Exploring Brazilian English Learners' Views and Experiences of Multilevel EFL Classes

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Abstract

Multilevel classes are diverse classes in which learners from different backgrounds, life experiences and language skills are placed together in one group. The multilevel approach in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts is becoming more common around the world due to various reasons: funding constraints, learner scheduling difficulties, increased number of learners (Ashton 2018), and program logistics (Shank, 1995). Through previous research on teachers' experiences (Ashton, 2018), it is known that the multilevel method offers both challenges and benefits to adult English learning. As challenges, there are beginners' vulnerabilities, insecurities, and demotivation throughout the learning process, naturally segregating themselves from others (Mathews-Aydinli & Horne, 2006). Additionally, advanced English learners, who have more knowledge and language skills than classmates with lower proficiency, may potentially be frustrated at sitting through instructions geared towards much lower levels. As benefits, advanced students potentially provide assistance through meaningful interactions with beginners. However, due to the lack of research on learners' experiences and views of multilevel English classes, it is crucial to explore and listen to learners' own experiences as English learners. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore adult Brazilian English learners' views and experiences of multilevel English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes, particularly, beginners and advanced students studying at a specific multilevel English institute located in Brazil. Data collection included ten individual interviews and 4.5 hours of classroom observations. This study found similar and different experiences among English learners in multilevel EFL classes, such as: both groups believed that the biggest challenges of the multilevel is to have pre-class preparation and to interact positively with each other despite their different levels of proficiency. The results are relevant for teachers-facilitators, students, and those managing multilevel EFL institutes in Brazil, bringing different perspectives towards the multilevel EFL classes. The findings will ideally

lead to the schools developing more effective tools for further professional development on multilevel EFL teaching, teacher education programs.

Keywords: Multilevel EFL classes; Foreign Language Acquisition; Adult English learning; English learners' experiences.

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"For from Him and through Him and for Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen." Romans 11.36

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Chapter 1: Context of the Study

A historical perspective of Education in the Brazilian Context

To better understand the Brazilian context of English teaching and learning, it is imperative to first highlight the general characteristics of the Brazilian educational system. Brazilian education is as diverse as the country itself and it has specific cultural and regional characteristics that influence the school systems. Among those characteristics, beyond cultural and socioeconomic levels, there are vast inequalities that contributed to creating two different school settings: the private and the public (Mendonça, 2020). This section will briefly discuss the history of education in Brazil, the differences, and inequalities among the public and private education systems, and how the historical perspective on these inequalities facilitates the understanding of the private English language schools' phenomena in Brazil.

According to Bloome (2018), "educational inequality" is the process in which parents' income shapes their children's education. It is the idea that high-income parents are more likely to raise highly educated children in comparison to low-income parents, reflecting which student populations are catered to in each system (private or public) and why. The educational inequality in Brazil is evident among public and private educational settings, not only in terms of the guardians or parents' income, but also in terms of other factors, such as: the level of preparedness of teachers; how many hours of instructions are provided per grade level, and so on. These factors presumably influence all teaching and learning in Brazil, including English as a Foreign Language.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss in detail the history, documents and policies related to the educational system in Brazil. However, it is important to understand its shortcomings in relation to private English language schools, as to why they are highly present in Brazil and how they are developed.

In the beginning of the first half of the 20th century, access to education was reserved for the minority of the population, the elite, who attended private schools. On the other hand, the poor, notably black and indigenous, were excluded from access to formal and free education (Mendonça, 2020). One of the first attempts to reduce educational inequalities was the creation of the *Manifest of the Pioneer of the New School* in 1932 (O Manifesto dos Pioneiros da Educação Nova) developed during the government of Getúlio Vargas (1930-1945) (Bomeny, n.d.). The Manifest defended education as a public responsibility, where there are no economic privileges to the elite, all teachers must have university education and where education is secular, free, and compulsory. The document described guidelines that would give a chance to most of the poor population to be educated in an equality-oriented environment, where there are similar opportunities for people of different social classes (Mendonça, 2020). However, educational policies in Brazil continued to ignore the socio-economically vulnerable population in its political and social responsibility. As mentioned by Paulo Freire, the most prominent Brazilian educator, inequality among social classes led to oppression of the popular classes by the more affluent classes (Freire, 2018).

Since then, many documents and policies have shaped the educational system in Brazil, which are deeply influenced by the historical moment in which they were developed, such as: *1961 Education Law of Guidelines and Bases* (Lei de Diretrizes e Bases de 1961), (Lei de Diretrizes e Bases, 1961) and the *1971 Education Law of Guidelines and Bases* (Lei the Diretrizes e Bases de 1971), see (Lei de Diretrizes e Bases, 1971; Beluzo & Toniosso, 2015; Assis, 2012); *The Brazilian Constitution of 1988*, see (Constituição da República Federativa do Brasil, 1988; Oliveira, 1999); *1996 Education Law* (Lei de Diretrizes e Bases de 1996), see (Lei de Diretrizes e Bases, 1996); *National Common Curricular Basis, henceforth BNCC* (Base Nacional Comum Curricular), see (Ministério da Educação, 2018; Marson, 2021; Souza & Gois, 2021).

Looking at the latest policies, there is an evident effort to decrease educational inequality in Brazil, however, the Constitution of 1988 and the 1996 Education Law did not put an end to the educational inequalities, but rather started the process of looking at the whole population needs (Mendonca, 2020).

As a result, the new *National Common Curricular Basis,* henceforth BNCC, promises to promote equality among both public and private schools in Brazil; however, it is known that the elite will continue to have the financial resources and choice to provide opportunities for their children by using what the private school system provides and beyond, such as private English schools (Ministério da Educação, 2018), whose own existence is linked to the intensification of the common sense that it is impossible to learn English only from regular schools- public or private (Paiva, 2003). Therefore, according to the Rossieli Soares da Silva, former Minister of Education, the newly implemented BNCC will not turn inequalities into equalities by itself, but it is an important step towards changes in the Brazilian Educational System, as both private and public schools are now required to follow the same curricula, promising to promote equality among both public and private schools in Brazil (Ministério da Educação, 2018).

As observed, history points us to a clear advantage of the private school system over the public school system in Brazil, and this advantage presumably influences all teaching and learning, including English as a Foreign Language. However, that is not to say that by simply attending a regular private school a student is able to obtain English fluency, as despite its advantage over public schools, neither school systems have this ability yet, due to the marginalization of the English language teaching in Brazil (Souza & Gois, 2021).

English Teaching and Learning: Brazilian Context

A brief analysis of the Brazilian Educational system through a historical perspective of the inequalities among public and private schools shows how far the Brazilian school system

still needs to go in terms of general teaching quality, which is also true when it comes to English as a Foreign Language teaching and learning (Souza & Gois, 2021).

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching and learning is integrated in the Brazilian education system in elementary and secondary schools. As previously mentioned, there have been two educational policies that provided guidelines for many years regarding the teaching of a foreign language: Lei de Diretrizes e Bases (Education Law of Guidelines and Bases; henceforth LDB) and Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais (National Curricular Parameters; henceforth PCNs), and currently, the document Base Nacional Comum Curricular (National Common Curricular Basis; henceforth BNCC).

The previously mentioned *Education Law* (LDB) incorporated the teaching of foreign languages in 1986 (Paiva, 2003). The PCNs provided comprehensive information about curriculum orientations on several topics, including foreign language teaching, from Grade 5 to 8 (Ministério da Educação, 1998) and secondary school (Ministério da Educação, 2000, 2006). With the implementation of those policies, English became generally taught as a subject from K-12 in both public and private school systems, although it is only mandatory from Grade 6 to High School, according to the Law nº 13.415/2017 from LDB (Ministério da Educação, 2018). Statutory and the National Curricular Guidelines make the teaching of a foreign language at elementary and high school compulsory. However, teachers and experts acknowledge that English teaching - both public and private - is unable to provide students with a usable level of English (Paiva, 2003; Souza & Gois, 2021; British Council, 2014).

Over the years, English language teaching and learning lost its place in the Brazilian school system. For instance, the 1998 National Curricular Parameters (PCN) for elementary school (which was operative until the end of 2018), concluded that reading skills in a foreign language are far more important than oral skills for Brazilian students. The PCN emphasized that "only a small portion of the population has the opportunity to use a foreign language as a

tool for oral communication in and outside the country" (Ministério da Educação, 1998, p. 20), and that the oral communication skill is more connected to leisure and not so much to a necessity.

To justify the exclusion of speaking skills from the curriculum, the PCN also argued that the two official Foreign Language Exams in Brazil (University entry and admission in graduate studies in Brazil) only required foreign language reading skills, and therefore, "reading skills meet both needs: formal education and the skills that students can use in an immediate social context" (Ministério da Educação, 1998, p. 20). The PCN also argued that other factors should be considered in justifying the exclusion of speaking skills from the foreign languages' curriculum, such as: reduced instructions hours, overcrowded classrooms, lack of English skills by most teachers, and blackboards and books as the only teaching materials, which makes it difficult to teach the four language skills in the classroom.

Therefore, it is not surprising the presence of a widely held belief in Brazil that students who only receive public schooling rarely learn beyond the basic English grammar and vocabulary. Those students may spend years and years on elementary and secondary school studying nothing beyond the "verb to be" in English grammar. As confirmed Almeida (2018, p. 78), Brazilian learners in different learning contexts, usually affirm that they have been spending the whole year just studying the "verb to be". These comments represent the permanence of a teaching approach that is mechanic and old-fashioned. According to Almeida (2019, p. 78), when English content and grammatical topics are the sole focus year after year in a monotonous and demotivating environment, where nothing new is added to the curricula, English learning opportunities to the students becomes limited, which is a consequence of the way educational policies approached English teaching and learning.

Facing the realities of teaching and learning English in schools in Brazil, the focus on reading skills was justified for its social role in Brazil, which was earlier discussed, and, for its

reachable goals through realistic conditions (Ministério da Educação, 1998). It is understandable that the ideas held by the PCN might have reflected the Brazilian social context in 1998, when the opportunities to use a foreign language were almost nonexistent for most of the Brazilian population. Nevertheless, the PCN 1998 was operative until 2018, and perpetuated for 20 years the inequalities among public and private school systems in Brazil.

Even though the PCN 1998 was also valid for private schools, those had more freedom go beyond the PCN requirements in their English language teaching curricula. Families with better social-economic conditions never deprived themselves from studying a foreign language - English or others - as they would hire private language teachers or enroll in foreign language courses and/or private language schools (Souza & Gois, 2021), where English teaching focused not only on reading and writing skills, but also on speaking, and listening. Yet, for 20 years, the PCN assumed that Brazilian children who attended public schools did not need to acquire a knowledge of English (or any foreign language) that went beyond reading skills, as their opportunity to use oral communication in and outside of the country was nearly impossible, which caused a historical inequality in terms of foreign language learning among the elite and lower class.

In a different approach, most recent PCNs, from 2000 and 2006, included oral communication as a teachable foreign language skill for secondary school years. According to the PCN from 2006, competencies such as grammar and sociolinguistics are relevant for teaching and learning foreign language oral communication and those should be interconnected. From that point of view, oral communication skills become essential not only for teaching and learning a foreign language, but also as an important communication tool in the modern world (Ministério da Educação, 2006). Despite reflecting on approaches to teaching oral communication skills in foreign language classes, PCNs did not reflect the reality, as studies around Brazil have shown that teaching oral communication skills in English language

classes in secondary schools, until then, was still not considered as a priority (Lima, Souza & Luquetti, 2014).

English language teaching in Brazil, especially oral communication skills, still needs to be improved in public school systems. According to Lima, Souza and Luquetti (2014), "only then, students will have access to effective learning of the fours basic foreign language skills: Listening, Reading, Writing e Speaking" (p. 101). Correa (2016) found interesting results from her research in a public high school in Minas Gerais, Brazil. English teachers were asked to speak English during the lesson, and afterwards, the researcher asked how students felt about it. Approximately 25% of the students said it was normal as they were used to listening to the English language in English schools. Around 38% affirmed that they felt surprised and confused; 5% said they did not know how to answer that question. Approximately 32% of the students said they had a positive experience listening to the English language in the classroom, and one student said: "I was really happy because I was tired of listening to English teachers always teaching the verb "to be", and not focusing on conversation" (p. 309). This example suggests how motivating for students and teachers it would have been should the PCN's (2000, 2006) guidelines on teaching oral communication in English had been implemented at that time.

As previously discussed, the current official document Base Nacional Comum Curricular (*National Common Curricular Basis*; henceforth BNCC) homologated in 2018 in Brazil, promises to promote radical changes and guidelines on how the English language curricula (and all the subjects) should be approached in all levels of education in Brazil, in both public and private school systems. Although English language teaching is still only mandatory for grade 6 and up, the good news is that from 2018 on, the oral communication skills are now part of the curriculum for every public and private school in Brazil. It is also worth mentioning

that BNCC is explicit in adopting the English language as a mandatory foreign language subject, instead of providing general guidelines for any foreign language teaching.

In years to come, we will be able to witness how the new Brazilian official educational document, BCNN, was accepted and incorporated into the educational system. According to Souza & Gois (2021, p. 35415), it will be difficult to change Brazil's 53rd place among 100th countries in the EF English Proficiency Index (the biggest proficiency index around the world). However, with the implementation of effective educational policies and the democratization of English teaching and learning, we will be able to see, in a not-so-distant future, a shift in the scenario that has been defining Brazil for so long: English language learning is a privilege for a few (Souza & Gois, 2021, p. 35415). Until then, private English language schools promise to offer supplementary education for students who require additional tutoring, and most importantly, who can afford it.

Private English Language Schools

It is important to highlight the difference between Private English language schools and bilingual Immersion schools in Brazil. Bilingual Immersion schools are regular elementary and/or secondary private schools in which a second language (L2) is introduced from early childhood education and is the most widely spoken and learned language until the literacy phase (Moller & Zurawshi, 2017). That is, the child speaks a mother tongue, enters the school, and receives his or her education or a good part of it in a second language (Moller & Zurawshi, 2017).

On the other hand, Private English language schools offer supplementary education for students who require additional tutoring. Most private English schools offer classes during after-school hours and/or on weekends, at other convenient times. These schools advertise teaching methods that are focused on oral communication (Muriana, 2018, p.17). Lacking the provision of oral communication skills in mainstream foreign language education, some

Brazilian students enroll in these private English courses (Galante, 2018), which is only available for those who can afford it.

An internet search reveals that the exact number of Private English School in Brazil is not known, as there were around 28.000.000 results for 'Private English schools in Brazil'. While there is no current and reliable data to confirm, it is widely known in Brazil that the country has a large market for private language schools' business chains (Muriana, 2018, p.17), as well as small businesses that offer courses and classes from a vast range of monthly fees. Recognizable private Brazilian English schools approach the same level classes as a teaching method, in which students are placed in the classrooms corresponding to their English level of proficiency whereas other schools began to incorporate multilevel EFL classes.

The British Council conducted research on Learning English in Brazil, including Brazilians' goals and expectations. The study was done in collaboration with the *Instituto de Pesquisa Data Popular* (Research Institute Popular Data) to the British Council and aimed to understand if the Brazilian emerging middle-class population was interested in learning the English Language. While this thesis draws some insights from the British Council (2014)'s data to promote better understanding of the purpose of this study, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. As mentioned, the British Council (2014) study only focused on growing middle and lower-upper class. It does not look at other social groups, therefore, excludes most of the Brazilian population, as 85% of Brazilians study in public schools (Souza & Gois, 2021) and are usually part of the lower class. By not including all economic classes, the British Council research ignores the existent educational inequalities in Brazil, and that affects the efficacy of the data.

While there has not yet been similar or up to date research or data gathering done solely by Brazilian scholars or institutes on this matter, the British Council (2014) data is still significant, as it shows that only around 5% of the population aged over 16 states that they have

some knowledge of the English language. Among those who claim to 'know' English, half considered to be on a basic English level and only 16% to be in an advanced level. Among those who were taking private English classes, only 4% affirmed to be in an advanced level, whereas 63% stated to be in the basic level. The levels of proficiency stated in the report are based on a self-assessment use of the terms, such as "basic level", "advanced level", which might be related to students' proficiency levels identified in their English schools. According to the British Council (2014), "for 75% of those taking private English classes, these courses should not extend 2 years, because long courses seem to be slow and not effective, forcing the student to spend a lot of time in the beginner level" (p. 20), which tends to cause demotivation.

Considering that most of the Brazilian private English schools use the same level teaching approach, which are classrooms divided by level of proficiency, this British Council (2014)'s data raise some questions to whether the same level teaching method can be considered as one of the reasons why most Brazilian learners enrolled in private English schools seem to be trapped in the same beginner level for years. In other words, is the same level method contributing for students spending many years in the beginner level? The other questioning is to whether the multilevel EFL method, which is the focus of this thesis, would be a better alternative to learn English as a Foreign Language; as besides offering shorter programs, which vary between 18 - 24 months, it promises a real-life English experience.

Multilevel English Classes

As most teachers have discovered, every class demonstrates a mix of ability to some extent (Richards & Burns, 2012). Language classes often have individual differences in learning style, students' previous experience with education, the country and culture of origin, the students' current situation (Richards & Burns, 2012).

Ashton (2019) points out that, "in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and learning languages literature, 'multilevel' and 'mixed-ability' are often used

interchangeably to refer to the diversity of learners in terms of age, proficiency, learning styles and learner background" (p.1). The term has also been used to describe classes in which "students learn across two or more grades and are taught by the same teacher for two or more years" (p.14), as demonstrated in the book *Independent Together, Supporting the Multi-level Learning Community* by Manitoba Education and Youth (2003). However, in this study, the term multilevel refers specifically to the varying levels of English language proficiency in one English class, where learners from beginning to advanced levels of language skills are placed together in a single group (Mathews-Aydinli & Horne, 2006).

The multilevel classes approach in EFL contexts is becoming more common around the world due to various reasons: funding constraints, learner scheduling difficulties, increased number of learners (Ashton 2018), and program logistics (Shank, 1995), as well as the increase in the number of immigrants in English speaking countries and, consequently, an increase of the adult refugee programs (Mathews-Aydinli and Horne, 2006).

Pilot Study: Beginner English Learners' experiences in multilevel EFL classes

In dealing with a variety of challenges or benefits from a multilevel class, beginner and/or advanced English learners might wonder during the learning process, whether the multilevel method is truly the most effective learning approach to meet their needs in the English language learning.

To explore Brazilian learners' experiences in multilevel EFL classes, I conducted a pilot study (Fall/ 2019) for a qualitative research course as part of my M.Ed. program. The study is entitled *Beginner English learners' experiences in Brazilian multilevel EFL classes: Case studies*, in which I conducted interviews with three Brazilian English learners in the beginner level of proficiency. The participants of this study were (3) three adult beginner English learners from a multilevel English Institute in Brazil. After obtaining permission from

the school to conduct the study, interested students contacted me willing to be participants, and I recruited the first three students to participate in 30 minutes individual interviews.

The data collection took place through online individual interviews. The interviews were conducted in Portuguese, transcribed, and translated into English afterwards. The participants identities were protected, as they were given pseudonyms, as well as a codebook with their contact information was kept in an encrypted and password secured computer.

The interview questions were planned to gather important information on their experiences, such as their English language background, time in the program, expectations, insecurities, and so on. As a result, all the participants were in the program for at least three months; all participants have had unsuccessful experiences learning English before the multilevel program, and each participant described similar expectations and insecurities about a multilevel English class. Following the interviews, transcriptions, and translations, I created a summary document for each participant, in which I wrote my comments and impressions of the interview. Commenting on their responses helped me to make sense of their experiences as Beginner English Learners in multilevel EFL classes. After analysing the participants' data and observing the common topics that best described their experiences as beginner English learners in multilevel classes, I divided the data into emerging themes, and answered the research questions, which were: 1) How do beginner English learners experience multilevel EFL classes? 2) What are the barriers and benefits for beginner English learners in a multilevel EFL class? Each case study was analysed individually and displayed in a word table (see Table 1).

