realized by students answering research-created questions during the virtual meetings and reviewing the learning outcomes of the telenovela activity after the study (Walker & Baets, 2009).

### *Pre-survey*

Prior to the study, participants completed the pre-survey on [surveyMonkey.com](http://surveyMonkey.com), which consisted of twelve questions. Pre-survey questions focused on each participant's background and experience with watching authentic programming in Spanish and their attitudes towards technology being used to learn an L2. Since the telenovela activity was centered around group work, the participants were also asked about the positive and

negative aspects of group work. Questions consisted of both yes and no questions, scale-based responses, and open-ended questions. The pre-survey can be found in Appendix A.

### *Weekly Activities*

Researchers outlined and explained the study's activities, which was separate from normal coursework, and then broke students into randomly assigned small groups prior to the 2-week treatment period. Participants were instructed to individually view Parts 1 and 2 of the first episode of the telenovela *La Reina del Sur* during Week 1 and Parts 3 and 4 during Week 2. After viewing the weekly episode segment, researchers assigned groups to virtually meet via Zoom. During each Zoom session, participants were instructed to: 1) Record a 20-minute session in Spanish, the L2 that they were learning; 2) Answer instructor-created questions found in the Telenovela Blackboard folder; 3) Continue the discussion as they saw fit, if time permitted; and 4) Upload their recorded group session to the appropriate telenovela group file exchange on Blackboard.

### *Post-survey*

At the conclusion of the 2-week telenovela activity, students completed a 25-question post-survey on surveymonkey.com. The post-survey asked participants about their experience with the activity and what they had learned during the study. Questions consisted of both yes and no questions, scale-based responses, and open-ended questions. The post-survey can be found in Appendix B.

## **Data Analysis**

### *Pre-survey*

The yes or no questions from the twelve questions on the pre-survey were tallied and then percentages were calculated. Responses to scale-based and open-ended questions were studied to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' thoughts on group work and technology prior to the study.

### *Coding*

First, Zoom sessions were coded to examine the content of each session and themes discussed amongst group members during the Zoom sessions. Both researchers transcribed from Spanish into English a total of four virtual group sessions (two per each group). After carefully reviewing the transcripts, ten principal categories emerged, some of which contained sub-categories, as shown in Table 1. Then, using these researcher-created categories, both researchers coded the transcripts by units of "instances". An instance consisted of a word, a phrase, a sentence or group of sentences. In order to gain a more nuanced understanding of group participation during the synchronous sessions, researchers utilized NVivo 10 for Windows, a software for analyzing and detecting patterns.

Node and Sub-nodes
Clarification on Plot
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Answer</li> <li>• Question</li> </ul>
Clarification on Word
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Answer</li> <li>• Question</li> </ul>
Confirmation/Agreement
Disagreement
Discussion Question
Expressing Opinion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preceded by Agreement</li> <li>• Question</li> </ul>
I Don't Know
Search for Additional Information
Statement
Not Applicable

*Table 1.* Coding categories.

Clarification on Plot included instances of participant's search for clarity on the telenovela's plot. This Clarification on Plot was subdivided into two: Answer and Question. The instance was coded Answer when a participant replied with an answer to a question while the instance was coded Question when a participant asked a question about the plot. Clarification on Word included instances of a participant's search for clarity of the Spanish language. Clarification on Word was broken into two sub-categories: Answer and Question. If a participant answered a question about the language, it was coded as Answer while if a participant asked a question about language, it was coded Question. Confirmation/Agreement included a participant saying "yes" or agreeing with a group member while Disagreement included a participant disagreeing with a group member. Discussion Question referred to a participant reading one of the provided discussion questions. Expressing Opinion included any instances made by a participant, which conveyed his/her personal opinion. Statements were categorized in one of two ways: 1) Preceded by Agreement when a participant made a comment after agreeing with another participant's comment and 2) Question when a participant asked another participant for their opinion on a topic. I Don't Know indicated a participant expressing his/her lack of knowledge on a subject or literally saying "I don't know." Search for Additional Information categorized statements made by a participant through consulting outside information in order to better understand the telenovela. Statement included statements made by participants, but not including ones of opinion. Not Applicable included any instance of the conversation that did not relate to the telenovela activity and, therefore, did not fall in any of the above categories.

### *Zoom recording time breakdown*

The synchronous Zoom sessions were analyzed by calculating the total time spent on Zoom session by group and the breakdown of participation by each group member by session. Both researchers calculated the time by noting time spans that each group

member participated in for each exchange via NVivo 10 for Windows, so as to gain a detailed breakdown of individual participation in the group by time.

## Results

### *Pre-survey data*

All five participants noted both positive and negative components, 100% of which commented that having the ability to work with others is helpful because of the opportunity to collaborate with others and speak in the target language. For example, one participant indicated that following positive aspects of group work: "Being able to discuss ideas to equal peers. Having a group member able to contribute where I fall short is reassuring." In like fashion, participants also noted negative aspects of working in groups. Three of the five participants noted that groups are difficult to organize since there are more personalities, ideas, and other differences to contend with when completing a task. The other two participants' comments included that sometimes group work is disorganized and group members may not want to correct their peers.

In regard to technology, all five participants used technology on a daily basis and expressed enjoyment of using it in their intermediate Spanish course. With reference to how satisfied participants were with their skills using technology, two out of five participants were very satisfied while the other three participants were somewhat satisfied.

The remaining question of the pre-survey focused on participants' beliefs on how learning a language is best done. Participants needed to choose the best response to answer the question the following question, "How is learning a language best done?" Choices included in the classroom, online, and both in the classroom and online. Four participants indicated that learning was best done in both the classroom and online while one participant noted that it was best done in the classroom.

### *Post-survey data*

The yes or no questions from the 25-question post-survey were also tallied and then percentages were calculated. Responses to scale-based and open-ended questions were also studied to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' opinions of and satisfaction with their virtual small group work.

All five participants confirmed that they watched all assigned parts of the telenovela *La Reina del Sur* confirmed that they used Spanish subtitles each time they watched it, and encountered no difficulties using the technology for the activity nor would change anything about the activity.

Regarding understanding the assigned parts of the telenovela, two participants stated that they understood each part of the telenovela equally while two participants claimed that Parts 1 and 2 were easier to understand and one participant indicated that Parts 3 and 4 were easier. Participants also identified the areas they found most difficult with understanding the telenovela, with all five participants agreeing that both vocabulary and speed of talking were areas of difficulty and three of those five participants indicating accents of the speakers also proved to be difficult to understand.

Although some of the aspects of the telenovela were difficult, participants also noted that their language skills of reading, listening, and speaking as well as culture benefited from

the activities. All five participants felt that they improved in reading while four participants also indicated they improved in listening, two of which also mentioned culture and one specified speaking. Explanations to participants’ choices included being able to listen to native speakers, read subtitles, and experience culture first-hand.

Three out of five participants also responded that the virtual group sessions helped them understand the telenovela better while the remaining two participants responded that the virtual sessions may have helped them. Only one participant indicated that she formed new opinions about the L2 culture by watching *La Reina del Sur*. The majority of the explanations of why participants did not form new opinions of the L2 culture included the dramatic and exaggerated nature of the telenovela and/or representation of the L2 culture.

Participants were also asked to choose whether they strongly agreed, agreed, were neutral, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with several statements. The statements as well as the results are shown in Table 2.

	Participating in the telenovela activity motivated me to learn Spanish.	Participating in the telenovela activity made me more confident in using Spanish.	I was afraid to make mistakes in Spanish while participating in the virtual group sessions (Zoom sessions).
Strongly agree	0	0	0
Agree	3	2	0
Neutral	2	2	1
Disagree	0	1	4
Strongly disagree	0	0	0

Table 2. Participant ratings for post-survey statements ( $n = 5$ ).

Additional post-survey questions were related to technology. The first asked participants to choose whether they were very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, neither dissatisfied or satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with two statements. The statements as well as the results are shown in Table 3.

	How satisfied were you regarding your skills on using the technology used for the telenovela activity?	How satisfied were you regarding the technology used for the telenovela activity?
Very satisfied	2	2
Somewhat satisfied	3	2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	0	0
Somewhat dissatisfied	0	1
Very dissatisfied	0	0

Table 3. Participant satisfaction about telenovela activity ( $n = 5$ ).

The final question of the post-survey focused on participants’ beliefs on how learning a language is best done. Just as in the pre-survey, in the post-survey, participants needed to choose the best response to answer the following question, “How is learning a language best done?” Choices included in the classroom, online, and both in the classroom and

online. Three of the five participants indicated the same response as in the pre-survey that learning was best done in both the classroom and online. However, one participant who noted that learning is best done in the classroom in the pre-survey indicated in the post-survey that it was best done in both the classroom and online. Another student who indicated learning was best done in the classroom and online in the pre-survey chose in the post-survey that learning is best done in the classroom.