Table 1. Findings

TOPICS	CASE STUDY: REBECA	CASE STUDY: DAVID	CASE STUDY: DEBORAH
The beginning	It was hard for not being able to understand other students and the teacher	The beginning was hard for not being able to interact with the class	The beginning was hard; uncomfortable
Motivation to study English	International trips; To be able to read foreign authors and writers	Professional interaction; Past feeling of "rejection" for not speaking English	There was no motivation to start; but the motivation came from loved ones.
Motivation to study English in the multilevel method	Short period of time; *Multilevel* was unknown until the first contact with the school	Affordable price; *Multilevel* was unknown until the first contact with the school	*Multilevel* was unknown until the first contact with the school
Biggest insecurity	Speaking	Speaking	Speaking
Motivation to continue studying English in multilevel classes	Own effort to learn and "small results"; Teacher and classmates' encouragement	To get help from advanced students; Observe them speaking	Teacher and classmates; Being able to help someone, the feeling of being useful.
Like the most about multilevel classes	Reading, speaking and listening skills present in class; the assessment project.	The interaction in class	To share and observe others' experiences
Dislike about multilevel classes	Sometimes, lack of attention with the beginners	"Empty" classes, which causes lack of interaction	The bureaucracy to contact the school; lack of English immersion for beginners; the assessment project.

The pilot study found that participants experienced multilevel level classes in mainly three ways: facing challenges at the beginning of their studies; being afraid of speaking in the classroom; and striving to find motivation to continue, despite the difficulties. Therefore, based on the data analysis, these are the common themes that emerged from the three participants' interviews, which I called 'common experiences: a) challenging beginnings; b) 'speaking' as the biggest insecurity; and c) demotivation. These themes are discussed in more detail in the literature review.

Challenging beginnings

Important pieces of the quotes will be highlighted to provide better understanding of their experiences. The three participants mentioned in their interviews how challenging the beginning of their English classes was, as observed:

Rebeca: But like, it's not an easy task. There have been times that I thought of giving up. There have been times that I left the classroom crying because **I could not understand anything**. **Anything. Anything. Anything**. And because it's multilevel, right? So, in my class there are people from all levels. And people would have

conversations, speaking, and I couldn't understand anything. **The first ten classes were… (pause).** I only continued because I really wanted to. But the school helped me a lot, the teachers would say, "look, it's normal. Don't worry, it will work out." And now, I am persistent, you know? It's been 9 months.

Deborah: When I got to the classroom, that I saw how it was… (pause) **I spent many days with my mouth shut**. Super quiet. I was very shy to pronounce the words… **I was very shy about everything.** So, **I got super quiet**. And then, I started to dedicate, at the beginning I was dedicated, and I start to find it interesting to see the other people speaking, and then I knew I could become like them.

David: You get that sensation, right? **"Wow, I'll get there and…",** or **"I don't know anything",** but once you overcome this **initial fear**, it's really good, because you… you see people talking, sometimes… at some point, you're doing an exercise and the teacher is speaking to someone in the class… you start to… to… glare a knowledge bigger than yours.

According to the participants, the challenging beginnings seemed to be a temporary fear. All the challenges mentioned by the participants can be considered normal situations due to the nature of the multilevel classes, and their English level. It was interesting to notice how the three students talked about their feelings after the initial fear: Rebeca mentioned that she only continued because she really wanted to; Deborah, started to dedicate herself to her studies and found it interesting to see other students speaking in English; and David, in the same way, started to glean a knowledge bigger than his own, by observing his classmates.

After analysing their responses, it may be implied that, for those participants, the challenging beginnings: a) were necessary for them to improve in the learning process; and b) are considered as both barriers and benefits for their learning process, as it was hard at the

beginning, but also rewarding, and possibly, having more advanced English speakers in the classroom provided the newer learners with helpful models.

'Speaking' as the biggest insecurity

When I asked what their biggest insecurities in the classroom currently were, the fear of "speaking" seemed to be the biggest one among the participants.

Rebeca: At the beginning, my biggest insecurity was, "am I going to speak English?" I (pause) I was **afraid of expressing myself**, you know, **I was shy**, I was afraid because I thought that… (pause) I was the only one at the beginner level. Everyone else was beginner level 3, intermediate, advanced, and me, all by myself there. So, like, I didn't have anyone to share, something like, oh well, there is someone else in my level as well. So, **I was insecure**, I simply thought that I wouldn't be able to do it.

Deborah: **My biggest insecurity is to speak**. I think that this is my biggest insecurity and that's what blocks me. So, I… I… when I see others speaking, I can even understand, but when I have to speak, I just **freeze** because of the difficulties I have, because I don't know… the truth is that I don't know.

Thaís: What are your biggest insecurities in the classroom? David: To **speak**. Because my utterance is not good. So, like, **I am very afraid of speaking**, and the pronounce too… right? That's my biggest fear.

As observed, the participant "Rebeca" answered the question in the past tense, talking about her challenging beginning, which suggests that she is no longer afraid or insecure of speaking in English. On the other hand, the participants, "Deborah" and "David" are currently insecure about their speaking skills in the classroom, which can be perceived as "barriers".

Finding motivation

This study found some demotivating factors for the participants to continue studying in multilevel EFL classes.

Before studying English at the multilevel school, the participant Deborah found motivation to attend a few private English lessons due to "short-term incentives": approval in graduate studies, as observed:

I took private lessons, **both to get approved in the master's entrance test** - and because it was a test about article reading, I was also focusing on that, and then I took it for a while to do these readings- and to get approved in the PhD entrance test as well, but **only to get approved, once I got in, I stopped it.**

Once she achieved her goals, she could not find another external motivating factor to make her study again, as the only factors that motivated her to study again were related to the ones coming from people: teachers, classmates and loved ones, like her husband. However, the lack of "reason to study" can be perceived as a demotivating factor for this participant. Another factor that seemed to demotivate the participant Deborah is what Williams and Burden (1997) call the principle of external dimensions, which included the role of the school environment such as, comfort, resources, time of day, week, year, size of class, and so on. In Deborah's case, the comfort, resources, and time of day were demotivating factors, as observed:

There is something about there (the school) that bothers me, the fact that **you have to schedule (a time), in order to be able to talk with someone there**. I think that, the fact there's a **certain freedom** like, if you don't do the exercises… it's all good… maybe you have many class times to choose… these things for me are bad. Because I am like 'Ah, if I didn't go at 7am, I can go at 8am… ah, no… there's the 3:30pm, there's at night', suddenly the day is over, and I didn't go. So, I think that these things for me are not good, because of that… **because I need routine…**

In the same way, the participant "David" seems to feel demotivated when it comes to the size of the classes. In sharing an experience in a school's chain in another city, he mentions

that in that school, there were 10 students in the classroom, however, all of them were in the same level: beginners 1, 2 and 3. About that, he said:

Sometimes I think the (my) classes are a **little empty**. So, more people… ok? So, sometimes, there are 4, 5 people, right? In São Caetano, there was a little bit more than that, so like, a little bit more people, would make the classrooms **dynamics better.**

And because this participant finds motivation particularly in interactions, he affirmed: "The **interaction** would be better!". Therefore, after analysing David's responses, the size of the class did not seem to be his primarily concern, but the interaction among students was. Thus, for him, if there were more students in the class, and if the classes were truly multilevel, consequently, there would be more interaction and he would feel more motivated.

Despite the demotivating factors, this pilot study also found that the participants found motivation to continue studying English in a multilevel EFL class, which can be considered benefits, from mainly three factors:

Their own effort to learn and their own improvement.

Rebeca: My biggest motivation is to see the **small results** I already had. This is my biggest motivation. I think, wow, **if I could get to here, I can go further a little bit more**, and when I reach a little bit more, I'll go further a little bit more, and who knows if in 5 years, I will be speaking fluently?

Interaction with advanced students and English-speaking community.

David: I think it's the **interaction** among the students, that motivates me. Because that **advanced student is a mirror for me**… it's like… **I can get there**! It motivates me! Right? So, in some months, I'll be like him.

For the participant David, it was essential to be able to communicate and interact not only with his advanced classmates, but also professionally, with foreign colleagues that

shared the same job and field of study. In the interview, he shared an experience that motivated him to study English.

David: Last year, in a conference… I was there with a friend, and he was organizing part of the conference … and he was speaking with the speaker, and I tried to speak English, but… getting by, you know? And… he was also speaking with the other speaker in Spanish… so, like… me, **not even in English I can get by**. (pause) So, that was one of the things that made me… an experience that like, "look…" **professionally, the English language is missing…**

Both participants, Rebeca and David, demonstrated a genuine interest in learning English, in order to come closer and interact with the English-speaking community, from afar, as Rebeca:

There is a professor, owner of a University in Europe, in three countries in Europe… and I am… he's a philosopher, and I am, **completely in love with his writing**, his dynamics, and now, studying English, **I even want to buy his book that there is no translation to Portuguese, to read it.** There is a book here in Brazil, that I bought, and I am already in the second reading of it, but the other book, we don't have it translated here. (Pause) And I talked to myself, look how many things, you know? Nice things, and that, if I do not know English, **I will not have access.**

And face-to-face, as David, when mentioning his future Post doc program in New Zealand or Australia, "I am about get a leave for the Post Doc, so, we need it (English language), even to **keep in touch,** to talk to my supervisor, or in case he comes to Brazil, to introduce ourselves and **to talk**.".

Teachers' and classmates' encouragement.

The participant Rebeca shared an experience she had with a teacher that motivated her:

Rebeca: the first class that I had was with a teacher, that by the way, moved back to England, and he would say, "**don't worry, I also didn't know anything about Portuguese, your distress is my distress**", he used to say to me, and it was really nice, you know? His patience… I used to say, "I can't do it", and he said, "You'll do it!", you know, "Relax, you'll do it!", so like, **he always tried to motivate me**, when I changed the level, he wasn't there anymore, and he reached out to me to ask how I was doing, kept in touch with me, all these things help, right? To keep us motivated, and to think that **there is someone that wants me to keep going, right?** It's really nice! It was an amazing experience with this teacher as well!

The participant could relate more with that teacher who experienced similar challenges when learning Portuguese as a second language, which implies that, beyond the teacher's encouragement and empathy, the fact that the teacher went through the same challenges, was an important motivating factor for Rebeca.

This study found the following participants 'common experiences': a) challenging beginnings; b) 'speaking' as the biggest insecurity; c) lack of motivation. For the participants, the challenging beginnings were necessary for them to improve in the learning process and were considered as both barriers and benefits for their learning process, as it was hard at the beginning, but also rewarding. The speaking insecurity is the biggest anxiety among the participants, although for one of them it was overcome. Finally, some demotivating factors were described by the participants, such as: short-term incentives, size of class, and lack of attention to the beginners. On the other hand, they find motivation to continue studying English in a multilevel EFL class from: 1) their own effort and improvement; 2) interaction with advanced students and English-speaking community; and 3) teachers' and classmates' encouragement.

Purpose of the Study

The results of the pilot research are part of the rationale of this thesis work, as it is important to continue studying about multilevel EFL classes, specifically, exploring students' experiences in these classes in the Brazilian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context of teaching and learning. In the pilot study, the focus was on exploring beginners' experiences, as according to the literature, those are the ones who struggle the most in multilevel English classes (Mathews-Aydinli and Horne, 2006).

For this study, beginners as well as advanced English students are the specific target groups. Even though there are also intermediate students in the multilevel classes, according to the literature, beginners and advanced students are the two extreme groups in a multilevel English class: the ones that know more, and the ones that know less. That is why I am particularly interested in understanding how different and/or similar their experiences are, for example: do both beginners and advanced students perceive 'speaking' as the biggest insecurity? What are their motivating and demotivating factors? Therefore, this qualitative study is an attempt to explore adult Brazilian English Learners views and lived experiences in multilevel EFL classes, particularly, beginners and advanced students studying in multilevel EFL institutes.

Through a case study design, the results of this study have relevance for students, teachers-facilitators, and schools management, as it can be helpful for further development of multilevel language classes based on learners' experiences as well as professional development, teacher education programmes, and mentorship.

Research Questions

Thus, the research question is posed:

1) What are beginners and advanced Brazilian English learners' views of multilevel EFL classes in terms of:

- Challenges and benefits?

- Interactions and proficiency?

- Motivations and demotivation?

- English skills development (speaking, writing, reading, listening)?

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Social Constructivism

According to Yang & Wilson (2006), "social constructivism provides a psycholinguistic explanation for how learning can be fostered effectively through interactive pedagogical practices" (p. 365), which is a relevant concept for Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research. According to social constructivist theory, learning takes place more effectively in a sociocultural environment and through dialogue (Vygotsky, 1978) and learners are "active constructors of their own learning environment" (Mitchell & Myles, 2019, p. 162).

Vygotsky mentions that learning depends on the purpose or motivation for learning, which explains why we as learners focus our attention on activities that are fulfilled with purpose. For instance, English learners learn new vocabularies better when they have a friend from another country to practice with, in that case, the social purpose motivates the vocabulary learning, or when they watch a movie or show that interests them (Yang & Wilson, 2011).

As previously mentioned, another fundamental concept inherent to the social constructivism theory is *scaffolding*. According to Vygotsky (1978), scaffolding means the support provided by others—parents, peers, teachers, or sources such as dictionaries which enables students to perform increasingly well (Yang & Wilson, 2011). In this study, the scaffolding concept will be part of the analysis of the interaction among beginners and advanced English learners in multilevel classes.

According to Creswell & Poth (2018), the goal of the social constructivist research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation and to study "the processes" of interaction among individuals. Social constructivist researchers focus on the specific contexts in which people live, work and study, to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants. They also recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation comes from their own experiences. Ultimately, their intent is to make sense of and interpret perspectives, views, and experiences that others have about a context (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To align those tenets with my study and to accomplish these objectives, in the data analysis, I considered participants' personal lives, such as, where they live, work and study, and I also relied on participants' views of the multilevel EFL classes and how they perceive their own interaction among each other.

Thus, this study utilizes a social constructivism theoretical framework throughout the research process, data collection, and data analysis, in order to better understand English learners' experiences and views of multilevel EFL classes settings.

Researcher Positioning

Recognizing that my own background shapes the study's interpretation, it is crucial to include my positionality in this study. I am a Brazilian English as an Additional Language (EAL) speaker and former English teacher at the institution in which I conducted this research. As a former teacher, I have experienced English learners' challenges as well as improvements in multilevel EFL classes.

Being an insider for some months shaped my perspectives about this learning and teaching method, but at the same it awoke within me a curiosity to learn more about students' actual perspectives and opinions about multilevel EFL classes, as well as how this method

might be helpful to Brazilian students who cannot afford private English language schools. Due to these experiences, I decided to pursue this study topic.

This study has shifted my perspectives from being a teacher-observer to an outsider researcher. When I was a teacher, there were aspects of multilevel classes that I did not reflect on in the same way I did as a researcher, for instance, the different nuances of receiving immediate feedback in class, and different opinions about interaction across levels of proficiency. Also, as a researcher, I was able to listen to students' deepest opinions and concerns regarding the multilevel EFL classes, what I did not have a chance to experience as a teacher. Accepting that my interpretations of the data also came from my own experience as a teacher, I strived to interpret participants' perspectives, views, and experiences about multilevel EFL classes.

Literature Review

My initial experiences and questions helped informed the literature review. Using university databases as well as course texts that were assigned readings in my M. Ed coursework, I begin to identify recent and salient literature addressing the following themes: challenges and benefits of multilevel EFL classes; motivation and demotivation; interaction among learners and English skills development. These themes provided key words that I used in my ongoing literature search to ensure the most up-to-date and relevant literature review for this study. The process of finding literature was not all pre-determined. As I worked with the findings, I found more literature based on what the findings revealed.

Multilevel EFL classes: challenges and benefits

Successfully acquiring a second language requires motivation throughout the learning process (Ushioda, 2011). However, being constantly motivated can be challenging to L2 learners, leading to several other challenges, such as: lack of effort and persistence in studying the foreign language, foreign language anxiety and insecurities, and much more (Ushioda,

2011). In multilevel English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes, these challenges are known to be even more due to the many proficiency levels in one class, and according to Treko (2013, p. 250) "perhaps, it is honest to suggest that there are more challenges than benefits". Mathews-Aydinli and Horne (2006) also suggest:

> Students with lower language skills and those who are generally less vocal may naturally segregate themselves from the more outspoken or advanced-level students. This prevents the quiet or lower-level students from getting the extra help they may need and that which the more advanced students might provide. (p. 2)

Demarcsek and Todea (2016) state that keeping all participants motivated throughout the course is a difficult task during any course, but it becomes more challenging during a language course because the teacher stands the risk of losing the interest of either the students who are advanced, or of the students who are at more beginner level. Either way, one group of students will lose focus (Demarcsek and Todea, 2016). That suggests that some challenges of the multilevel classes can also be found in same level classes, in which learners from same English proficiency levels are placed together, as all language classes are somehow multilevel. Yet, multilevel classes are known to intensify these challenges, as beginners may be vulnerable to face insecurities, and demotivation throughout the learning process, and naturally segregate themselves from others (Mathews-Aydinli and Horne, 2006) and the advanced English learners, who have more knowledge and language skills, could potentially be frustrated at sitting through instruction geared towards much lower levels.

A major challenge among L2 learners is *foreign language anxiety.* Foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been extensively studied throughout the years, therefore only the most relevant information is being provided here. According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1994, p. 27) FLA is "the worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language". FLA could be classified into two different types: debilitating (harmful) anxiety and

facilitating (helpful) anxiety (Alpert & Haber, 1960). The effects of debilitating anxiety could be direct as reducing class participation or indirect such as fear, frustration, and worry (Oxford, 1999). However, facilitating anxiety helps learners to perform well in the language learning (Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019).

Additionally, previous studies reveal that various factors lead to the feeling of anxiety in learning a foreign language. According to Howitz, Howitz and Cope (1986), foreign language anxiety is caused by three factors related to performance: 1) fear of negative evaluation, which is the feeling of "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively" (Horwitz et al. 1986, p. 127). 2) communication apprehension, which is a form of situational anxieties related to interpersonal communication and oral expression (Argaman & Abu-Rabia, 2002). In other words, people who fear from oral communication may feel anxious when asked to talk a foreign language as well (Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019); and 3) test anxiety which is defined as "a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 127). Other causes are significant in provoking foreign language anxiety, such as: interpersonal issues and personal characteristics, such as fear of speaking a foreign language, low self-perceived foreign language proficiency, and low self-esteem (Mahmoodzadeh, 2013). Young (1991) have explained a learner's self-esteem also relates to foreign language anxiety. Overall, people with low self-esteem are more worried about what other people think about them, which increases the level of anxiety (Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019).

Therefore, according to Oteir and Al-Otaibi (2019), the literature on foreign language anxiety can be summarized into six major causes from three primary sources: the learner, the educator, and instructional practice. These causes are 1) interpersonal and personal anxiety, 2) learners' beliefs about learning a foreign language, 3) classroom procedures, 4) employing

teacher-centered method, 5) teachers' beliefs about language teaching, and 6) language examination (Young, 1991).