*Virtual small group meetings via Zoom*

Results indicated that raters had a 91.10% agreement (Kappa = 0.85 with  $p < 0.001$ ). Both coders worked together to reconcile the remaining differences and agreed on the final coding so that there was a 100% agreement.

Data from all transcripts combined indicated that the majority of coding instances fell across three categories: 1) Clarification on Plot (18.1%), 2) Expressing Opinion (18.1%), and 3) Statement (19.5%). The categories with the least number of instances were Disagreement (0.2%) and Search for Additional Information (1.2%) with one and five coded instances, respectively. Table 4 shows the percentages of all coded instances for each researcher-created category and the distribution by sub-category. The Frequency column shows the number of coded instances under each node. The Percentage column refers to the percentage of the sub-nodes that make up the main node. Percentage of total refers to the percentage of each node in relation to the total number of instances and all nodes combined.

Node	Frequency	Percentage of node	Percentage of total
Clarification on Plot			
• Answer	63	81.8%	
• Question	14	18.2%	
Total	77		18.1%
Clarification on Word			
• Answer	20	43.5%	
• Question	26	56.5%	
Total	46		10.8%
Confirmation/Agreement	48		11.3%
Disagreement	1		0.2%
Discussion Question	37		8.7%
Expressing Opinion			
• Preceded by Agreement	34		
• Question	6		
• Other	37		
Total	77		18.1%
I Don't Know	22		5.2%
Search for Additional Information	5		1.2%
Statement	83		19.5%
Not Applicable	29		6.8%
Total instances from main nodes	425		

Table 4. Coding summary by node.

Breaking down the results by group and then by participant showed an additional perspective of coding percentages. The data indicated that the both groups had a similar

total number of coded instances. Group 1 had 219 total instances and Group 2 had 206 total instances. However, comparing the nodes with the three highest percentages when the data were combined (Clarification on Plot, Expressing Opinion, and Statement) displayed that there is a difference between groups. Although the number of coded instances for Clarification on Plot for Group 1 (36) and Group 2 (41) and Statement for Group 1 (38) and Group 2 (45) were similar, there was a discrepancy for the Expressing Opinion category. While Group 1 had a total of 58 coded instances in this node, Group 2 had 19 instances.

Within each group, specifically looking at the number of coded instances made by each participant, results indicated that Group 1 was not as fairly balanced as Group 2. In Group 1, Participant 1 made up 93 (42.5%) of the 219 total instances while Participant 2 contributed 21 (9.6%) and Participant 3 added 105 (47.9%). In Group 2, Participant 4 made 116 of 206 (56.3%) total instances, while Participant 5 included 90 (43.6%).

Results indicated that in each group, there was one group member who participated approximately 60%, while another participant in each group spoke approximately 40% of the total time across both Zoom sessions. Participant 2's total time spent speaking totaled just above 5%, much lower than all other participants. Table 5 details how each participant contributed to each Zoom virtual meeting by time.

	Minutes speaking	Percentage of total time
Group 1		
• Participant 1	14.7	37.9%
• Participant 2	2.1	5.4%
• Participant 3	22.0	56.7%
Total across both sessions	33.8	
Group 2		
• Participant 4	11.9	37.1%
• Participant 5	20.2	62.9%
Total across both sessions	32.1	

Table 5. Time breakdown by participant.

## Discussion

### *Pre- and post-surveys*

Analysis of the results for the pre- and post-surveys provided the researchers with insight of the participants before and after the 2-week treatment period. However, when evaluated together to answer RQ2, the analysis revealed that exposure to the L2 culture, via technology, influenced the participants' views on technology and small group work either positively or negatively, based on their experiences.