Ashton (2018) research on teachers' views of multilevel language classes in New Zealand brought about challenges associated to multilevel language classes. Among the challenges described by the teachers, the increase in teacher workload was noted, as was "the lack of in-school support or professional development in how to approach multi-level classes, and how to go about day-to-day planning" (Ashton, 2018, p. 113). Those challenges had a negative impact on teacher well-being, as well as a "sense of frustration and guilt that no matter how hard teachers worked, the quality of teaching, and assessment grades, were not as good as they would be in a single level class" (Ashton, 2018, p. 113). Ashton (2018) also found that teachers thought there was less time to talk to students individually and "expressed feelings of frustration and guilt that students were not getting the quality of teaching or grades that they would in single level classes" (p. 112). Overall, her study shows that teachers feel that language learning is depreciated through the decision to have multi-level classes (Ashton, 2018). However, the study did not investigate students' views of the challenges of multilevel language classes, and therefore, this thesis will closely explore participants' challenges in the data analysis.

In terms of benefits of the multilevel, Ashton (2018) also found that "some teachers were able to see the benefits alongside the challenges, particularly the support learners provide one another across levels and the ability for students to operate at a level above their year level" (p. 112), when students of various levels interact simultaneously in a semi-immersive environment to develop skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking the English language. An additional benefit noted by a teacher is "seeing learners at lower year level excel" (p. 167). Carr (2005) states that multilevel classes bring about an increase in the diversity of students in terms of proficiency, background, and experience. On the same path, Manitoba Education and

Youth (2003) delineates the general idea of multilevel classes: "they are built on the premise that diversity is not a challenge to be overcome, but an asset and a resource that promotes learning. All classrooms are diverse" (p.16).

According to Manitoba Education and Youth (2003), a benefit of the multilevel classes is that it "minimizes competition because students recognize and accept that each student is at a different place in his or her learning. Students learn to set personal learning goals, assess themselves, and reflect on their own learning" (p. 16), which is strongly related to the concept of differentiation (Ashton, 2018), a learner-centred approach that requires teachers to be aware of each learner's starting point, their current level of understanding and to tailor their teaching accordingly so that each learner can progress as far and as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Even though the definition of multilevel classes articulated by Manitoba Education and Youth (2003) is not particularly related to language classes - rather, it is related to elementary classrooms where two or more grades are put together in the same classroom and teacher for two or more years - the nature of the multilevel classes and general definition is the same whichever content is being taught. Multilevel classes, besides helping students to recognize that each one is at a different stage of learning, it helps teachers to focus on the developmental stage of the learner, moving the focus to individual learning along a continuum, which is known to have benefits to students. According to Ashton (2018) those benefits include: advanced students review the material covered in previous levels; beginner learners have the opportunity to access some of the language taught to the advanced level; and "multi-level classes do also provide the opportunity (for teachers) to respond to individual differences in ability" (p, 112).

In English speaking countries, it is a fact that in real-life situations people do not always communicate with others from the same language level of fluency; rather, they are in constant communication with people from different backgrounds, countries, cultures and consequently,

levels of English fluency. Multilevel EFL classes have the potential to promote a real-life experience, as different students collaborate and learn from each other (Ashton, 2019). Multilevel EFL classes put together people from different backgrounds, experiences, and levels of proficiency with the same goal to improve their English skills.

This approach has the potential to mirror real-life situations in English-speaking countries, which is more challenging to achieve in same level English classes, where all students have similar levels of proficiency. As observed, research shows both challenges and benefits regarding the multilevel English classes.

Interaction among learners: main themes

As previously discussed, one of the biggest differences between multilevel EFL and same level English classes is the way interactions among advanced and beginner English learners take place in the classroom. Ashton (2019) points out that "in the multi-level class, it was [is] common for learners in the lower year level to feel intimidated and for learners in the higher year level to feel self conscious about their level of language proficiency" (p. 172). However, according to a teacher- participant of the study conducted by Ashton (2019) "[multi-level] groups, […] work well as weaker students can get support from stronger ones and stronger ones can reinforce their understanding by teaching weaker ones" (p. 167). The interaction among learners of different English levels in a multilevel class might take different forms and evoke different opinions. Conclusively, Kim (2017) states that there are ample evidence that interaction indeed fosters L2 development, as summarized in several meta-analyses. In multilevel EFL classes, interaction might provide benefits for all the students, as, specifically for the context of this study, beginners and advanced students have the possibility of learning from each other.

Understanding the interaction among learners as a benefit, Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) can be directly related to multilevel EFL classes and learners.

Fundamentally, ZPD is about learners' development through meaningful interactions with others. Vygotsky observed two levels of development 1) the current level of development, which can be explained as the activities that a learner is able to perform alone, and 2) the potential or proximal level of development, as the activities that the learner is not able to perform alone but could do so when assisted by a more advanced classmate or physical tools (Vygotsky, 1978), which is primarily observed in multilevel language classes.

This assistance, which in ZPD is called *scaffolding* (Vygotsky, 1978) is a tool that promotes growth and learning among learners. Through meaningful interactions and assistance across levels of proficiency in multilevel EFL classes, development can happen. Even though Vygotsky's definition of the ZPD was designed to reflect on the developmental potential of children, the concept may be transferred to the L2 learning context, in which many learners are adults; and even more so in multilevel EFL classes, where the scaffolding among students is more evident than in same level EFL classes due to the different levels of proficiency.

In terms of learner-learner interactions in the classroom, research has been devoted to understanding how interaction among L2 learners could be beneficial for their development. Watanabe and Swain (2007) found there are benefits in L2 learners interacting with peers who have similar and/or different proficiency levels when that the interaction was collaborative. In other words, the authors suggested that a collaborative interaction among learners seemed to be more important than their proficiency levels, which seems to be the case of multilevel EFL classes. Sato and Viveros' (2016) also claim that a collaborative mindset is more important than the differences in proficiency levels. This means that "proficiency does not define how much of a collaborative mindset the learners may possess" (Sato & Viveros, 2016, p. 107).

Regarding small group tasks and activities, Philp et al. (2006) investigated how the planning time impacts the interaction. They found that little or no planning time resulted in more talk and interaction, and more feedback provision between English learners. Tuan and

Neomy (2007), examining group planning prior to oral presentation tasks in class, found that during task planning and preparation, small groups composed of mixed proficiency learners (multilevel) were more interactive and focused on both language and content issues related to the upcoming oral presentation. In both cases, interaction played an important role for English development.

One of the main concerns in learner-learner interactions in ML classes is that students might adopt the other learner's errors (Kim, 2017), which is strongly related to the idea of priming - another topic related to L2 learners' interaction. Priming is "the phenomenon of speakers' tendency to use linguistic structures that they have recently heard" (Kim, 2017, p. 134), whether they are correct or not. During classroom interactions, speakers are likely to reproduce similar linguistic patterns and constructions, reuse similar expressions, grammatical structures, and patterns of pronunciation previously employed by their classmates (Kim, 2017). Research shows that priming occurs in both written and oral modalities, in comprehension and production, and among child and adult first-language (L1) and second-language (L2) speakers (see Mahowald et al., 2016; Pickering and Ferreira, 2008). Some research also suggests that priming can be long-lasting, supporting claims that structural priming represents a form of implicit learning (e.g. Branigan and Messenger, 2016; Dell and Chang, 2014; Kaschak, et al., 2014). Such longer-term effects are most often characterized as a type of error-based implicit learning (e.g. Branigan and Messenger, 2016; Dell and Chang, 2014; Jaeger and Snider, 2013). In multilevel EFL classes, this concern might be intensified, as beginners are constantly listening to advanced students- which is beneficial for them, as advanced students have a higher level of proficiency and, therefore, are less likely to make mistakes; on the other hand, advanced students are also constantly listening to beginners- which might not be as beneficial for them, as beginners tend to mispronounce and make more frequent errors due to their level of proficiency.

However, there is no consensus that this phenomenon is indeed an issue for L2 learners. According to Jackson (2017, p. 54), "more research is needed to understand the underlying mechanisms that support structural priming and the contexts in which priming is most successful for promoting longer-term learning". Jackson (2017) also mentions that further research should focus on whether priming facilitates the acquisition of a new structure in earlier stages of L2 learning (beginner L2 learners) or whether it is most beneficial in later stages of learning, (advanced L2 learner) as a way to reinforce the development.

Another important theme in cognitive-interactionist research is the expansion of interactional contexts. Synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) refers to real-time interaction between people over a computer network (Stockwell, 2010). Researchers have been exploring how interaction takes place online in comparison to face-to-face. However, according to Kim (2017) many researchers have claimed that it is not ideal to set comparisons among characteristics and learning outcomes of face-to face and remote learning interaction, nor to claim that one way is better than the other, as these two modes involve different cognitive, affective, and social perspectives, and it is not surprising that the research findings demonstrate differences between the two modes.

Recent research on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on learners and teachers' experiences transitioning to remote learning suggest the same, as opinions diverge. On the one hand, Hartshorn & McMurry (2020)'s study on the effects of the pandemic on English as a Second Language (ESL) learners and teachers in the United States revealed that on average, the negative effect of transitioning to online teaching and learning was perceived severely by students as the process undermined the L2 development of students and increased their stress levels, specifically related to their speaking skills development; however, the study also showed that what some participants perceived as stressors, others viewed as benefits. Mahyoob (2020) found that "students are not happy with distance education and many obstacles have

been encountered (Bataineh, Atoum, Alsmadi & Shikhali 2020; Rajab et al., 2020)" (p. 152), and that these obstacles are mostly, related to technical difficulties accessing online lessons, materials downloading, online exams, etc.

On the other hand, other studies show that even though there are challenges related to the remote learning during the pandemic, such as: communications, interaction, assessment and assignments, online education experience, technology use tools, time management, stress and anxiety, students were positive and perceived the effectiveness of online learning during the pandemic (Rajab, Mohammad, Gazal, & Alkattan, 2020).

As observed, interaction among learners is a vast topic with many subthemes within it. There are conflicting opinions when it comes to how interaction among learners can be beneficial in small groups, through priming and in the remote learning experience. This thesis will also discuss participants experiences on this topic of interaction.

Motivation and demotivation: learning English in a multilevel class

All the topics to be discussed in this section (L2 motivation definition, L2 Motivational Self-System, student engagement, and L2 demotivation, amotivation and demotivators) are directly linked and relevant to the purpose of this thesis, which is to explore English learners' views and experiences of multilevel EFL classes in Brazil, and, therefore, this literature informs the data analysis.

Second language (L2) motivation research is one of the most vibrant fields of study in applied linguistics and L2 education (most recently see Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021; Dörnyei, 2019b; Dörnyei & Muir, 2019; Gardner, 2019; Al-Hoorie, 2018, Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017; Lamb, Csizer, Henry, & Ryan, 2019). For that reason, this section will only explore the most relevant topics to this thesis.

The notion of L2 motivation is known to be difficult to define because it represents a complex phenomenon that tries to explain human behavior (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021), as

according Dörnyei (2019a), "motivation affects all of us, all the time, both as individuals and as group members, and therefore it is complicated" (p. 61). Intuitively, we may know the meaning of "motivation", yet there seems to be little consensus on its conceptual definition. At the same time, L2 motivation is an intriguing topic that required both theoretical and practical research. Dörnyei (2019a, p. 61) adds that:

> The reason why motivation is such a complex and elusive notion and why the history of L2 motivation research has displayed so many twists and turns is the fact that motivation is an immensely important concept, comprising one of the grand themes of psychology.

Still, most researchers agree that L2 motivation consists of a behavior of *choice, persistence,* and *effort*. Choice usually refers to the reason why L2 students choose to learn English; persistence relates to how long the learner is willing to continue studying English; and effort refers to the amount of energy invested into English learning and how hard learners are going to pursue this goal (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). Gardner (1985)'s notion of language learning motivation states that it the combination of efforts and desire to achieve the goal of learning, added to "favorable attitudes toward learning the language" (p. 10). These favorable attitudes are closely related to the persistence to learn a L2, described by (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021).

The behavior of persistence, which could be seem as the most important part of the most agreeable L2 motivation definition, has received far less attention in past research than the other components, choice, and effort (Dörnyei, 2019a). Grant and Shin (2012) affirm that "compared to research on the direction and intensity of effort, few theoretical models and empirical studies have focused on the maintenance or persistence of effort" (p. 514). Dörnyei, (2019a, p. 61) explains that:

This imbalance is in contrast with the perception of classroom practitioners, who know all too well that student motivation is not constant but displays continuous ebbs and flows as well as a steady 'leak', that is, a tendency to peter out with time. (…) In some sense, therefore, the exploration of L2 learning perseverance is a debt that motivation researchers— both in mainstream psychology and in the field of applied linguistics— still owe to the teaching profession.

Therefore, according to the author, it would be crucial to have a better understanding of the nature of learners' perseverance for promoting permanent learning behaviours, which are required to successfully acquire a L2 (Dörnyei, 2019b). This thesis partially discusses in the data analysis the nature of persistence in the participants, in terms of their motivations to continue studying English in a multilevel class, and the factors that influence those motivations.

The notion of persistence is closely related to the idea of *L2 Motivational Self-System*, first introduced by Dörnyei's (2009). L2 Motivational Self- System is based on the belief that the way in which people see themselves in the future plays an important role in giving them energy in the present to continue doing what they are doing to achieve their goals. (Dörnyei, 2019b) continues by stating that L2 Motivational Self-Systems, first involves the learner's *whole identity,* as "learning a foreign language is more than a mere educational activity targeting a specific subject matter as it involves adding a new L2 dimension to one's self" (p. 47); second, it also involved *mental imagery*, in which "someone with a developed ideal self could visualise him/herself in the future in vivid terms, which made the ideal future self-image similar to the concept of *vision"* (p. 47), which is a "vivid mental image of the experience of successfully accomplishing the goal" (Dörnyei 2019a, p. 58). (Dörnyei, 2019a) also argues that:

people's vision of who they would like to become as L2 users seems to be one of the most reliable predictors of their long-term intended effort, because by keeping one's eyes focused on the bigger picture, a vision helps to underpin one's overall persistence. (p. 58)

Another important concept to the field of L2 motivation is *student engagement.* According to (Dörnyei, 2019a), student engagement is related to how involved students are in school related activities and academic tasks and has been described as "the holy grail of learning" (Sinatra, Heddy, & Lombardi, 2015, p. 1). That is because, it offers both theoretical and practical ideas of how to make students more engaged in schools, at a time when social media has been intensifying students' social life, constantly bombarding young people with information from different sources, and strongly intending to capture their attention (Dörnyei, 2019a). It is possible that this situation has been aggravated with the COVID-19 pandemic as most schools around the world transition to remote learning, contributing to more media distractions.

As Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) explain, the concept of student engagement informs the notion of motivation, as it has a direct connection to classroom behaviours. Dörnyei (2019a) explains:

Motivation does not manifest in task pursuit automatically, because although a motivated student is likely to do well at school, this cannot be taken for granted, because various distractions and obstacles can cancel out or put on hold even relatively strong motivational commitments. (p. 60)

Dörnyei (2019a) continues by stating that, currently, there are too many competing influences on a student' life and that, teachers and scholars must ensure that students' positive willingness to learn is not negatively influenced by all the distractions surrounding them. As Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) affirm, "motivation is undoubtedly necessary for 'preparing the deal', but

engagement is indispensable for *sealing the deal*" (p. 6). In this sense, according to Dörnyei (2019b) these are practical ways and aspects which students can engage with:

> *School context* (e.g., various aspects of belonging to the school community, adopting school norms and developing general academic confidence); *syllabus and the teaching materials* (e.g., curiosity about and interest in the content; match between the syllabus to the students' needs; ownership and personalization of the materials); *learning tasks* (e.g., utilizing the principles of task-based language teaching; application of project/problem-based learning; goal-setting and progress checks); *one's peers* (e.g., relevant areas of group dynamics/classroom management, particularly social acceptance, group cohesiveness, norms of cooperation and tolerance); *teacher* (e.g., student-teacher rapport; utilizing insights from leadership models; conflict resolution). (p. 25)

This list, even though not conclusive, offers aspects for researchers to consider when exploring student engagement. There is extensive literature in educational psychology discussing various forms of engagement assessment. For instance, the *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement* (Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012), which addresses ways to measure engagement. According to Dörnyei (2019a), this literature concerns general educational engagement, but the discussions could be used to study L2 student engagement.

L2 motivation and student engagement are closely related to the concept of L2 Learning Experience, which is "the perceived quality of the learners' engagement with various aspects of the language learning process" Dörnyei (2019a, p. 25). According to Dörnyei (2019a), approaching an engagement perspective may be beneficial to future developments and research on L2 learners' learning experience.

As in L2 motivation research, L2 demotivation is also widely studied. Thorner & Kikuchi (2019) even affirmed that "demotivation is arguably a greater issue in Second

Language Acquisition (SLA) than motivation, as students often begin language courses highly motivated, and according to them, that is the problem, as motivation seems to decrease throughout the learning process. L2 scholars have been attempting to define and differentiate terms related to L2 demotivation field. For instance, Dörnyei (2001) defined *demotivation* as "specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action" (p. 143) whereas *amotivation* is related to learners' unrealistic expectations of learning outcomes (Thorner & Kikuchi, 2019). In other words, while amotivation refers to the complete lack of motivation, demotivation describes learners who were once motivated but have lost their motivation, which means that a demotivated learner may become motivated again (Thorner & Kikuchi, 2019). There are also the called *demotivators*. According to Kikuchi (2015, p. 3) demotivators are "the specific internal and external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action", and as these forces happen, a state of demotivation may be reached.

As observed, learners' motivational state is constantly changing, and those changes are due to both external and internal demotivators. Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) proposed six common external/internal demotivators in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts:

1. Teachers: critical attitudes towards students, lack of teaching competence or language proficiency, personality and teaching style not matched with learners' preference.

2. Characteristics of classes: course content and pace, excessive focus on difficult grammar points or vocabulary, monotonous and boring lesson procedures, focus on university entrance exams preparation and memorization of language.

3. Experiences of failure: disappointment due to test scores obtained, lack of social acceptance by teachers and classmates and the feeling of not being able to, (e.g.) memorize vocabulary and idioms, understand texts, or perform oral tasks.

4. Class environment: attitudes of classmates, the compulsory nature of English study, friends' attitudes, inactive classes, inappropriate level of difficulty and inadequate use of school facilities (e.g., not using audiovisual materials).

5. Class materials: unsuitable or uninteresting materials (e.g., too many reference books and/or handouts).

6. Learners' loss of interest: for example, a learners' own sense that the target language used at school is not personally relevant or necessary; learners' low regard for speakers of the target language. (p. 61)

As Thorner & Kikuchi (2019) explained, while this list presents some ideas of external and internal demotivators, it is not conclusive as several other demotivators may affect learners, such as the lack of feedback or judgmental feedback from teachers and peers, which may be experienced as a distraction or poor behavioural control (Kim, Reeve, & Bong, 2017).

Based on the six factors, researchers also began to question whether teaching should be included as a demotivating factor in L2 learning. For instance, Falout, Elwood, and Hood (2009) studied the impact of external and internal influences on L2 motivation. As a result of the study, they found that teachers' behaviour (how approachable and friendly) was on average a cause of motivation for these students, rather than demotivation, whereas the methodology based on grammar-translation was the factor that caused demotivation among most of the participants. Based on the finding, they proposed that "poor teacher behaviors are not a substantial problem for these learners" (p. 410), as teachers can be inspiring to them. Kikuchi (2015) also found similar results among 1200 Japanese learners of English, where course difficulty best described causes of demotivation while teacher behaviour was the least demotivational factor. It is interesting to note that demotivators can vary from context to another, and what is considered a demotivation factor to learners in one country, may not be a demotivation factor to learners from another country (Thorner & Kikuchi, 2019).

English Skills Development

Knowing', 'speaking' or being 'fluent' in a second language is a complex concept, as it involves the exposure and development of specific skills, such as: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. As DeKeyser (2017) stated, "skill is a form of knowledge" (p. 16), therefore, acquiring different kinds of knowledge is essential for second language acquisition (SLA).

According to DeKeyser (2017) knowing the difference between knowledge and skill is one of most common challenges among foreign language learners. Some will complain by saying that they do not want to learn grammar, rather, they want to learn how to speak, not realizing that, to learn how to speak, they first need to learn grammar, as grammar is the *knowledge* and speaking is the *skill*. On that topic, DeKeyser (2017) raises some questions: "given that nowadays the goal of most language teaching IS skill, what does that imply for the kind of knowledge that should be attained eventually, and for the best path to get there?" (p. 16). Even though any L2 beginner realizes that knowledge of vocabulary, of grammar, and of pronunciation are very different things, it is true that most of the distinctions made in second language acquisition (SLA) research are less obvious, and a cause of frequent confusion and frustration, even for the researchers themselves (DeKeyser, 2017).

For the purposes of this thesis, this section provides the differences between four types of knowledges: declarative versus procedural; and, explicit versus implicit. Declarative knowledge is the 'knowledge that' and 'knowledge of facts'; procedural is the 'knowledge how', which is a form of knowledge permanently stored in memory and constantly used for executing specific skills (DeKeyser, 2017). However, according to (DeKeyser, 2017, p. 16),

This distinction is easy to misunderstand (…). When a learner knows that an English verb takes a final *-s* in the third person singular, one could say this learner

knows how to conjugate a verb, or when to use that final *-s*, but this knowledge is not procedural unless the learner has executed the mental act of selecting that morpheme under the right conditions many times and has therefore learned a behavior instead of knowledge about a desirable behavior.

As seen in the example above, declarative knowledge is the knowledge that an English verb takes a final *-s* in the third person singular, whereas the procedural knowledge is the knowledge of how to use the declarative knowledge over and over in the right moment, through conversations and interactions, potentializing, for instance, the speaking skill. Therefore, for the purposes of skill acquisition the main kind of knowledge is procedural knowledge (DeKeyser, 2017).

In terms of explicit versus implicit knowledge, explicit is knowledge one is aware of, and implicit is knowledge without awareness (see P. Reber, 2013; Rebuschat, 2013). Explicit knowledge is mostly considered to be declarative knowledge (Ullman, 2015). DeKeyser (2017, p. 16) explains that because most forms of second language instruction focus on declarative/explicit knowledge for grammar teaching,

(…) learners know what they should do and are aware of what they know but are not able to do what they know they should do unless they are focused on form and have enough time to draw on their declarative knowledge and act upon it using high-level, that is very abstract, all-purpose procedures.

Consequently, as L2 learners practice the second language, they become better at using their acquired knowledge, by using it more correctly, and easily, and more often, in many different situations, causing automatization, which is a gradual improvement (DeKeyser, 2017).

Therefore, "being skilled at something means one has the requisite procedural knowledge. Mere knowledge of grammar rules and vocabulary does not suffice; one needs to be able to use knowledge fast and accurately, (…) incorporating them seamlessly into one's

communicative behavior" (DeKeyser, 2017, p. 18). As English skills development takes place through communicative behaviors and interactions, L2 learners may draw on different forms of practicing the language. Ohta (2005) affirms that learners' development may be also scaffolded by materials such as textbooks, worksheets, and dictionaries. Ohta (2005), mentioning Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) proposed that:

> Rather than understanding the ZPD as a strictly interpersonal space, it may be more useful to consider how the mechanisms of the ZPD may be internalized over the course of development such that literate adults become able to manage the ZPD for themselves as they interact both with people and with other L2 sources. (p. 506)

Besides those scaffolding forms, Corrective Feedback (CF) is also intimately linked to practicing and developing a foreign language; and can be distinguished between implicit and explicit (Lyster, Saito, and Sato, 2013).

According to Ellis, Loewen and Erlam (2006) "corrective feedback takes the form of responses to learner utterances that contain an error" (p. 340). Corrective feedback can be implicit or explicit. In an implicit feedback, it is not evident that an error has been committed, whereas in explicit feedback types, there is. Implicit feedback often happens in the form of recasts, defined by Long (in press) as:

> a reformulation of all or part of a learner's immediately preceding utterance in which one or more non-target like lexical, grammatical etc. items are replaced by the corresponding target language form, and where, throughout the exchange, the focus of the interlocutors is on meaning not language as an object (p. 2)

Explicit feedback can take two forms: (a) *explicit correction*, in which the feedback clearly demonstrates that what the learner said was incorrect (e.g., "No, not *speaked—spoke*") or (b) *metalinguistic feedback*, which are comments, information, or questions related to the the learner's utterance" —for example, "You need past tense," (Ellis et al., 2006).

According to DeKeyser (2017), the processes of learning or the nature of the knowledge does not correspond to the type of feedback, whether it is implicit or explicit. The author continues by stating that regardless of how implicit or explicit a feedback may be, if the learner notices its corrective intent, "there is awareness of what is being learned, that is, there is explicit learning, and the knowledge immediately resulting from it is explicit (p. 37), and this explicit knowledge will then be incorporated into L2 skills through practice, which can be enhanced by applying metacognitive strategies. According to McGuire (2015, p. 16), "metacognition also gives students the ability to accurately judge how deeply they have learned something, whether they have only a superficial understanding or the ability to widely apply their knowledge".

This section presented the literature review on a variety of studies whose focus was not necessarily on the multilevel approach to teaching and learning English itself, as there is not much literature in this topic. However, this study draws from different areas of studies that help shed light on the phenomenon in order to make sense of the data and to inform each of this study's research questions.

Research Gap: Learners' perspectives and experiences

Looking at the teachers' perspectives of multilevel language classrooms, Ashton's (2018) study noticed that within the multilevel method, there are other approaches to be considered. The study found that three different approaches were used by teachers in responding to the challenge of teaching multilevel language classes, which are: approach one, when there are completely separated programs of study for each student in the class; approach two, when there is a common topic though different exercises and expectations; and approach three, where learning is self-directed with all materials and resources uploaded to the school intranet or online, and the teacher only sets end points that students need to reach. The study concludes that teacher preference and cohort factors impact a teacher's choice of approach and that it is not possible to say that one approach is best for all teachers and classroom settings.

Throughout Ashton (2018)'s study, the students' perspectives about those multilevel approaches were not considered. This discrepancy of studies related to teachers' and students' perspectives towards the multilevel English classes was significantly noted by Ashton (2018), speaking of her own research: "Further research should look at student perceptions of multilevel classes as this research was from the perspective of teachers" (p. 11), which reinforces the need for this study.

In terms of Brazilian research on EFL education, most of the research on English as Foreign Language seem to focus on English learning and teaching in public schools, with primary focus on teachers' experiences. These studies focus on the stories of English teachers and the public-school systems and their emotions about language policies for teaching at public schools (Bernardo, 2019; Teixeia and Silva, 2017; Ferreira, 2017). There is no study in Brazil on multilevel EFL classes. Brazilian studies largely discuss English teaching in public schools due to the various issues that need to be addressed in that context (e.g., focus on reading skills, inequalities among public and private education systems etc.) which were discussed in Chapter 1. On the other hand, it is also important to conduct research on private Brazilian English schools, to better understand their social impacts in the Brazilian society and adult English learners. In addition, Brazilian EFL studies should also include research on multilevel EFL classes, which are a still emerging EFL teaching and learning method in Brazil.

As observed in the literature review, there is very little research specifically on multilevel English classes around the world, and much of the literature considers the teachers' views and the big challenges in teaching a multilevel class, providing them with tools, strategies and approaches to teaching and overcoming those challenges, (Ashton, 2018; Mathews-Aydinli and Horne, 2006; Treko, 2013; Shank, 1995); comparatively, little attention has been devoted to the students' perspectives or experiences in multilevel English classes.

Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology

This chapter will discuss the method and methodology of this study, in terms of: Case Study Design; the process of obtaining ethics approval; participants and recruitment process; data collection and data analysis.

Case Study Design

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), case study research is defined as a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life case, defined as:

> contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded system (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes. (p. 96)

Creswell and Poth (2018) explain that a qualitative case study can be used to illustrate a unique case that has received little to no research interest but needs to be described and better understood. This type of case study is called an *intrinsic case*, in which the case presents a unusual or unique situation, and the focus of the study is based on the case itself.

This study approaches the case study design to explore more about multilevel EFL classes, which is considered the intrinsic case. According to Stake (1995) when researchers are interested in an intrinsic case, they pursue it not because by studying it they want to learn more about other similar cases, but because they are curious to learn more about that particular case. This interpretation holds true to this study, as I sought to learn more about beginners and advanced learners' experiences, which offered two comparative examples to illustrate multilevel EFL classes in two specific Brazilian cities.

Case study design allowed me to explore this real-life case, the multilevel EFL classes in Brazil, through detailed and in-depth data collection involving online individual interviews

and classroom observations, in which beginner and advanced learners' experiences and views offer two comparative examples to illustrate the multilevel EFL classes in Brazil.

Other qualitative approaches would not allow me to develop an in-depth understanding of multilevel EFL classes, without mentioning factors such as phenomena, creation of grounded theories, and cultural characteristics, which I did not consider to be the focus of this study. Besides that, approaching this research as a case study design allowed me to conduct data analysis through description and case themes as well as cross-case themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018), which is effective to explore the learners' views of multilevel EFL classes in terms of challenges and benefits, interactions and proficiency, motivations and demotivation, and English skills development.

Ethics Approval

As in most studies, there have been a few ethical concerns associated with this thesis. Initially, upon the Ethics Application Form submission, my intention was to mention the multilevel institute's name in the study and to seek approval from the Brazilian's head office to conduct research with their students as well as from each individual institute. However, following the Protocol Approval from Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB), I attempted to contact the head office for a few weeks and received no response. Then, upon further reflection on my research, I decided to submit an Amendment Request Form, anonymizing the institute in my research to avoid potential conflict by the exposure of negative findings related to the institute itself as well as requesting release from obtaining permission from the national head office. Instead, I emphasized that I would continue to seek individual permission to each selected multilevel institute in which I recruited students from. After a few days, the Amendment Form was approved, and I was able to contact and seek permission from each multilevel institute in which I aimed to conduct research. This process will be discussed

in the next sections. It is also important to mention that all ethics documents were translated to Portuguese for ENREB submission as well as to collect participants' signatures.

Participants

The participants of this study were 10 (ten) adult Brazilian English learners, 5 (five) students from the beginner level and 5 (five) advanced English learners from a specific private multilevel English Institute in Brazil, which I chose to keep confidential in this study. To ensure that the learners' views are related to the multilevel method, I recruited students from two different cities, minimizing the possibility of communication among themselves about the study and interview questions. I also chose two sisters institutes that were under the umbrella of the larger company but were managed in a similar fashion, ensuring comparability of the data. More on the participants will discussed in the next chapter.

Recruitment

The first step was to obtain permission with the school to conduct the study (Appendix A) with the students. I inquired with the school to distribute a recruitment letter (Appendix B) to the students, and to instructors (Appendix C). Interested students contacted me to become participants and I recruited the first 10 (ten) students (beginner and advanced levels) who contacted me to participate in 1-hour online individual interviews. I did not offer any incentives to participants. More students contacted me; however, those were turned away when I reached 10 (ten) participants. Overall, I did not have any issues recruiting participants. For the classroom observations, I asked the school administration to distribute recruitment letters to instructors, in which I asked permission to observe one of their classes. Three instructors, two from site 1 and one from site 2, contacted me allowing to have their classes observed. Once all participants were recruited, I kept a list of their names on a safe file in my personal computer. In order to follow ethics' requirements, interview and classroom observation's participants as

well as instructors were required to sign the consent letter (Appendix D) before the interviews and classroom observations.

Data collection

As mentioned, the data collection took place through online individual interviews as well as online classroom observations. The interviews via Zoom call (Appendix E) were conducted in Portuguese, simultaneously translated into English and transcribed. The interview protocol was designed for the pilot study and refined for this research. The questions were informed by the research question topics. No member checking took place, predominantly because I engaged in simultaneous translation during the interviews. This is in accordance with my background and expertise as a professional translator. The participants' identities were protected, as I gave them pseudonyms. The audio recordings were stored in encrypted, and password secured computer files before and after being transcribed. The audio recordings will be kept until the completion of this thesis (i.e., August 2021), and the anonymized transcriptions and interview notes as well as the translations into English are being kept indefinitely, as I would like to use the data for future publications.

Observations were also included as data collection instruments, which were conducted online, as due to Covid-19 classes were remote. I initially intended to conduct a total of 3 hours of classroom observations, however, I was able to conduct a total of 4.5 hours of observations, in 3 different classrooms, 1.5 hours of observation in each class. Observations were scheduled individually with English instructors. During the observations, I took notes based on the Observation Protocol (Appendix F), which has been extensively refined in numerous education studies by my advisor and provided me questions, reflections, and insights to guide my observations. After the observations, those notes were stored in encrypted, and password secured computer files.

In the data collection, I encouraged participants to answer the questions focusing on the multilevel classes and not on the English institute itself, which at times, was challenging for them to distinguish. However, as the interviewer, I assured that the topic was focused on the multilevel method as much as possible. Another important reflection on the process of collecting the data is that the interview questions slightly changed throughout the interviews, as I adapted some questions to specific participants. For example, whenever I felt a participant was reluctant to respond to a specific question, I changed the way I framed the question, so that the participant would still answer it, but would not feel intimidated by it.

Data analysis

To analyse the participants' data gathered from all methods, thematic analysis was employed. According to Bryman (2016), thematic analysis is one of the most common approaches to analysing qualitative data, which emerge from the data and literature, as in my pilot study. The emerging themes were used to answer the research question of this study, in terms of challenges and benefits of the multilevel classes, interaction and proficiency, including their lived experiences in the remote learning; motivations, demotivating factors, and insecurities, and finally their perspectives of English skills development in the multilevel EFL classes.

To analyse the interviews data, I used Srivastava's (2009) framework for data analysis, which consisted in answering the following questions throughout the analysis:

Q1: What are the data telling me? (Explicitly engaging with theoretical, subjective, ontological, epistemological, and field understandings) Q2: What is it I want to know? (According to research objectives, questions, and theoretical points of interest) Q3: What is the dialectical relationship between what the data are telling me and what I want to know? (Refining the focus and linking back to research questions). (p. 78)

By reading and rereading the transcribed interviews, and answering the previous questions from the framework, I was able to identify the statements that best described participants' experiences related to my research questions.

I then created a file with two tables, in which I individually summarized beginners' and advanced students' experiences relating their responses to the research question topics (challenges and benefits; interaction and proficiency; motivations and demotivating factors; English skills development). Afterwards, based on the tables, I wrote down the observed emerging themes from each group within those research question topics that best described and summarized students' experiences as Brazilian English learners in multilevel EFL classes (see Table 2 and Table 3 in the next chapter). The emerging themes from each group were then refined and eventually turned into the themes that will be discussed in the next chapter on findings and discussion. In a reflexive process and through the framework used, the role of iteration was to spark insight and develop the meaning of the themes. As according to Srivastava (2009), "reflexive iteration is at the heart of visiting and revisiting the data and connecting them with emerging insights, progressively leading to refined focus and understandings" (p. 77), which I strived to do in this study.

The focus of the classroom observations was to observe and try to capture participants' behaviours in terms of the research question topics (challenges and benefits; interaction and proficiency; motivations and demotivating factors; English skills development). In my notes, I focused on what I was observing and wondering about during the classes, specifically related to the interaction among beginners and advanced students when placed together in small groups, or when placed in same level small groups, which seems to be where most of my reflection came from. The analysis followed the same process of iteration, however my observation notes were not analysed separately from the interview data, rather, by reading and rereading my observations' notes I used the data to inform and confirm the emerging themes

of the interviews, while also considering and analysing whether the context of the observation matched the emerging themes.

In the data analysis, I considered participants' experiences from interviews as well as my observations notes, while also reflecting on their personal lives and context such as, age, where they live, work and study and how the data related to the literature review. These reflections were especially important when analyzing why participants had different and/or similar experiences in the multilevel classes. Besides that, reflecting on the participants' lives contexts is an important characteristic of the selected theoretical framework *Social Constructivism.*

Chapter 4: Findings and discussion

As previously mentioned, this study approached the case study in the form of an *intrinsic case*. As an intrinsic case study, this study was not interested in learning more about all learners' experiences in multilevel EF L classes in Brazil. On the contrary, this study aimed to learn more about the particular case of multilevel EFL classes through the eyes of five beginners and five advanced learners, who offered two comparative examples to illustrate the multilevel EFL classes in two Brazilian cities (Stake, 1995). The ten interviews provided glimpses into the lived experiences of a small number of English learners. The analysis illustrates their views and perspectives of the challenges and benefits of studying English in a multilevel class, which was much needed, as besides my pilot study on beginners' experiences, and this thesis, only teachers' perspectives of the multilevel approach have been studied and documented (Ashton, 2019).

Overview of the multilevel EFL institute

Before moving to the actual findings and discussion, it is important to provide an overview of the main characteristics of the institute, which facilitates understanding of the data, and helps to contextualize participants' experiences. As previously mentioned, this study anonymized the multilevel EFL institute due to ethical concerns. The information provided in this section is drawn from my personal experience as a teacher in the institute in the late 2010s as well as from their official website, which will not be cited so that the institute's identity is protected.

Currently, the institute has about 420 school sites and thousands of students around Brazil. According to their website, their methodology is based on the multilevel class system and students go beyond English and learn about topics that will contribute to their professional and personal growth, such as entrepreneurship, public speaking, time management, leadership, negotiation and much more. According to their website, the institute's multilevel methodology

is exclusive for adults and focuses on the four essential English skills: speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Students are expected to prepare for each class by watching the videos and documentaries and studying the grammar and vocabulary, which are available in their online platform; and then to practice the acquired knowledge during the group classes.

The estimated course duration is 18- 24 months, and students usually have 1h30 min class, twice a week. Regarding the monthly fee, the institute is known by its emerging- upper class and upper- class students, including professionals from diverse backgrounds who are looking to improve their professional lives by learning English, and because of that, the cost is slightly beyond the average of most Private English schools in Brazil.

As far as I know from my previous experience as an employee and from the interviews, learners' enrollment process in the institute is based on an initial interview with the institute's educational coordinator, in which an assessment is made to determine whether the candidate has the expected profile to study English there. The criteria to be accepted as an English student into the institute are unknown, as at the time I worked there, it was not the teachers' role to make those decisions. Perhaps this should be investigated and discussed a bit more in future studies.

Overall, classes are available at flexible times from morning to evening, as the schedule of classes is based on the specific day of the week. On a specific day of the week, all classes taking place in all units around Brazil have the same study topic, which is based on the school's unique and own courseware and book materials. Therefore, even though students choose their preferred class schedule, they also have the flexibility to attend other classes during the day in case they miss their own classes. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all classes were transitioned to remote instruction via Zoom Platform, but the structure of the classes remained the same. However, the website mentions that the online classes are now officially

part of the institute regardless of the pandemic, and instead of 18 months course duration, it is now 24 months for online classes.

In terms of the classrooms' structure and organization, each class has approximately 12 students from different levels of proficiency: from beginners to advanced students. The school divides the proficiency levels in about three steps for each level, such as: Beginner 1, 2 and 3; Intermediate 1, 2 and 3; Advanced 1, 2; approximately 2 students per level, although it depends on the class, as it is possible that some classes do not have one or two of the levels; and Conversation Classes, which are separate from the multilevel classes. From my experience teaching at this institute, there was no specific 'English-only' policy to be followed by the teachers. However, there was an implicit expectation (from the educational coordinator and students) that English would be mostly spoken during the classes.