Learning is best done in the classroom and online was an opinion that four out of five participants shared prior to the 2-week treatment period. However, through the use of technology, via the telenovela, Zoom and Blackboard, two participants' answers changed about how learning is best done, thus suggesting that this study's activities could have positively and negatively influenced participants' views on learning. It should be noted that the participant who was somewhat dissatisfied with the technology used during the

treatment period did not change her opinion of how learning was best facilitated. Furthermore, all participants remained satisfied with their skills using technology prior to and post-study, showing that this activity did not negatively, nor positively impact the way in which participants viewed their tech savviness. Comparison of pre- and post-surveys illustrated that although all participants had never watched television in Spanish before the study, three of the five the participants agreed that participating in the telenovela activity motivated them to learn Spanish, providing evidence that that small group work (Ballman, 1988; Dörnyei, 1997; Johnson, 1995; Julkunun & Borzova, 1996; Olsen & Kagan, 1992; Slavin, 1996; Sugino, 1994; Ushioda, 1996) and integrating culture (Bada & Genc, 2005) can have motivating effects on learning. One participant stated, "Unlike pure vocab or grammar, there was outside motivation to learn Spanish." When presented with a task that required active use of culture presented through the telenovela, participants were motivated to recognize what they did not understand, and then they figured out the answer by speaking within their small groups.

In addition, participants reported the perception that the online small group activity had a positive impact on their four language skills and/or cultural knowledge during the 2-week study. Although the activities were not originally planned to help students with their reading skills, the data suggested that because all participants used Spanish subtitles when viewing Parts 1 and 2 of the telenovela, they indicated that their reading skills improved. In addition to this passive language skill, as anticipated, the majority of participants reported that in their opinion, their listening skills improved through the telenovela and Zoom sessions.

Nonetheless, even though participants stated that their listening ability improved from the telenovela activity, all participants communicated that vocabulary, speed of talking, and/or accents of speakers gave them the most difficulty with the telenovela. This difficulty with comprehension of the dialogue resonated in the surveys in statements such as, "The second parts (of the telenovela) had a lot of dialogue based interactions, which was where I ran into trouble". If participants were having difficulty understanding native Spanish speakers and they identified that their listening ability improved as a result of watching the telenovela, then this both identified a weakness in their current Spanish skill level and also presented a potential solution to the problem: to integrate more culture through technology and telenovelas.

Turning attention to the active language skills of writing and speaking, participants only reported improvement in speaking skills since there were no writing activities associated during the 2-week treatment. However, since four out of the five participants were not afraid to make mistakes during Zoom session and two participants were more confident in using Spanish because of the telenovela activity, it was unusual that only one participant believed that her active skill of speaking improved. Although participants always spoke in Spanish to resolve the content-specific issues during virtual meetings, these results showed that additional speaking opportunities may be needed over a 2-week period to note a considerable improvement in speaking ability. This may also suggest why that students were able to see a more immediate improvement in the two passive skills of reading and listening as compared to the active skills of speaking.

The participants had no trouble identifying the exaggerated portrayal of life that the telenovela presented, but only one participant stated that she formed new opinions about

the L2 culture and two students reported the possibility that they may have formed new opinions. Watching television is an aspect of culture, and by watching and listening to a telenovela in Spanish, they were able to gain a greater appreciation for and understanding of the culture of a Spanish-speaking country. This study also suggested that additional opportunities for viewing programs in Spanish are needed for more notable cultural awareness. The best way to teach culture is not an easy decision (Kramsch, 2011). As was seen with this study's intervention, although the telenovela, an authentic part of Hispanic culture, was a relevant way to connect to participants, the way in which the L2 culture is portrayed is chosen by the director (Kramsch & Anderson, 1999). Because of this, instructors must be cautious of how to integrate culture so that L2 stereotypes are not taught (Kramsch, 2011), but rather the L2 culture is portrayed in a way to provide L2 cultural understanding. As Lambert (1963) stated, "The learner's... attitudes towards the other group are believed to determine his [sic] success in learning the new language" (p. 102). If participants are never exposed to the culture and native speakers of the language they are studying, they will be unable to fully understand and utilize the language of study.

#### *Virtual small group meetings via Zoom*

To answer RQ1, when transcripts from the virtual meetings via Zoom were analyzed, it was evident that the telenovela, technology, and Zoom mediated L2 learners' participation in an online small group setting. The breakdown of coded instances by node (research-created categories) and by source (small group and individual small group member) showed evidence of the ways in which participants interacted with one another during the 2-week study.