When students enroll at the institute, they take an English language level test, which is done by a teacher. The teacher then decides the proficiency level in which the student will begin his or her journey at the institute. According to the website, students move to the next level each 3 months by presenting a project assignment. The project assignment is an oral presentation based on an essay writing of a topic discussed throughout the level. Students develop the essay writing during 3 months with the teacher's assistance and then, prepare a presentation to the class, in which they talk about what was written in the essay. Once students have the project assignment approved by the teacher, they move to the next level.

Still on the topic of assessment, students are usually given feedback for their development in class and homework once at the end of each level. On that day, students individually meet with the teacher, who gives general feedback on the students' performance in the English language throughout that level, which includes feedback on the project assignment and oral presentation. As the findings reveal, assessment is an unclear process for the student.

This study focused on and recruited students from two different institute sites from two different Brazilian mid-sized cities. For the purposes of this study, I will refer to the schools as S1 (School 1) and S2 (School 2), when specifying which school students are enrolled at. Among participants, three advanced students were from S1 and two from S2; among beginners, three were from S2 and two from S1. In total, there were five participants from S1, and five participants from S2.

Participants' profile

It is also important to provide participants' profiles, including age group, professional careers, educational background, and previous experiences learning English, and relevant information about their personal lives. Each participant's context has influenced my interpretation of their experiences in the data analysis. The information provided is based on their responses to the interview questions as well as my own impressions of them, which were documented as part of the interview notes. This will illuminate the responses to the interviews and the context of the data analysis. As previously mentioned, the participants were 5 advanced students and 5 beginner students. The pseudonyms I selected for the advanced students were Andrew, Esther, Greg, Isabella, and Juliet. The pseudonyms I selected for beginner students were Evelyn, Kate, Leo, Lucas and Pietra. All advanced students started at the multilevel EFL institute as beginner students.

Advanced students

Andrew. Starting with the advanced students, Andrew was 21 years old, and studied Psychology full-time. He thoroughly responded to all my questions. He studied in public schools during elementary and high school, and in several same level English schools (total of 2 years and a half) before the multilevel EFL institute at S1. His main reason for choosing a

multilevel EFL institute was the short duration of the course. At the time of the interview, he had been studying there for a year and 4 months.

Esther. Esther was 22 years old and studied Law full-time. She was vocal and gladly responded to all my questions. She studied in private regular schools her whole life, and never studied English in a private language school before the multilevel EFL institute at S2. Her main reason for choosing a multilevel EFL institute was to focus on her writing skills development. At the time of the interview, she had been studying there for 6 months.

Greg. Greg was 21 years old and studied Medicine full-time. He openly talked about all his concerns of the multilevel method. He studied partially in public and private regular schools, and in several same level English schools (total of 3 years and a half) before the multilevel EFL institute at S1. His main reason for choosing a multilevel EFL institute was the focus on adults and the short duration of the course. At the time of the interview, he had been studying there for a year.

Isabella. Isabella was 22 years old and studied Law full-time. She was more reluctant and less open to share details or to criticize the institute compared with the other participants. She studied in public schools during elementary and high school, and before the multilevel EFL institute at S1, she only had one experience in a same level English school (total of one year). She did not mention any specific reason for choosing a multilevel EFL institute, other than providing her a way to live abroad. At the time of the interview, she had been studying there for a year.

Juliet. Juliet was 22 years old and studied Nutritional Studies full-time. She was eager to share all her opinions and concerns in the course of the research. She was the most vocal and open advanced student participant and had a lot to share. She studied in private regular schools her whole life and her experiences with the English language are vaster than other advanced

students, even though the multilevel EFL institute at S2 is her first English school Her main reason for choosing a multilevel EFL institute is to take the IELTS proficiency test. At the time of the interview, she had been studying there for a year, but she took breaks from it during the beginning of the pandemic.

Beginner students

Evelyn. Evelyn was 37 years old and worked full-time as an engineer. She gave thorough responses to all my questions. She studied in public schools during elementary and high school, and before the multilevel EFL institute at S2 she had a few experiences studying English in same level schools. Her main reason for choosing a multilevel EFL institute was to try a different learning method that is not same level. At the time of the interview, she had been studying there for nearly three months.

Kate. Kate was 23 years old and studied Architecture full-time. She also worked as a secretary at the same multilevel EFL institute in which she studied. She seemed reluctant to answer some questions. She studied in public schools during elementary and high school and had some experiences studying English in same level schools (2 years) before the multilevel EFL institute at S1. Her main reason for choosing a multilevel EFL institute is because that is her workplace and for the short duration of the course. At the time of the interview, she had been studying there for nearly three months.

Leo. Leo was 32 years old and worked as an engineer full-time. He shared that he is married and has a daughter. He gladly responded to all my questions. He studied in public schools during elementary and high school and had several experiences studying English in same level schools (3 years and a half) and in another multilevel school (2 years) before the current one at S2. His main reason for choosing this multilevel EFL institute is the focus on adults and a different perspective on multilevel classes, as the previous focused on repetition

instead of dynamism and natural interaction among students. At the time of the interview, he had been studying there for nearly three months.

Lucas. Lucas was 26 years old and worked full-time as a manager of a shoe company. He studied in private schools his whole life, but never learned English enough to become fluent and never had experience studying English in other English schools before the multilevel EFL institute at S1. His main reason for choosing this multilevel EFL institute is the short duration of the course. At the time of the interview, he had been studying there for nearly three months.

Pietra. Pietra was 40 years old and worked full-time as a registered nurse. She shared that she is married and has a 4-year-old daughter. She was distracted by her daughter during the interview, being constantly interrupted. She studied in public schools during elementary and high school and had two experiences studying English in same level schools before the multilevel EFL institute at S2. Her main reason for choosing this multilevel EFL institute is because she found the idea of multilevel extremely interesting, and she wants to apply for a master' program and needs to pass the English test. At the time of the interview, she had been studying there for nearly five months.

Initial insights: interviews

The following tables (Table 2 and Table 3) provide a glimpse into the advanced and beginners' students' experiences in relation to the research question topics (challenges and benefits; interaction and proficiency; motivations and demotivating factors; and English skills development). The insights presented in these tables are drawn on my interview and observation notes, but mostly from information reported to me during the interviews. It is intended to provide the reader with an overview of some of the common themes and issues in this research. These themes are taken up in more detail in the subsequent discussion and analysis.

Table 2. Advanced English Learners' experiences

RESEARCH QUESTIONS TOPICS	ANDREW 21, Psychology student.	ESTHER 22, Law student.	GREG 21, Medicine student.	ISABELLA 22, Law student.	JULIET 22, Nutrition student.
Challenges and benefits of the multilevel classes	Challenge: To make learning English a priority. Anxiety: insecure about his own learning development Benefits: Interaction among different levels.	Challenge: To keep focused on the class. Anxiety: being blind to own errors. Benefits: Multilevel forces students to speak only in English during the class.	Challenge: Pre-class preparation. Anxiety: insecure about his own learning development Benefits: Sharing of experiences.	Challenge: To make the most of the time in class. Anxiety: insecure about his own learning development Benefits: Sharing of experiences. beginners and advanced students, where they help each other.	Challenge: To have patience with lower levels. Anxiety: being blind to own errors Benefits: To be constantly reviewing content from the beginners' level.
Interaction and proficiency; remote learning experience	Interaction: He never felt frustrated to help beginners and enjoys helping beginners. Remote learning: He preferred the in-person classes because of the more natural interaction. Interaction has decreased.	Interaction with beginners allows her to help them, and to receive help with topics/content she might have forgotten. Remote learning: She prefers the remote learning because she thinks there are still opportunities to interact with students.	Interaction with beginners does not frustrate him. Advanced students are not teachers. Remote learning: The remote learning is demotivating him. The interaction has decreased.	Interaction with beginners allows her to help them, and to receive help with topics/content she might have forgotten. Remote learning: She preferred in-person classes. Interaction among students decreased a lot.	Interaction: She does not like to be in groups with beginners. She does not like to "be the teacher". Not every advanced student is actual advanced in the English language. Remote learning: She likes remote learning, as her peers turn on cameras and microphones.

Motivations to study at the multilevel institute	Motivations to begin: Short duration of the course. Motivation to continue: Professional goals and to travel abroad; To see others' improvements.	Motivations to begin: Improve writing skills. Motivation to continue: Study abroad; To see own improvement.	Motivations to begin: Program's focus on adult learning and the short duration of the course. Motivation to continue: To travel abroad.	Motivations to begin: To live abroad. Motivation to continue: To live abroad, professional goals.	Motivations to begin: To study a master's degree abroad; to pass the IELTS exam. Motivation to continue: To consume content directly in English; To see own improvement.
Demotivation	Demotivators: Remote learning demotivates him.	Demotivators: She did not mention any demotivator.	Demotivators: Remote learning demotivates him.	Demotivators: To be part of a big group discussion.	Demotivators: Being required to participate in a group discussion with beginners; lack of immediate feedback from teachers.
English skills development	Development: speaking and listening. Do not see a development: Writing and reading	Development: speaking and listening. Do not see a development: Writing. Development not due to Multilevel: Reading.	Development: speaking and listening. Do not see a development: Writing and reading.	Development: speaking Development not due to Multilevel: writing, reading, and listening.	Development: speaking and listening. Development not due to Multilevel: Writing, reading.

Table 3. Beginner English Learners' experiences

RESEARCH QUESTIONS TOPICS	PIETRA 40, Registered Nurse.	KATE 23, Architecture Student	EVELYN 37, Electric Engineer.	LEO 32, Engineer.	LUCAS 26, Manager of a Shoe Store.
Challenges and benefits of the multilevel	Challenge: prioritizing English and pre-class preparation. Anxiety: feeling frustrated for not understanding the classes. Benefits: interaction with advanced students as takes her out of her comfort zone.	Challenge: prioritizing English and pre-class preparation. Anxiety: caring about other opinions. Benefits: Interaction with advanced students. Multilevel is a representation of the real world.	Challenge: prioritizing English and pre-class preparation. Anxiety: caring about other opinions. Benefits: Exposure to future grammar topics.	Challenge: prioritizing English and pre-class preparation. Anxiety: feeling frustrated for not understanding the classes. Benefits: Interaction with advanced students. Multilevel is a representation of the real world.	Challenge: prioritizing English and pre-class preparation Anxiety: caring about other opinions. Benefits: interaction with advanced students as takes him out of his comfort zone.
Interaction and proficiency **Remote learning experience**	Interaction: Advanced students provide assistance; mutual help among beginners. Remote learning: She likes the remote learning.	Interaction: Advanced students are inspirations and provide assistance; too much interaction with other beginners made her feel "stuck". Remote learning: She prefers the remote learning.	Interaction: Advanced students are inspirations and provide assistance; mutual help among beginners. However, too much interaction with other beginners made them feel "stuck". Remote learning: She prefers the in-person classes.	Interaction: Advanced students are inspirations. Remote learning: He prefers the remote learning.	Interaction: Advanced students are inspirations and provide assistance. Remote learning: He prefers the in-person classes.

Motivations to study at the multilevel institute	Motivations to begin: To experiment a different learning method. Motivation to continue: master's program application and to have sense of belonging.	Motivations to begin: program's short period. Motivation to continue studying: To have a sense of belonging.	Motivations to begin: To experiment a different learning method. Motivation to continue studying: to gain self-confidence in her job.	Motivations to begin: To experiment a different learning method. Motivation to continue studying: Professional growth; and to notice his own improvement.	Motivations to begin: program's short period. Motivation to continue studying: to gain self-confidence, and to notice advanced students' improvements as well as their own improvement.
Demotivation	Demotivator: not able to engage in classroom conversations.	Demotivator: not able to engage in classroom conversations.	Demotivator: Remote learning.	Demotivator: He does not have any demotivator.	Demotivator: not able to engage in classroom conversations.
English skills development	Development due to Multilevel: speaking. Do not see a development: Reading and listening.	Development due to Multilevel: Writing and reading. Minor development: speaking. (i.e., project presentation)	Development due to Multilevel: Writing and speaking. Do not see a development: Reading and listening.	Development due to Multilevel: writing and listening. Do not see a development: Speaking.	Development due to Multilevel: speaking and reading. Do not see a development: Writing and listening.

Based on the tables above, emerging themes were identified from both advanced and beginner students. Next, the emerging themes will be described, including selected quotes from participants and observation notes, and then analyzed with reference to the theory and literature informing the study.

Advanced students' experiences

Challenges of the multilevel

This research found that advanced students find multilevel EFL classes challenging in terms of prioritizing English in their lives; preparing for the class in advance; keeping focused in the class; and managing having patience with beginner students, and anxiety.

Prioritizing English and pre-class preparation. When asked "what are some challenges with the multilevel?", some advanced students described challenges such as: prioritizing English in their lives and having a pre-class preparation. Through the lens of the social constructivism framework, it is important to consider participants' contexts, and personal lives to better understand the data. All advanced student participants were full-time university students and worked part-time jobs, which demanded most of their daily schedule. Considering their realities, it is understandable how prioritizing English, by for example, having a pre-class preparation was perceived as a challenge.

Participant Greg mentioned pre-class preparation as his biggest challenge in the multilevel EFL classes. According to him, students are asked to prepare for the class on their own and to be confident in that preparation, so that they can have a good quality of learning and see their own improvement. He noted: "in the multilevel, you have to study beforehand, because the class time is not the time to learn, it is the time to verify what you have learned at home. This is a characteristic of the active learning method" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 4[1]).

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[1] I=interview, O=observation, followed by the date and the page number of the transcription.

According to the participant Greg, the multilevel classes could be described as an *active learning method*, which according to Yurdabakan (2012) "is a student-centered approach to learning and it assigns the responsibility of learning to the student" (p. 45). In active learning classrooms "students should be self-regulated and have an active role in the decision-making process while engaged in cognitively challenging academic tasks" (p. 45). Yurdabakan (2012) also notes that active learning enhances the quality of student learning. This definition of active learning method partially aligns with participant Greg's quote, as he pointed out: "you have to prepare by yourself and be confident in that so that you have a good quality of learning and see that you are improving" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 11); which shows that the decision to prepare for the class beforehand is part of students' active role, which they choose to make to be more engaged cognitively in academic tasks during the class.

Perhaps an additional and more precise theoretical explanation for multilevel classes could be the *flipped classrooms*, in which, according to Davis & Minifie (2013) students are expected to work on information and content outside of class, in which students' first exposure to new material, grammar, or topic is via their textbook, the Internet, and others. In flipped classrooms students come to class and work on the new material, grammar, or topic, participating in small group discussions. As noted by the participant Greg: "in the multilevel, from beginner to advanced, nobody is going to fully explain to you the content you are supposed to learn" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 8), which aligns with Davis & Minifie's (2013) description of flipped classrooms, in which the model expects that students' first contact with a content will happen between them and a textbook and not between teacher and students. As Greg pointed out: "the class time is not the time to learn, it is the time to verify what you have learned at home" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 4).

As most of us, the advanced students mentioned having busy lives, and the next quotes suggest that that is why they find it challenging to have a pre-class preparation as well as

prioritizing English learning. Participant Andrew commented how making time for English was overall a big challenge for him due to his day-to-day activities, such as job and university, family etc. He noted:

> As time goes by, we lose the motivation (…) when I first began, I only studied full-time, but now, I work and study full-time. So, there are many things that influence me now. And I began to place my English learning in the second place. Not a priority". (I, 03/12/2021, p. 9)

It is logical to suggest that if prioritizing English is a challenge for him, that also makes making time for pre-class preparation a challenge. Also, for Andrew, poor time management around studying English causes demotivation. Greg also noted: "if I had more time, I would prepare better for the class. (…) then, I would get to class knowing what to share" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 13). As observed, both participants know the importance of playing an active role in their English learning, which includes prioritizing English in their lives by preparing for the classes. This pre-class preparation makes possible the flipped classroom. According to Shibukawa & Taguchi (2019), "the pre-class preparation time plays a promising role for deepening students' understanding during the (…) class time in the flipped classroom settings" (p. 314).

During classroom observation, I also noticed the importance of pre-class preparation for the students, regardless of their level. In observation 2, the teacher asked questions related to the main lesson topic, which was related to *time management.* Some students were able to immediately engage in a discussion with the teacher, others struggled, as observed: "teacher asked a question to an advanced student, but the student could not answer it. So, the teacher just moved on to the next advanced student" (O, 03/11/2021, p. 1). Considering the importance of pre-class preparation, my observation notes suggest that the student who immediately answered the question and engaged in a discussion on the lesson topic had a pre-class

preparation, in which s/he at least previously searched more about the class topic. The other student seemed to be struggling to engage in a discussion, and I attribute this at least in part to the lack of preparation for the class, though there might be other elements at play, such as shy personality or speaking anxiety. On the one hand, the student lost a precious chance to engage in conversation and practice the speaking skills with the teachers and classmates; on the other hand, when the teacher moved on to the next student, s/he also lost the chance to scaffold and promote learning (Vygotsky, 1978) with that student who was struggling. The teacher could have asked more questions about the same topic in different ways, using other vocabulary, for instance.

Therefore, even though the participant Greg described the multilevel classes as being active learning method, in which learners engage in meaning-making inquiry, action, imagination, invention, interaction, hypothesizing and personal reflection (Cranton, 2012), active learning can take many shapes and forms, and the elements above described (meaning-making inquiry, action, imagination) were not deeply observed in both participants' experiences and observation notes, specially when the teacher did not promote any of these elements when a student struggled to communicate. According to McGuire (2015) "active learning involves encouraging students to take on a teaching role themselves so that teachers and students become equal partners in the learning process" (p. 26). However, the type of active learning I observed, and which participants described, involved a lot of onuses on the students to prepare for the classes. Ideally, when the teacher actively involves students in the class, through active learning activities such as group discussions (McKeachi & Svinicki 2006) pair works, reaction to videos (McKinney, 2010), learning by teaching and others, students are expected to come to class better prepared (Weimer, 2015), a characteristic of *flipped classrooms*, which seems to be more inline to what current represents multilevel EFL classes.

Focus and time management in class. Another challenge, according to advanced students, was the lack of focus and time management in class. The participant Esther mentioned that keeping focused throughout the classes is her biggest challenge studying in a multilevel class. Esther noted: "To keep focused. People get distracted. We talk a lot about other things and lose track of time" (I, 03/15/2021, p. 9). On a similar way, the participant Isabella mentioned how she wants to make the most of her time in class, by engaging in meaningful and productive conversations in small groups. She noted:

> I do not like big groups. I prefer smaller groups for discussions. When we are discussing a topic, I think we can get to an agreement when there are fewer people. When there is a lot of people, there are many opinions, and we take a long time to agree on an answer for an activity, for example. (I, 03/08/2021, p. 7)

For the participant Esther, off topic conversations are one of the reasons for the lack of focus in class. Spontaneous conversations in class are a natural part of the interaction among learners, which promotes learning (Vygotsky, 1978), but at the same time, when frequent, those off topic conversations or chitchats can turn into distractions, and some students may perceive it as a waste of time, as the participant Esther did. The same feeling seems to be a challenge for the participant Isabella, specially when the teacher places her in big group discussions. As noted elsewhere in the findings, most of the classroom discussion seemed to be managed by the students themselves, with little input from the teacher. For her, being part of a big group discussion has disadvantages, as in activities when students are required to discuss about a topic, it may take a long time for all students to agree on a topic. According to Isabella, class time is better managed in small group discussion.