With regards to the data representing the overall breakdown coding by node for both groups, results showed that participants completed the virtual small group activities as set forth by the researchers in varied ways. The fact that the Clarification on Plot, Expressing Opinion, and Statement categories made up the highest percentages of the virtual group conversations and participants only reverted back to the statement I Don't Know less than 6% during the Zoom sessions showed that participants were able to analyze the plot, form and discuss opinions about the telenovela, and make statements based upon their opinions and understanding. The fact that the majority of Clarification on Plot instances were Answers showed that participants were working together in order to better understand the plot and to help their group members reach the same level of understanding (Bailey, Daley, & Onuwuegbuzie, 1999; Ballman, 1988; Ford 1991; Long & Porter, 1985). When participants were given the opportunity to work together in groups outside of the classroom, analysis of the data clearly suggested that L2 learners took the opportunity seriously in order to gain valuable knowledge about the language and culture during the study.

The data breakdown by individual participants in relation to each participant's group data reinforced how utilizing Zoom can help facilitate L2 learner participation in an online small group setting (Bohinski & Mulé, 2016). The fact that equal participation based on coding category was reflected in data from Group 2 shows that both Participants 4 and 5 were involved equally with thematic topics during the 2-week treatment period, reinforcing the fact that small groups encourage participation and interaction among participants (Doughty & Pica, 1986; Gass 1997; Long, 1996; Pica, 1991, 1994; Walker & Baets, 2009). Via Zoom, each L2 learner was interested in participating, engaging with the discussion

questions, and sharing thoughts, questions, and opinions with other participants in order to learn about the telenovela. Therefore, this study showed how small group work was made possible through this video conferencing technology tool.

However, as per the coding categories, the breakdown for Group 1 showed that Participant 2 was actively engaged 9.6% of the time during the one session that she participated in. Even if this participant had completed the additional Zoom meeting and participated in the same way, there still would be a considerable discrepancy of participation between this participant and Participants 1 and 3. Unlike Group 2, it appeared that all participants in Group 1 were not as willing to ask questions and answer questions to improve their understanding during the online small group activity. Although there were no negative interactions or disagreements among these group members, it seemed that group size contributed to the lower participation rate by Participant 2. In groups of more than two, this data suggested that a participant can easily “hide” and have others control the conversation. If students are not motivated to participate or feel intimidated, it appears that group work is not optimum for every L2 learner under all circumstances.

Nonetheless, when the data was analyzed in terms of time spent by each participant in the conversation, patterns emerged within each group. Participant 2’s total time spent speaking stands in contrast to the other participants. Her minimal time spent speaking appeared to be related to the low percentage of participation shown by coded thematic categories, suggesting that when a participant is not engaged in a discussion’s topics, it is difficult to fully participate in the conversation. However, the study’s other participants showed that, although participation by thematic category was near equivalent amongst them, there can be more discrepancy in total time spent speaking in the conversation. Even though participants can be engaged in themes that a conversation presents, this data could indicate how there can be a more dominant speaker in the group. While this may provide an opportunity for less advanced speakers to learn from partners, it can also prove to be difficult for them to contribute in spoken conversation if there is one dominant speaker in the group.

### *Implications for the L2 Classroom*

Although this study specifically focused on L1 English students learning Spanish as an L2, this study has implications for all L2 students, including those in the English as a Foreign Language classroom. Nonetheless, this study showed that small group work coupled with integration of L2 culture, via technology, is beneficial for the L2 classroom. This study also indicated that L2 learners are capable of and interested in incorporating technology into their coursework, and that when technology is combined with small group work and exposure to the target language’s culture, there are many ways in which L2 learners can be supported during the learning process. By integrating online activities and structuring them following Walker and Baets’ (2009) Instructional Design Framework, instructors can provide a learning environment that allows their L2 learners to utilize the target language out of class in a peer-only setting where they can collaborate with group members to complete the task at hand while developing their individual L2 language skills and culture.

Just as the majority of participants reported a belief before and after the study that learning is best done in both the classroom and online, it is important that instructors recognize the advantages of technology to the L2 learning process. Like Bueno (2006), this small-scale study also suggested that, by taking advantage of the technology, such

as Zoom and telenovelas, which are readily available, instructors can provide opportunities to improve skills and motivate students by using multimedia, via authentic materials, in online small group settings. Nonetheless, the context of the type of multimedia used to bring L2 culture to life must be considered (Kramsch & Anderson, 1999). It was evident that this study's participants recognized that a telenovela does not accurately portray L2 culture. However, even with the exaggerated representation of the L2 culture, participants were able to increase their appreciation for the L2 culture and language and begin to form new opinions.