Perhaps, here lies a classroom management issue, in which the challenges described (focus and time management in class) are closely related to how the teacher manages and deals

with leadership in the classroom. Brophy (1996) explained classroom management as "actions taken to create and maintain a learning environment conducive to successful instruction" (p. 5). According to the participant Isabella, one action that could lead to successful instruction is placing students in small groups discussions. Crookes (2003) highlighted classroom management as "one in which whatever superficial manifestations of disorder may occur either do not prevent instruction and learning, or actually support them" (p. 144). Based on Esther's comment: "we talk a lot about other things and lose track of time.", the off-topic conversations were not supporting instruction and learning. During my observations, I noticed that the time spent in large group vs small group discussions varied. It could range from 15-25 min in terms of large group discussion time and the rest of the time was spent in small groups.

However, it is also important to recognize that there are distinct aspects of classroom management that may affect foreign language teaching in particular ways. Those include students' unwillingness to speak in the target language and students at different levels of language proficiency (Macias, 2018), what is particularly a characteristic of the multilevel EFL classes. According to Ashton (2018), multilevel EFL teachers seem to be even more affected by classroom management and described a "sense of frustration and guilt that no matter how hard teachers worked, the quality of teaching, and assessment grades, were not as good as they would be in a single level class" (p. 113). Even though multilevel classes could be considered as *flipped classroom*, the challenges described by the participants suggest that perhaps more leadership in the classrooms would be helpful to minimize distractions among learners and to better manage the time students have in class so that teachers are able to "create and maintain a learning environment conducive to successful instruction" (Brophy, 1996, p. 5).

Patience with beginner students. This challenge was not common among all advanced students; however, it is important to be discussed, as it demonstrates that the feeling of impatience and lack of empathy is a possible outcome of the multilevel EFL classes for

advanced students. When asked "what is the challenge of the multilevel?", the participant Juliet, who was extremely open about her opinions and concerns, noted:

> To have patience. One thing is to be the teacher and to have patience with the beginner levels. Another thing is to be an advanced student. We won't always have patience to deal with the beginners. I don't think it's a problem of the "multilevel" itself. It depends on the student. For example, I used to get way more stressed out with them; but nowadays, I am better. But it wasn't the multilevel classes' fault. It was my own fault. (I, 03/19/2021, p. 10)

According to the participant, the lack of patience towards the beginners is not related to the multilevel classes itself, but to what extent advanced students are willing to collaborate. About her interaction with beginner students, Juliet noted: "I used to get way more stressed out with them; but nowadays, I am better" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 10). It is not clear what happened for her to change her mindset towards the beginners. In any case, her experience is important because perhaps it demonstrates that the multilevel classes are not adaptable for any kind of person. That is, some students will adapt better than others, mostly due to their personality traits, such as having a collaborative mindset.

Watanabe and Swain (2007) found there are benefits in L2 learners interacting with peers who have similar and/or different proficiency levels if that the interaction was collaborative. In other words, the authors suggested that a collaborative interaction among learners appeared to be more important than their proficiency levels, which seems to be the case of multilevel EFL classes. Sato and Viveros' (2016) also claim that a collaborative mindset is more important than the differences in proficiency levels. This means that "proficiency does not define how much of a collaborative mindset the learners may possess" (Sato & Viveros, 2016, p. 107), which reinforces Juliet's claim that "it depends on the student" (I, 03/19/2021,

p.10).

When I asked Juliet if she would recommend the multilevel classes for someone who does not have any knowledge of the English language, she noted:

Yes, if I knew the person. I know there are people who would feel demotivated with the multilevel. I even experienced some people in my classes who gave up. I would explain to the person how it (multilevel) works; because I am sure there are people who would not adapt (I, 03/19/2021, p. 15).

As the interviewer, I confess that I should have engaged more in conversation at this point, so that I could fully understand what she meant by "I would explain how it (multilevel) works". However, based on her previous comments on lack of patience with beginners, it is logical to suggest that in her opinion, people who lack patience, and a collaborative mindset, would not adapt to the multilevel EFL classes. This notion that in multilevel EFL classes students must possess a collaborative mindset to benefit from it, was also supported by the participant Esther. When I asked the same question to the participant Esther, she also claimed that:

I don't know. (…) Because some people adapt but others don't. (…) I don't know if I would recommend for everyone because it depends on the person's profile. If that person does not like to help others, I am not sure if the multilevel is the best method for them. (I, 03/19/2021, p. 12)

Esther also claimed that she would not recommend the multilevel classes for someone who does not have a collaborative personality. Both participants' experiences suggest that having a collaborative mindset, regardless of the proficiency level, might determine whether the student adapts to the multilevel or not.

Anxiety. As discussed in the literature review, this study found that another common challenge among advanced students is *foreign language anxiety* (FLA). Participants described feeling anxiety and insecurity about speaking with English native speakers, or target language users; anxious about being blind to their own errors and finally, insecure, and uncertain about their own English learning development in the multilevel classes.

To briefly recall, foreign Language Anxiety could be classified into two different types: debilitating (harmful) anxiety and facilitating (helpful) anxiety (Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019). The effects of debilitating anxiety could be direct as reducing class participation or indirect such as fear, frustration, and worry (Oxford, 1999). However, facilitating anxiety helps learners to perform well in the language learning (Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019). This study has found the presence of mainly debilitating anxiety, in which students expressed their fears, frustrations and worries; however, the described anxieties also seemed to be manageable.

When asked about their biggest anxieties and insecurities about learning English in a multilevel class, Juliet and Esther shared about their fear of being blind to their own mistakes. Participant Juliet shared: "My frustration is to see people making mistakes, and fear of incorporating the same mistakes into my own speaking habits" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 9), indicating that her fear is to repeat other students' errors in her own speaking, not noticing it herself. Based on Oteir and Al-Otaibi's (2019)' summary of the six major causes of FLA, Juliet's anxiety seems to be caused by her belief that, by being exposed to others' speeches, somehow, she will incorporate their errors into her own speaking habits. In the literature, this is mostly defined as *priming*- a topic related to L2 learners' interaction, which is "the phenomenon of speakers' tendency to use linguistic structures that they have recently heard" (Kim, 2017, p. 134). Even though this is a fair insecurity, there is no current no evidence nor consensus that this phenomenon indeed promotes long-term effects for L2 learners. According to Jackson (2017) more research is needed to understand priming and should focus on whether priming is

mostly common among earlier stages of L2 learning (beginner learners) or in later stages of learning (advanced learners).

Similarly, the participant Esther shared: "My insecurity is to make a mistake and do not notice it on my own. This is my biggest insecurity: to be making frequent mistakes and being blind to them" (I, 03/15/2021, p. 7), indicating an insecurity about her own errors, and consequently about her own learning (to how see this relates to instructor feedback, see section on *Demotivating factors*.) While Juliet's anxiety was interpersonal, as it related to how others' errors in the language can affect her own learning, Esther's anxiety seems to be caused by a personal anxiety, based on Oteir and Al-Otaibi's (2019) summary of the six major causes of FLA. On the other hand, Esther also shared a facilitating, helpful personal anxiety: "I am anxious to go the conversation classes. Because I like to talk!" (I, 03/15/2021, p. 8). When she said, "I am anxious to go the conversation classes (…)", it suggests that she is anxious to move to the next step of her English development. That anxiety seems to differ from the previous one, mainly because it seems to be a mild anxiety co-occurring with the enjoyment and excitement to be able to explore her speaking potential, which according to Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014) facilitates progress in foreign language learning.

Participants Greg, Isabella and Andrew reported, more specifically, on feeling insecure about their own learning development in the English language. Greg noted:

> My insecurity is to know if I am actually learning. I had this insecurity and I still have. In the multilevel, from beginner to advanced levels, nobody is going to fully explain to you the content you are supposed to learn. (…) this is what makes me insecure: the teacher gets a limited sample of what she thinks I know. And then, I don't know if I am learning, because I am being evaluated based on a limited sample of my knowledge. (I, 03/19/2021, p. 8)

Greg's quote is crucial to understand where his insecurities come from. According to him, the fact that the teacher is not necessarily aware of his actual learning performance makes him insecure, as in his opinion, the teacher assesses his knowledge based on limited sample, which can be subjective. His anxieties lie on the fact that he does not know with certainty if he is developing. Based on Oteir and Al-Otaibi's (2019) summary of the six major causes of FLA, his experiences indicate that his anxiety is both interpersonal and personal; interpersonal because it involves the teacher's assessment of his knowledge, and personal because the consequence is insecurity about his own learning.

Similarly, Isabella also seems to face challenges related to not knowing if she is prepared for the language examination in the multilevel institute, as noted: "The insecurity comes when I have to present the Project, because I am being evaluated, and I need a certain score to pass to the next level" (I, 03/08/2021, p. 6). One might say that her anxiety to present the Project assignment might simply come from the mild anxiety and excitement to be presenting in front of the class. However, by saying: "I am being evaluated, and I need a certain score to pass to the next level", the *language examination* anxiety is revealed (Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019), indicating an insecurity about her own ability to move to the next level and fear of being evaluated by the teacher.

Participant Andrew also shared his insecurities about his actual learning development, using as an example his insecurity about speaking to a native English speaker. He noted:

Nowadays, my insecurity is more related to self- confidence. I have never spoken in English with a native speaker before. But I know it is different. When we talk to someone that is also learning, it is slower, there are accents. I know how to speak among the students, but do I know how to speak with a native speaker?

Andrew' anxiety relates to the rest of the participants, as an insecurity about his own learning, and lack of self-confidence. As he said, he knows how to speak with his peers, but he is not sure if she would do well speaking with a native English speaker. His anxiety seems to be both interpersonal and personal (Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019); interpersonal because it relates to speaking to a native speaker, and personal as it relates his own lack of confidence.

As observed, most of the participants' anxieties come from the insecurity about their own learning development as advanced students, that is knowing for certain if they are progressing to the next level, what is referred to in the literature as the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Participants are insecure about their actual learning and fearful of making mistakes and not receiving proper immediate feedback. These are certainly real fears and issues as reported by the learners and based on students' reports, they seem to be dissatisfied with the amount and type of feedback they get. Therefore, the solution might be to provide more feedback and/or it might be to provide students a clearer explanation of how and why the teachers give feedback in certain ways and certain times, to alleviate frustration. More on feedback will be discussed in the later sections.

Benefits of the multilevel

When asked what the benefits of studying in a multilevel EFL classes are advanced student participants' responses lead to the understanding that the interaction among all students is the biggest benefit, which makes them review beginners' content, promote knowledge exchange, and forces them to speak in English all times during the class.

Interaction with all levels. The participant Andrew answered that having contact with other students is the biggest benefit of the multilevel: "I have no doubts that is it the contact with other students. On Zoom this is limited, but when it was in person, that is what I liked the

most. Just chatting with them. The interaction with others!" (I, 03/12/2021, p. 7). His quote does not necessarily represent a unique characteristic of the multilevel, as in same level EFL classes, students also have contact and interaction with other students. But at the same time, it shows how interaction plays an important role in any EFL class.

On a similar way, Greg noted that the biggest benefit of the multilevel is "to share experiences. We would not have that in a same level class, where you do not meet people from other levels. We would not be able to share or to receive an extra knowledge or tip" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 15). While Andrew did not specify that the benefit was the contact with other levels, Greg did. In his views, the interaction among levels allows for opportunities to share experiences related to English language learning, when he says, "share or receive an extra knowledge or tip". Greg goes further and affirms that in same level EFL classes that would not be possible, as all students are in the same level of proficiency and consequently, do not always have extra knowledge to share with others. Greg's thoughts align and complement what the participant Juliet answered: "to review the beginners' grammar, which I don't always remember" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 10), which infers that Juliet also sees advantages of interacting with beginners, as she can review beginners' content. That aligns to what Ashton (2018) found in her study, in which benefits of the multilevel include advanced students revising the material covered in previous levels. Overall, the benefit of the multilevel for advanced students is the interaction with all levels, which allows for opportunities to share and receive extra knowledge, whether that knowledge comes from a higher or lower-level student. More on interaction will be discussed in the next section.

Particularly the participant Esther mentioned that the benefit of the multilevel comes from the challenge of being forced to speak in English during the classes. She noted: "it comes from the challenge, because I try to only speak English in class" (I, 03/15/2021, p. 10). According to her, "the multilevel forces you to shift from one language to another, which helps

with the fast thinking too. The benefit is to force myself to speak in English" (I, 03/15/2021, p. 10). However, she claims that at times, students end up speaking Portuguese, but "when the teacher comes, we speak in English again" (I, 03/15/2021, p. 10). This last quote particularly, Esther clearly stated that students speak in Portuguese when the teacher is not in the group, and in English when the teacher is present, which raises some questions: Is it the multilevel that forces students to shift from Portuguese to English, or the fact that the teacher is watching? During all three observations (the teacher was present in the small groups) when placed in small groups according to their levels, students communicated in Portuguese most of the time, which is understandable for beginners due to their lower English skills; however, advanced students would also predominantly communicate in Portuguese during discussions, which was also experienced by the participant Juliet:

> If I am in an English class, I want to speak English. Last week, I was in a group with advanced students, and they were speaking Portuguese all the time. There are so many times in the day to speak Portuguese, why in the English class? (I, 03/19/2021, p. 13)

In observation 1, students were placed in small groups according to their levels. I noticed: "advanced student is speaking more Portuguese than English; when divided by levels, I felt like they are more comfortable to speak and interact. Is it because they are speaking mostly in Portuguese, or because they are in small groups?" (O, 03/01/2021, p. 1).

In observation 2, I observed both whole group and small group interaction. When with the whole group, I noticed: "teacher explains the activity in Portuguese; homework for students: teacher explains the homework in English and then in Portuguese". When placed in small groups without the teacher, I noticed: "advanced student: reading the text out loud in English and translating into Portuguese; students did not try to naturally speak in English during the exercise, they would answer the question in English, and then, translate to

Portuguese; the interaction among the students were better in small groups, however, they were speaking Portuguese most of the time" (O, 03/11/2021, p. 1).

In observation 3, part of the notes was done while students were not in small groups, and part in small groups. When with the whole group, teacher said: "I am going to explain in Portuguese not to lose any meaning." When in small groups, my notes were: "advanced students: speaking in Portuguese. One student began to speak in English, and then, the other students begin to speak in English too" (O, 03/11/2021, p. 1).

Based on my observation data, multilevel classes do not necessarily force students to speak in English all the time, as described by the participant Esther. It suggests that advanced students communicated in Portuguese in class for mainly two reasons: 1) for their own convenience and comfort. In observation 3, when one advanced student began to speak in English, others did too, which suggest that one peer positively influenced the others to get out of their comfort zone of speaking Portuguese; 2) to clarify the meaning of what they said first in English, mainly by translating mostly all English communication to Portuguese as noted in observations 2 and 3. As a researcher who speaks both Portuguese and English, these clarifications of meaning did not seem necessary at the time, as the content being translated referred to textbook activities which topics had just been discussed with the whole group.

It was interesting to note that teachers also seemed to speak in Portuguese to ensure that students were fully comprehending the activities. As discussed in the section *Overview of the multilevel institute,* from my experience working there, there was no specific English-only policy to be followed by the teachers and students. However, there was an implicit expectation from the educational coordination, teachers, and students that English should be mostly spoken during the classes. Thus, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully analyse and discuss whether multilevel EFL classes should incorporate English-only policy, specially since,

according to Debreli & Oyman (2016) there is "neither a persuasive body of research nor satisfying empirical work indicating that abandoning or allowing the use of L1 in EFL classrooms would better contribute to students' learning of a L2" (p. 149). However, considering what some researchers (e.g., Nanda, 2021) have argued, instead of strongly agreeing or denying the inclusion or exclusion of L1 in EFL classrooms, they preferred to suggest criteria for when and how much of first language should be used in English classes, which is based on a balance. These criteria are often based on the purpose of using the first language, students' language proficiency level, and duration of the foreign language classes (Nanda, 2021) as well as provided approaches and techniques to guide teachers to use L1 when necessary.

Perhaps the ideal benefit lies on the institute's clarification to be provided around ideal language use in the school, determining criteria for how and when to use Portuguese in class, while providing approaches and techniques to guide teachers on how to use Portuguese appropriately in class. Consequently, students and teachers would know what to expect from the English classes.

Interaction and proficiency

As discussed in the previous section, advanced students' experiences in terms of interaction among levels were described as a benefit of the multilevel classes. However, as I asked more in-depth questions, and inquired more about their lived experiences with those interactions, many insights emerged. As advanced students, participants discussed that even though they enjoy helping beginners, they do not wish to be considered teachers; advanced students receive assistance from beginners; and that some advanced students should not be considered as advanced for the purposes of the multilevel.

Advanced students are not teachers. Throughout the interviews, participants commented that despite enjoying providing help to beginners, they do not wish to be considered equals to the teachers. Andrew, for instance, noted that it is common for beginners in his class to see him as someone who is willing to help. He noted: "(…) Obviously, I don't know everything, but I always try and help them with basic things, with what I can (…) whenever I can (…)" (I, 03/12/2021, p. 1). Andrew's opinion on helping beginners suggests that there is a spontaneous assistance between advanced students towards beginners, in which there is no expectations from the institute that advanced students are required to assist beginners at all costs, rather, advanced students do so whenever they are able to. Similarly, the participant Esther mentioned that before studying at the institute, she had the perception that advanced students would be tutors for the rest of the class. She explained: "I thought advanced students would be tutors, you know, like teaching assistants. But it is not the case. There is no hierarchy among students, everyone is the same" (I, 03/15/2021, p. 4). It is not clear where this idea came from; either way, this was her first impression of the multilevel method before even starting her studies at the institute.

Additionally. the participant Greg seemed emphatic in stating that advanced students are not teachers, and that, as beginners, they are also in the learning process. He affirmed: "(…) We are not the teachers. The main thing is to know that we are on our learning process, and they (the beginners) are as well" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 7). Juliet also noted: "(…) It is not because we are advanced students, that we know it all" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 4), demonstrating that even though they are in a different stage of learning, they are not the teachers. As Ashton (2019) points out, "in the multi-level class, it was [is] common (…) for learners in the higher year level to feel self conscious about their level of language proficiency" (p. 172). This can be partially seen in the participants' experiences, because even though they are aware of their level of proficiency in the class, they are also aware of their role in the classroom as students, as

observed, among others, in Greg's quote: "(…) We are not the teachers" and Andrew's quote: "I don't know everything".

Understanding that advanced students still required assistance despite their level of proficiency, Greg expressed some concerns towards the lack of a more in-depth guidance on their current content and grammatical topics:

> When I was in the beginner level, it was easier for me because of all my previous experiences learning English. But now, that I am in the advanced level, it is harder. We are currently learning Present Perfect. It is hard to understand. There is no specific time in the class that the teacher will explain it to me, and I am expected to share my knowledge with other students. (I, 03/19/2021, p. 4)

In his opinion, beginner students can deal better with the lack of in-depth guidance, as most of them come from previous experiences learning English, which might have taught them some basic elements of the language. However, as students advance, the content is completely new, which makes it harder for them to comprehend by themselves. His concerns bring us back to the concept of *flipped classrooms* in which students are required to study the content by themselves and to come to class ready to share what they have learned (Minifie, 2013). However, he complements his thoughts:

> In my opinion, when you are in the beginner level, you are more productive, but as you advance, you feel the lack of a more specific in-depth guidance to your level. (…) In my point of view, the multilevel classes have some gaps, which must be filled by the students themselves. (I, 03/19/2021, p. 4)

His quote reinforces the idea that even though they are advanced students, they are still learning English, and therefore, require guidance specific to their level. Greg mentioned that "the multilevel classes have some gaps, which must be filled by the students themselves",

however, the rest of his quote suggests that, regardless of the multilevel EFL classes being considered *flipped classrooms*, perhaps a special attention should be given to teaching grammatical topics.

Participants' opinions and views point toward a more complex understanding of the interaction across levels. In this study, the interaction in the multilevel classes seems to have an even higher complexity level than the one described by Ashton (2018), where it is described, that weaker students get support from stronger ones and stronger ones can reinforce their understanding by teaching weaker ones. There are nuances that surround these interactions, such as advanced students being aware of their role as students and not teachers, while recognizing their needs for *scaffolding* from other peers and teacher, by stating sentences such as: "I don't know everything", "we are on our learning process". Through s*caffolding* advanced students also have a chance to grow and develop as beginners do (Vygotsky, 1978) during their learning process.

Advanced students receive beginners' assistance. As observed, advanced students are aware of their role as students who can spontaneously assist beginners when possible. This section complements what was briefly discussed in the *benefits* section, that advanced students find it beneficial when they received help from beginners, either directly from them, or from reviewing content directed to them.

The participant Isabella reported that an important piece of her interaction with beginners is when they remind her of something from previous levels. She noted:

Sometimes, there is a beginner student who tells me like, "it is not *there is*, it's *there are*.", and so on. And I say, "yes, that's true, I didn't notice that detail.", which is something that they are learning at that moment. We help them with other things, like, verb tenses. One helping the other. (I, 03/08/2021, p. 6)

The participant Esther also reported being corrected by beginners in her writing. She noted: "I make mistakes too, specially in my writing, and I do not realize it right away, but the beginners do" (I, 03/15/2021, p. 6). Similarly, the participant Andrew mentioned: "because it is multilevel, we (advanced student) are learning a topic, but the beginners are studying another topic, so we also review their topic!" (I, 03/15/2021, p. 6), inferring advanced students study new content and review past contents simultaneously (Ashton, 2018). Andrew goes further and mentions specific grammar topics in which he received help from the beginners: "I have a hard time with pronouns, past verbs, irregular verbs etc., and the beginners always help me to remember. (…) I am always learning with the beginners" (I, 03/15/2021, p. 7).

Before the study, I expected that the beginners would benefit more from the interactions among levels than advanced students; however, throughout the research, I noticed that the advanced students also reported that they benefit from it, as they review previous and important content through interaction with beginners. That relates to Watanabe's (2008) claims that regardless of the peer's proficiency, peer interaction provides learning opportunities when participants work collaboratively, and that a successful collaboration does not depend on proficiency levels, but rather on peers' willingness to share their ideas and help each other in completing a task. Similarly, Sato and Viveros (2016) affirms that while the original understanding of scaffolding focused on learning interactions between a learner and a person with higher skills (e.g., native speakers, teachers, learners with higher proficiency), there is now that idea of *collective scaffolding,* which argues that "scaffolding is not necessarily unidirectional, from expert to novice, but bidirectional in collaborative peer interaction. He showed that learners are indeed capable and willing to help each other for learning an L2" (p. 94). Based on the advanced students' quotes, their beginner peers had a collaborative mindset and that is why their interactions were reported successful.

Advanced students who are not advanced. Participants also shared their experiences of interaction with other advanced students in the class. I initially expected advanced students to have effective and productive interactions with each other due to their similar level of proficiency; however, one participant criticized how some students were placed in the advanced level, but could otherwise be considered lower or intermediate levels, based on their weak speaking, and listening skills.

The participant Juliet expressed her concern about that. She noted:

Another negative point that I see in the multilevel: some people are in the advanced level, but they are not actually advanced in English. Because everybody passes the tests to move to the next level, I have never seen someone failing the project. And so, there could be a person that is in the advanced level but lacks some skills that perhaps a person from the beginner level already has. (I, 03/19/2021, p. 8)

As described in the section *Overview of the multilevel institute*, students move to the next level after preparing and effectively presenting the project assignment. Juliet criticism is on how, in her perspective, "everybody passes the tests to move to the next level", meaning that all students move to the next level regardless of how they did on the project assignment. Juliet was the only participant to report this concern. However, in my classroom observations, I have noticed a similar situation, in which I wondered about an advanced student's actual English level. In observation 2, I noted:

I am wondering if this 'advanced student' is indeed advanced and how easy it is move to the next level. I say that because he just said in a small group that had mostly beginners: 'you *is* a teen, and no one corrected him. (O, 03/11/2021, p. 2)

From my observation notes, I wondered: "Does the institute approve all students to move to the next level even though they might not be prepared yet? If yes, why? If not, how

do I interpret this observation note?" (O, 03/11/2021, p. 4). Those concerns become important issues that are worth reflecting on. Recalling my previous experience working at the institute, I was never instructed to approve students to the next level regardless of their development, where I used to follow the institute's specific framework to assess students' performance. As Knoch and Macqueen (2017) affirmed, "most classroom teachers are required to report learner performance against a set of external standards, such as proficiency scales or frameworks" (p. 185), which has also occurred at the institute when I was a teacher.

With the exception of the website, this thesis did not collect data from the institute itself, such as textbooks, policies, nor assessment frameworks, and therefore, those can not be analysed. However, according to Knoch and Macqueen (2017), in general, frameworks or standards have been criticized for many reasons. First, for its questionable use of scales that do not represent actual learning trajectories at the level of individual learners. SLA studies have been often finding evidence of nonlinear L2 development, which means that learners progress in curves, U and N shapes, and that is not captured by such assessment frameworks (Knoch & Macqueen, 2017). The authors argue that frameworks or standards are reductionist in terms of levels, as those often have a limited number of levels, from total beginners to highly proficient users of language, which is the case of the multilevel EFL institute (see the section *Overview of the multilevel EFL institute* for proficiency levels).

According to Knoch and Macqueen (2017), "this number of levels is often very limiting for classroom teachers, who would like progress to be described on a much finer level to show smaller increments of progress made by learners and to avoid frustration on behalf of students" (p. 186). Perhaps that might be case at the multilevel EFL institute. Teachers are limited to place students in a few levels, and perhaps, as described by Knoch and Macqueen (2017), the assessment framework uses scales that do not represent actual students' learning trajectories. Then, consequently, students might still do well in their project assignments, as it is subject;

however, based on the data (Juliet's quote and my observation notes) that probably does not mean they were ready to move to the next level. However, future research should focus specifically on assessment in multilevel EFL classes, collecting actual documental data from the institute.

Still on the topic of advanced students in the class, some participants reported to miss having another advanced peer in their classrooms, as someone to be inspired by, as they are to the beginner students. For instance, participant Greg noted: "I miss having someone that is more advanced than I am". In his classroom, Greg recognizes that he is the most advanced student, perhaps based on interaction with all students. He continues: "Not only because of what they share with me; but for me to see the reflection of what I can become; to see that I can get there" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 4). It is interesting how, even though Greg is in the advanced level, he longs for having a more advanced peer who he can be inspired by. Similarly, participant Andrew noted: "The negative side (of the multilevel) now is that I am the most advanced student". As an advanced student, Andrew reports the lack of a more advanced peer not only as a necessity, but as a negative side of the multilevel. As Greg, he potentially realized he was the most advanced student in his class based on interaction with others. He continues by stating: "Like I said, when I was a beginner, I would learn a lot from the more advanced ones. Now, that I am advanced, there is a gap. I feel the necessity of having someone more advanced than myself" (I, 03/12/2021, p. 9). According to him, there is a gap between his experiences as a beginner, in which he would benefit more from interacting with advanced students, and currently, as an advanced student, when he does not have a more advanced peer. In addition, when asked if teachers could be considered the more advanced person in the class, students argued that receiving assistance from the teacher is not the same as having another advanced classmate, with whom they could be more comfortable, and who would not have to share their attention with the whole class. Yet the teacher could be helpful in providing the

feedback that several students complained was lacking, as will be discussed later in the analysis.

In all three classroom observations, advanced students were the minority in the class. In observation 2, there was only one advanced student in the class, and I observed: "The one advanced student does not talk much and has his microphone off most of time". I also noticed that:

> Small groups with beginners and one advanced student: Students are trying to come up with a presentation to the class. Advanced student said they could prepare by themselves and present to the class. (O, 03/11/2021, p. 3).

It is important to mention that the observed advanced student was not one of the focal participants. The advanced student did not show any interest in engaging with the rest of the group, either by speaking and participating in the group discussion, nor helping the beginners with the group presentation. Because that advanced student was not one of the focal participants, there is no certainty as to why the student had that behavior towards the beginners. In any case, it is interesting to note how Choi and Iwashita (2016)' study found the opposite in relation to small groups with mixed proficiency learners. Analysing two small groups, they found that a high-proficiency learner took charge of putting all the members' ideas together on the writing task, which indicates that more high-level peers were more likely to be the leaders of the group when it came to the writing stage of a group presentation.

As Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) explain, student engagement has a direct connection to classroom behaviours. Therefore, there could be several reasons for that advanced student not to have engaged in the small group, such as: personal issues, demotivation, insecurity, lack of patience with beginners, lack of collaborative mindset (Sato & Viveros, 2016) etc.; however,

based on the participants' opinions, and on the fact that the student was the only advanced learner, the lack of another advanced student in the class could also have been the reason.

Truong and Storch (2007), examining group planning prior to oral presentation tasks in class, found that small groups composed of mixed proficiency learners (multilevel) were more interactive and focused on both language and content issues related to the upcoming oral presentation. This might explain why the observe advanced student did not engage with the rest of the group: s/he was the only advanced student in the group, all the other students were beginners, which indicates that the small group was not completely multilevel, as other levels were missing such as intermediate and more advanced students, creating a gap and lack of interaction among the high-level and the lower levels.

Reflecting on Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) in multilevel EFL classes is important when talking about interaction across levels of proficiency. Understanding that L2 development is achieved through interacting and being scaffolded by peers and the teacher, advanced students' experiences and my observation notes indicate how advanced students also require scaffolding from beginners, who provide the opportunity to review lower-level content; from another advanced student who is more knowledgeable; and from the teacher, whose primarily role is to provide that assistance.

Remote learning experiences. Due to Covid-19, students in Brazil had remote classes at the time of data collection. As a researcher, I could not ignore the fact that the interaction among students might have been affected by the shift to online classes, as well as their development in the learning process. Advanced students presented varied opinions in terms of the remote learning: while some believed that remote learning affected the interaction among classmates, others believed the remote learning to be as effective as in-person classes. It was observed, thus, that the difference in opinions is strongly influenced by their different life

circumstances, such as work and study life, or simply by their personal preferences (see section on *Participants' Profile*).

When asked about how they see the interaction with all levels in the remote learning, participant Andrew said: "I don't see a lot of interaction between students now. (…) In the in-person classes, we could chit chat, make jokes. But now we cannot" (I, 03/12/2021, p. 9). His quote suggests that he is not satisfied with the interaction among learners in the remote learning and misses the "chit chat" indicating that for him, this is part of a natural and beneficial interaction in class. Besides that, remote classes also demotivated him, as observed: "The online classes also demotivated me a little bit" (I, 03/12/2021, p. 9), which will be better discussed in the *demotivation* section of this thesis. Similarly, participant Greg noted that: "in person, when the teacher leaves the room, there are lots of chit chats going on, which can even motivate us to be in the class. It is part of the human communication" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 9), suggesting that for him, chit chat is also a part of human interaction, and promotes motivation. According to Vygotsky (1978) learning takes place more effectively in a sociocultural environment and through dialogue and learners are "active constructors of their own learning environment" (Mitchell & Myles, 2019, p. 162). For Greg, remote learning also demotivated him, as noted: "Online, we are more distracted, (…) and it demotivates me!" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 9), which will be better discussed in the *demotivation* section of this thesis.

Likewise, participant Isabella noted: "I think the interaction among students decreased a lot. Because I had the in-person experience, I can compare both. The interaction in the in-person classes were way better! Classes were more interactive, and more interesting" (I, 03/08/2021, p. 5). Isabella's quote also suggest that she is dissatisfied with the remote learning. In the interview, I asked her to explain in which ways the in-person classes were better, but she was reluctant to explain. Participant Greg also mentioned:

The remote learning is different from the in-person classes. In-person, the teacher is watching us, we won't go on your phone, and we pay attention to the others. In the remote classes, we are more distracted, because of the thousands of other things going on in our lives, and it demotivates me. (I, 03/19/2021, p. 9)

Greg provided actual reasons for why in-person classes are more effective than remote classes, such as: in-person classes have less distractions, students are less likely to use their phones, and are more attentive to the peers. According to him, the same cannot be said about remote learning, in which there are several distractions. Similarly, Dörnyei (2019a) affirms that student engagement is overall a challenge in any classroom, specially at a time when social media has been intensifying students' social life, constantly bombarding young people with information from different sources, and strongly intending to capture their attention (Dörnyei, 2019a), which is even more intensified in remote learning. Additionally, participant Greg concluded his thoughts by stating: "I don't think it is as effective as the in-person classes. Even though it is now called the new normal, the future of education, I think it is ineffective" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 9).

My observation notes also suggest a lack of the interaction among students. In observation 1, I noted: "most of the interaction happened between the teacher and one student at a time" (O, 03/01/2021, p. 2). During observation 1, I noticed that the interaction happened mostly between the teacher, who was usually asking a question to the students, and one student at a time, as they replied to the teacher. In observation 2, I noted: "5 out of 9 students have their cameras off" (O, 03/11/2021, p. 2). I noticed that most of the students in the class had their cameras off. In observation 3, I noted: "the interaction among the students (mixed levels) is better in small groups; while in small groups, many interactions in English about their lives" (O, 03/11/2021, p. 2).

Comparing my experience teaching at the multilevel school, which was in-person, to these classroom observations, I would say that the interaction among students decreased drastically. Obviously, the remote learning is not to blame specifically, as considering the difficult COVID-19 situation, people's anxiety might have increased considerably. However, considering participants' quotes, my own observation, and previous experiences, the interaction among students decreased with the remote learning. It is also worth noting that, among the three observations, the observation 3 seemed to have more interaction among students while in small groups, in which they would not only share about the content related to the class, but also aspects of their personal lives, such as, jobs and daily lives. That suggest that, not every class was affected negatively by the remote learning, which also depended on the teachers' teaching style, such as excitement while teaching, and students' personal preferences and personalities. On a different perspective, participant Juliet noted: "I don't see a lot of difference, to be honest. The only difference that I see, is the 'before and after the class', when we would talk to each other" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 4). Juliet's response is different from the other participants but presents a similarity when she noted: "the only difference that I see, is the "before and after the class", when we would talk to each other", which aligns to the previous discussion on chit chat being a natural and part of human interaction. She also mentioned: "the online classes are good at least on my class, everybody turns on the camera, I think that helps too" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 4). The fact that Juliet still enjoys the online classes even though the "before and after class" conversations are lost, might be an indicator that for her chit chats are not as important as they are for Andrew and Greg. Similarly, participant Esther noted: "we do have opportunities to interact. Comparing the online interaction to in-person classes I've had before; online is actually better" (I, 03/15/2021, p. 10), indicating her preference for remote learning.

Hartshorn and McMurry's (2020) study revealed that on average, the negative effect of transitioning to online teaching and learning was perceived severely by students, as "many students and some teachers saw the online approach to teaching and learning as a hindrance that actually undermined student language development and created additional stress" (p. 15). Mahyoob (2020) also found that "students are not happy with distance education and many obstacles have been encountered" (p. 152). Both studies align to most of the advanced students' experiences in this thesis, Andrew, Greg, and Isabella. On the other hand, other studies show that even though there are challenges related to the remote learning during the pandemic, such as: communications, interaction, assessment and assignments, online education experience, technology use tools, time management, stress and anxiety, students were positive and perceived the effectiveness of online learning during the pandemic (Rajab, Mohammad, Gazal, & Alkattan, 2020), which aligns to Juliet's and Esther's experiences.

As observed in Hartshorn and McMurry (2020)'s study "what some participants perceived as stressors triggering a crisis, others viewed as beneficial" (p.152). The findings in this section also indicate that participants' lifestyles and circumstances played an important role in whether the remote learning was perceived as beneficial for them or not. To conclude, as Kim (2017) affirms, setting comparisons among characteristics and learning outcomes of face-to face and remote learning interaction is not ideal. Claiming that one way is better than the other is also not ideal, as these two forms involve different conditions from cognitive, affective, and social perspectives; therefore, it is not surprising that research findings demonstrate differences between face-to-face and remote learning interaction.

Motivations and demotivation

As discussed in the literature review, most researchers agree that L2 motivation consists of a behavior of *choice, persistence,* and *effort*. Choice usually refers to the reason why L2 students choose to learn English; persistence relates to how long the learner is willing to

continue studying English; and effort refers to the amount of energy invested into English learning and how hard learners are going to pursue this goal (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). Considering motivation as the combination of choice, persistence, and effort (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021), this study identified two kinds of motivations among advanced students: motivations to begin (choice) and motivations to continue studying English in a multilevel class (effort, and persistence).

Motivations to begin. As briefly mentioned in the *Participants' Profile* section, advanced students' motivations to begin their studies at the multilevel EFL institute, which is also interpreted as *choice*, ranged from the institute's program focus on adult learning and the short duration of the course to expectations to develop writing skills, and to pass English proficiency tests.

Participant Greg explained how his *choice* to begin studying English at the multilevel EFL institute was particularly based on the program's focus on adult learning and the short duration of the course, as observed on Greg's quote: "when I decided to go back to studying English, I chose the multilevel school. Mostly, because of the short duration, 18 months, and because it is focused on adult learning" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 3). Similarly, participant Andrew mentioned: "something that we would take a year to learn in a same level school, we learn way faster in a multilevel school" (I, 03/12/2021, p. 13), indicating that the short duration of the program influenced his *choice* for the multilevel institute.

Participant Esther, on a different perspective, commented on her *choice* for the multilevel: "When I first started, it (the institute) was my first time ever in an English school. I really wanted to improve my writing skills" (I, 03/15/2021, p. 5), indicating that her main motivation was to improve her writing skills. Participant Juliet noted: "I also want to study abroad, master's degree, and I am going to take a summer course in Europe, but I need the

IELTS to be approved; so, it is also a motivation for me" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 3), expressing that her *choice* to begin at the institute was based on the desire to pass the IELTS proficiency test. Finally, participant Isabella mentioned: "I want to live abroad. My sister lives in England, and she does not know English. And I think that if I have the chance to live abroad, knowing English will make things better for me (…) the multilevel classes are more realistic" (I, 03/08/2021, p. 3), indicating that she wants to live abroad, and explaining her *choice* for the multilevel institute for its more realistic characteristics than same level schools.

As observed in the *Participants' Profile* section, none of advanced students had a successful background learning English with previous experiences. Most advanced students, except Juliet and Esther, studied English language in the public elementary and high schools, where the English teaching is neglected, as extensively discussed in chapter 1. Later in life they attended same level English schools before the multilevel school but did not see any improvement in their English skills. Juliet and Esther studied in private elementary and high schools and the multilevel institute was their first experience formally studying English. Both also had parents who speak English, and therefore, taught them basic concepts, as well as took them to English-speaking countries in their childhood. It was interesting to note the following trend: the ones who studied in the public school system were the same ones who enrolled in several same level English schools before the multilevel institute, whereas the two participants who studied in private schools, even though they did not become fluent by only studying there, seemed to have an advantage in having more contact with the English language than the other participants, mostly due to their families' financial resources. This fact reinforces what was discussed in chapter 1 about the inequalities among public and private education systems in Brazil, specially in terms of English teaching.