By incorporating synchronous computer-mediated communication, this study has shown that L2 learners are able to participate in a face-to-face environment outside of the classroom and be engaged in the L2 learning process. However, it is important to recognize that students who may speak less still contribute in significant ways through engagement with the conversation's topics. Learner engagement is much more than the amount of time spent in an activity, but in the breadth in which the L2 learner carries it out. Therefore, it is important for instructors to remember that every L2 learner is unique and will participate in group work and with technology in different ways.

In conclusion, by integrating a blend of technology, group work, and exposure to the L2 culture, instructors are able to incorporate meaningful, relevant activities to the curriculum in order to provide students with opportunities to apply their L2 knowledge, improve their L2 language skills, and develop their cultural knowledge. By taking advantage of how group work and access to authentic materials have changed due to the digital age, L2 instructors need to recognize the ways in which technology are able to transform L2 teaching and learning.

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### **Appendix A Pre-survey**

1. What is your nickname (alias) that is being used for this study?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your native language?
4. Have used entertainment/media to learn Spanish in the past? Please list the mediums you used.
5. Do you watch Spanish language TV (telenovelas/noticias) outside of classwork assignments?
6. What are the positive aspects of working in groups for Spanish projects/assignments?
7. What are the negative aspects of working in groups for Spanish projects/assignments?
8. Do you use technology in your daily life?
9. Using the scale below, how satisfied are you regarding your skills on using technology? Choices include: very dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, neither dissatisfied or satisfied, somewhat satisfied, and very satisfied.
10. Do you like using technology in your Spanish course?
11. What are the reasons you like or dislike using technology in your Spanish course?
12. How is learning a language best done? Choices include: in the classroom, online, and both in the classroom and online.

## Appendix B Post-survey

1. What is your nickname (alias) that is being used for this study?
2. Did you watch all four parts of episode 1 of *La Reina del Sur*?
3. Please select the option(s) that reflect your experience watching *La Reina del Sur*. Choices include: I used Spanish subtitles for parts 1 and 2 of the 1<sup>st</sup> episode, I did not use Spanish subtitles for parts 1 and 2, I used Spanish subtitles for parts 3 and 4, and I did not use Spanish subtitles for parts 3 and 4.
4. Please choose the statement that best describes how you feel about the first episode of *La Reina del Sur*. Choices include: Parts 1 and 2 were easier to understand than parts 3 and 4, Parts 3 and 4 were easier to understand than parts 1 and 2, and I understood the same amount over the whole episode.
5. Please explain your previous response in as much detail as possible.
6. If you had trouble understanding the telenovela, please select which areas proved difficult for you. Choices include: accent of speakers, plot, speed of talking, vocabulary, I did not find any of the above areas difficult to understand, and other (please specify).
7. Please explain your previous response in as much detail as possible.
8. Using the scale below, how satisfied were you regarding your skills on using the technology used for the telenovela activity? Choices include: very dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, neither dissatisfied or satisfied, somewhat satisfied, and satisfied.
9. Using the scale below, how satisfied were you regarding the technology used for the telenovela activity? Choices include: very dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, neither dissatisfied or satisfied, somewhat satisfied, and very satisfied.
10. How have you benefited from using technology as part of the telenovela activity?
11. In general, what area(s) do you feel you benefitted in through your use of the telenovela activity? Choose as many that apply. Choices are: reading, listening, speaking, writing, culture, and none.
12. Please explain your answer to the question above in detail.
13. In your opinion, did the virtual group sessions (Zoom sessions) help you better understand the telenovela?
14. Please explain your previous response in as much detail as possible.
15. Did you form any new opinions about Spanish culture by watching *La Reina del Sur*?
16. If yes, please explain what opinions you formed in as much detail as possible.
17. Using the scale below, choose the response that best represents how you feel about the following statement: Participating in the telenovela activity motivated me to learn Spanish. Choices include: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree.
18. Please explain in detail why you chose the response for the question above.
19. Using the scale below, choose the response that best represents how you feel about the following statement: Participating in the telenovela activity made me more

confident in using Spanish. Choices include: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree.

20. Please explain in detail why you chose the response for the question above.
21. Using the scale below, choose the response that best represents how you feel about the following statement: I was afraid to make mistakes in Spanish while participating in the virtual group sessions (Zoom sessions). Choices include: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree.
22. Please explain in detail why you chose the response for the question above.
23. Would you make changes to the technology used for the telenovela activity?
24. If yes, why?
25. How is learning a language best done? Choices include: in the classroom, online, and both in the classroom and online.