Vygotsky mentions that learning depends on the purpose or motivation for learning, which explains why learners focus their attention on activities that are fulfilled with purpose

(Yang & Wilson, 2011). Perhaps, when the participants chose to study English in a multilevel class, this *choice* was fulfilled with the purpose of achieving their individual goals, such as specific academic purposes, to live or study abroad, and to reach professional goals, which will be better discussed in the next section. In other words, based on Vygotsky's ideas, it might be possible that advanced students see in the multilevel EFL classes a higher possibility of fulfilling their purposes (Yang & Wilson, 2011), which can then raise a few concerns in terms of whether the multilevel can translate these goals into reality for students. During the interviews, I was not able to glean from the participants whether other classmates had succeeded in reaching their aims.

Motivations to continue. Motivations to continue studying in a multilevel English class (which is also interpreted here as *persistence* and *efforts*) are mainly based on participants' *whole identity* and *mental imagery* (Dörnyei, 2019b); and in noticing beginners' as well as their own improvement in the English language, which is the result of their own *efforts.*

As discussed in the literature review, the notion of *persistence* is closely related to the idea of *L2 Motivational Self-System* (Dörnyei, 2009b), which is based on the belief that the way in which people see themselves in the future plays an important role in giving them energy in the present to continue doing what they are doing to achieve their goals. This study has found evidence for advanced students' *whole identity,* as the transformation that learning English can cause in oneself (Dörnyei, 2009b), and *mental imagery*, in which someone with a developed ideal self could see themselves vividly in the future in, which relates to *vision,* a "vivid mental image of the experience of successfully accomplishing the goal" (Dörnyei 2019a, p. 58).

Participant Esther noted: "I am interested in the research field, and I have plans to apply for graduate studies abroad; and I need to learn English for that" (I, 03/15/2021, p. 4), which might indicate that her *whole identity* is based on the transformation that learning English can

provide, such as pursuing graduate studies abroad. In other words, Esther visualized herself studying abroad, which was her *mental imagery*, and to reach this goal, she needs to learn English. As previously mentioned, Participant Juliet also wants to study abroad. She noted: "I want to study abroad, master's degree; and so, I am going to take a summer course in Europe, but I need the IELTS to be approved; so, it is also a motivation for me" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 3), which indicates that her *mental imagery* is based on achieving the goal of studying abroad, through passing the IELTS test. Juliet also mentioned an interesting motivation for continue learning English:

> I really like the idea of consuming knowledge in its original language. I don't like translations; I don't like dubbed movies. I think it is much richer when you read or watch something in the original language, it is so much better for understanding (…). (I, 03/19/2021, p. 3)

This quote indicates that Juliet's *whole identity* is based on how learning English will allow her to consume content directly in English, and add "a new L2 dimension to one's self" (Dörnyei 2019b, p. 47), which she reported to be extremely important.

In the same way, participant Greg mentioned: "I want to travel abroad. That is my main motivation" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 3), which indicates that his *whole identity* and *mental imagery* are based on visualizing himself traveling abroad. Similarly, participant Andrew noted: "First, my motivation to study English is professional. I see that English nowadays is not even optional anymore. And besides that, to travel the world" (I, 03/12/2021, p. 4). According to him, speaking English is not optional anymore to achieve his professional goals, which could be considered his *mental imagery*: seeing himself professionally fulfilled as well as travelling the world. As previously mentioned, for Isabella, her *whole identity* and *mental imagery* are based on the success that speaking English can provide for her academic life as well as living abroad.

She noted: "I want to live abroad. (…) if I have the chance to live abroad, knowing English will make things better for me" (I, 03/08/2021, p. 3).

Therefore, as Dörnyei (2019a, p. 58) affirms:

People's vision of who they would like to become as L2 users seems to be one of the most reliable predictors of their long-term intended effort, because by keeping one's eyes focused on the bigger picture, a vision helps to underpin one's overall persistence.

As observed in the sections *motivation to begin* and *motivations to continue*, advanced students have ambitious goals and views of themselves as English language users, such as living and studying abroad, achieving a high score in proficiency tests, and improvement writing skills. Those are the most reliable reasons for their long-term effort and could have the power of making them persist throughout the learning process (Dörnyei, 2019a). However, can this short program fully prepare students to achieve their ambitious goals? The idea that this short multilevel program (18- 24 months) is going to prepare students better requires careful consideration, specially when it comes to tangible goals such as Esther's (writing development) and Juliet's (IELTS). Thus, whether the multilevel is going to directly benefit them in their future is uncertain.

Other factors that contribute for some participants' motivation to continue is to notice beginners' improvements as well as their own improvement in the English language, which is based on their *efforts*. Participant Andrew noted: "To notice our own development is harder, but to notice others that started from zero and now are speaking and see how they developed is really nice! Sometimes I can see myself in them. I believe it is a motivation!" (I, 03/12/2021, p. 3). According to Andrew, he finds motivation by watching beginners' improvements and their progress. He continued: "I see their development and I think 'I also need to keep studying' (…) I see that beginners study a lot, they are very motivated, and every class someone brings

something new (…)" (I, 03/12/2021, p. 3). Seeing beginners' efforts in class motivates him to study more and take efforts himself.

Jodai, Zafarghandi, and Tous (2013) affirm that we can only say a learner is motivated to learn a second language when he/she tries to do so, and that is why it is not enough to say that "a person who likes to learn a second language is motivated" (p. 4). Therefore, students seeing their own development in the English language might be taking more efforts to study outside of the class, which then becomes motivation. This motivation linked to the *effort* is also related to metacognitive approaches, which is the idea of thinking about your own thinking (McGuire, 2015). According to McGuire (2015, p. 16), "metacognition also gives students the ability to accurately judge how deeply they have learned something, whether they have only a superficial understanding or the ability to widely apply their knowledge", which was noticed in the following participants' experiences.

Based on efforts, participants Juliet and Esther affirmed that they have seen their own improvements. Juliet noted: "I attend the classes, but I study English 2 to 3 hours daily. So, humbly, I think my progress is great compared to the majority, because I do strive to study English at home" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 4). She also noted: "sometimes, when you are in the advanced level, you do not realize how good you are, but when I see someone that is struggling, I see how far I've got" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 7). According to her, seeing how much a peer is struggling in the learning process is also proof of her own improvement. Similarly, Esther affirmed: "I have learnt a lot by myself, watching TV shows and music video clips with subtitles in English", indicating that she sees her improvement when she learns things on her own. Both participants perceived improvement and that motivated them to continue studying.

As Jodai et al. (2013) stated, the definition of 'motivation' is not a simple one and cannot be understood only by one factor, for instance, just by likes or dislikes. As observed in

this section on motivation to begin and to continue studying English in the multilevel EFL institute, there are several nuances and details that affect motivation in English learners, such as *choice*, *persistence,* and *effort*, which were discussed considering advanced students' experiences.

Demotivating factors. As discussed in the literature review, demotivation is arguably a greater issue in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) than motivation (Thorner and Kikuchi, 2019). Among the several definitions of terms, this study differentiates *amotivation*, *demotivation* and *demotivators.* While *amotivation* refers to the complete lack of motivation, demotivation describes learners who were once motivated but have lost their motivation, which means that a demotivated learner may become motivated again (Thorner & Kikuchi, 2019). *Demotivators*, according to Kikuchi (2015, p. 3), are "the specific internal and external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action", and as these forces happen, a state of demotivation may be reached. With that in mind, this study found that advanced students reported mainly four demotivators of the multilevel EFL classes: remote learning, the need to settle for less, big group discussions, and the lack of immediate feedback.

Both participants Andrew and Greg shared how demotivating the remote learning is for them. As previously discussed in the *Interaction among leaners* section, both participants were not satisfied with the transition to online classes mainly due to the decrease in the interaction among students. In this section, I will focus more on the demotivating aspect of the remote learning from their perspectives. Participant Andrew noted: "The online classes also demotivated me a little bit" (I, 03/12/2021, p. 9). Similarly, participant Greg noted: "Online, we are more distracted (…) and it demotivates me!" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 9). As observed, both participants reported feeling demotivated towards the remote classes, mainly due to the number of distractions that come with it causing a decrease of interaction among learners. Based on

Sakai and Kikuchi's (2009, p. 61) six common external/internal demotivators in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, the demotivator *Class environment* seems to best describe both participants' experiences, in which, the remote learning is the environment, and the "inactive class" characteristic is interpreted as the decrease of interaction.

Another *demotivator* that was described by some advanced students is being required to participate in a group discussion with beginners, as they are pressured to settle for less, in a classroom activity, for instance, as the participant Juliet explained:

> I was in a group with beginners, and we had to discuss a topic and create a product together. I remember I had a great idea of a product, but I would try to explain to others, and they would not understand. So, we ended up doing the ordinary, basic idea, because they could not understand me. I had to decrease the quality of what I was doing and settle for less because the beginners did not understand me (…). (I, 03/19/2021, p. 6)

In other quotes from the participant Juliet in the *Challenges and benefits* section, she expressed that being patient with beginners is a challenge for her in the multilevel classes. Here, she expressed that suppressing her potential in class is a *demotivator*. According to Juliet, in a classroom activity in which she was placed with beginners, she was pressured to decrease the quality of her ideas to accommodate the answer to the beginners. As she described: "For example, there were small group with beginners, and I would have to explain everything to the group, to make them understand, which I did not like very much" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 6). She also affirmed that she prefers when the small groups replicate the multilevel nature:

> I like it when the small groups are actually multilevel (beginner, intermediate and advanced), but when they put me in a group with only beginners, I simply do not want to be the "teacher" there; that irritates me a little bit. (I, 03/19/2021, p. 6)

Juliet disliked being in a group with beginners because she felt that instead of using her knowledge to its maximum potential, she was suppressing it to adapt to the rest of the group's level, and she also did not like when she is a group with advanced students, and they only speak in Portuguese, as discussed in the *Challenges and Benefits* section. This was also observed in the classroom observations: when advanced students were put together in a breakout rooms, instead of practicing English, they spoke in Portuguese the entire time, which confirmed Juliet's frustration. Even though she mentioned that she prefers actual multilevel small groups, her previous experiences also indicate that she feels demotivated by being in small groups with both beginners and advanced students. Therefore, based on Sakai and Kikuchi's (2009) common external/internal demotivators in EFL contexts, Juliet's experiences indicate that *Experience of failure* could be the best type of *internal demotivator* to describes her experiences, which are characterised by the feeling of not being able to explore her full advanced proficiency level potential in class.

Different from Juliet, who feels demotivated when placed in a small group specifically with beginners, Isabella commented on another *demotivator* factor: to be part of a big group discussion, where there are lot of students, and consequently many divergent opinions. She prefers small groups, regardless of the proficiency levels, as noted: "I don't like it when it is a big group discussion. I prefer smaller groups for. (…) I am a bit shy, so I prefer smaller groups. Regardless of the level" (I, 03/15/2021, p. 6). My observation note also suggests the preference of one student for small groups: "the student who was shy in a big group, seemed to feel more comfortable participating in the small group" (O, 03/11/2021, p. 3). However, it seems hard to know for sure, as it might be that the task assigned in the observed small group was simply more appealing or one the student was better at.

Isabella's preference for small group discussion rather than big group discussion seems to be more related to the number of people, which might cause disagreements in discussion

topics, than the proficiency levels per se. That suggests that based on what we know so far about both participants, Isabella might have a more collaborative mindset than Juliet when it comes to group work, as the success of group work is more related to the collaborative interaction among peers than the proficiency levels (Sato and Viveros, 2016). Therefore, based on Sakai and Kikuchi's (2009) common external/internal demotivators in EFL contexts, Isabella's experiences indicate that *Class environment* could be the best type of *external demotivator* to describe her experience, characterised by her preference for small groups rather than big groups discussions.

Another common *demotivator* among some advanced students was the lack of immediate feedback from teachers. Juliet noted:

> When someone mispronounces, the teacher does not give an immediate feedback. I would like to have received more feedback on the things I did or said wrong, specially when I was a beginner. I had to go and look for myself, to see if what I said right or wrong (…) If I had received more feedback, I think I would have developed faster and felt less demotivated. (I, 03/19/2021, p. 5)

According to the participant, receiving more immediate feedback would have made a difference in her development as a beginner, giving her more motivation. She continued:

> They give you feedback, but it is not enough, you know. If you mispronounce 20 words, they will correct 1. There should be more of a feedback and correction when a student makes a mistake. This bothers me a lot because beginners and intermediates have many mispronounced words in one single sentence, and the teacher does not give immediate feedback. I understand that it can be dangerous because it can demotivate a beginner to speak again; but I think it is necessary because sometimes the person is pronouncing a word incorrectly, but she/he thinks it's correct. (I, 03/19/2021, p. 5)

According to her, the amount of immediate feedback is minimal and insufficient to promote improvement. She demonstrated a concern when she said: "I understand that it can be dangerous because it can demotivate students to speak again", indicating that by receiving too much immediate feedback, students might feel demotivated, specifically a feeling of failure. However, not receiving feedback also causes demotivation. However, in her opinion, immediate feedback should be more incorporated in the multilevel classes, when she noted: "It lacks correction. That's my opinion. It could be a private feedback section after class, I don't know. Something. There has to be a way to say "look, you made a mistake, and that's the correct way" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 5).

Similarly, participant Greg expressed his concerns about not receiving immediate feedback in class. He noted: "The role of the teacher is to give immediate feedback. When you see you made a mistake, and you are corrected, you can fix it. But when you receive a feedback of something you did a month ago, you just don't care anymore. There is no change at all, and then I feel demotivated and insecure (…)" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 7). According to Greg, when a student receives a feedback of an error from a month ago, what usually happens at the multilevel institute (see *Overview of the multilevel institute* section), the student is less likely to incorporate that feedback, and that demotivates him. He also compares his undergrad classes to the multilevel EFL classes: "in my undergrad, we study at home, speak in the class, and at the end the professor gives you a feedback. But in the multilevel English classes, you see that there are some mistakes that are not immediately corrected" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 7). By comparing his experiences, Greg was also able to identify the immediate feedback in his undergrad classes, but not in his English classes.

Through these excerpts, we can see how the lack of immediate feedback is a factor that causes strong demotivation for Juliet and Greg. Many advanced students shared throughout their interviews that they do not know everything, and because of that, they see immediate

feedback as an important tool to help with their development. Participant Juliet wished she had received more immediate feedback when she was a beginner student, which according to her would have helped her improve faster in the language. She shared how disappointing and frustrating it was for her to know that a beginner student is mispronouncing a word and not receiving immediate feedback, which according to the participant Greg is extremely important for the student to be aware of the mistake and correct it immediately. Therefore, based on Sakai and Kikuchi's (2009) common external/internal demotivators in EFL contexts, both Juliet's and Greg's experiences indicate that *Teacher* could be the best type of *external demotivator* to describe their experience, characterised by the lack of immediate feedback to students.

An interesting perspective came from participant Esther, as she noted: "If you have doubts or questions, the teacher answers it" (I, 03/15/2021, p. 7). This quote indicates that if a student has a question or doubt, the teacher will provide feedback or answer the question. Esther's point of view is relevant because it suggests general and direct questions from students receive a response, whereas spontaneous errors do not receive correction, according to Juliet's and Greg's experiences.

During my classroom observations, I noticed both immediate feedback and lack of immediate feedback. In observation 1, I noted: "Teacher corrected student pronunciation while student was speaking/reading" (O, 03/01/2021, p. 3). In observation 2, I noted:

> Teacher corrects students in the Zoom chat. Teacher corrects each student individually (pronunciation, order of the words etc.), while they answered the questions. Teacher did not correct pronunciation while students responded. Teacher did not correct them, asked them to do save their work to analyse next week. (O, 03/11/2021, p. 4)

In observation 3, I noted: "Teacher took turns asking questions to each student. When a student did not pronounce correctly, teacher would ask a question to emphasize the correct way.

Example of word in class: 'guitar'" (O, 03/11/2021, p. 3). As observed, I noticed more immediate feedback than a lack of immediate feedback, as suggested by the participants. However, I do not discredit participants' views and experiences, first because I also witnessed the lack of immediate feedback, and second because the way feedback was given depended on the activities, lesson topic and classroom. Also, it is also possible that my presence as an observer might have influences teachers' responses to feedback.

As discussed in the literature review, according to Ellis et al. (2006), "corrective feedback takes the form of responses to learner utterances that contain an error" (p. 340). Corrective feedback can be implicit or explicit. In implicit feedback, it is not evident that an error has been committed, whereas in explicit feedback types, there is. Implicit feedback often happens in the form of recasts, defined by Long (in press) as:

> a reformulation of all or part of a learner's immediately preceding utterance in which one or more non-target like lexical, grammatical etc. items are replaced by the corresponding target language form, and where, throughout the exchange, the focus of the interlocutors is on meaning not language as an object. (p. 2)

Explicit feedback can take two forms: (a) *explicit correction*, in which the feedback clearly demonstrates that what the learner said was incorrect (e.g., "No, not *speaked—spoke*") or (b) *metalinguistic feedback*, which are comments, information, or questions related to the the learner's utterance" —for example, "You need past tense," (Ellis et al., 2006).

Through participants' quotes, it is not clear which kind of feedback students refer to when stating "immediate feedback", whether it would be a corrective, implicit or explicit feedback, or a general feedback, in which students receive a general overview of their learning development. However, when I observed corrective feedback, those were both explicit and implicit. Implicit feedback happened, for instance, in observation 3, when the teacher asked a

question to the student using the word "guitar" pronounced correctly, so that the student would listen to the word, and make the connection between the mispronunciation and the correct pronunciation. Following the implicit feedback, the student repeated the word "guitar" using the correct pronunciation, which suggests that the immediate corrective feedback promotes a positive reaction in students, who will feel motivated to learn more, and aware of the attentiveness of the teacher. Explicit feedback happened, for instance, in observations 1 and 2, when the teacher corrected the student in the Zoom chat, writing the correct spelling and pronouncing it in the correct form, and when the teacher corrected each student individually immediately after their responses to a question. In both cases, students seemed to be satisfied with the feedback received.

On the other hand, my observation notes also suggest the lack of immediate feedback in observation 2, in which the teacher did not give any type of feedback to mispronounced words. In another moment, the same teacher did not provide corrective feedback to beginner students in their pronunciation but asked them to do save their work as it would be analysed next class. At that point, the class was not close to an end yet, and therefore, from my perspective, the teacher would still have enough time to issue corrective feedback for the students. However, whether there was time to give corrective feedback or not is beside the point. Surely the purpose of the task should matter. If the task was primarily a fluency/meaning-based one, then it was entirely appropriate that corrective feedback was not the priority. However, if the task was focused on accuracy/form, then it was reasonable for students to expect corrective feedback.

English Skills Development

As discussed in the literature review, 'knowledge' and 'skill' are two related concepts. As DeKeyser (2017) stated, "skill is a form of knowledge" (p. 16), for instance, grammar can

be considered the *knowledge* and speaking is the *skill*. I also discussed about the different types of knowledge (declarative versus procedural; and, explicit versus implicit). Declarative knowledge is the 'knowledge that' and 'knowledge of facts'; procedural is the 'knowledge how', which is a form of knowledge permanently stored in memory and constantly used for executing specific skills (DeKeyser, 2017). In terms of explicit versus implicit knowledge, explicit is knowledge one is aware of, and implicit is knowledge without awareness (Reber, 2013; Rebuschat, 2013).

When I asked, "how do you see your English skills development in the multilevel classes?", by observing participants' facial expressions, I noticed that most of them did not seem completely prepared to answer that question with certainty. Participant Esther even commented: "I've never thought about how my reading is improving, but (…)" (I, 03/15/2021, p. 12). That might indicate that participants lack metacognitive strategies, which according to McGuire (2015, p. 16), "gives students the ability to accurately judge how deeply they have learned something, whether they have only a superficial understanding or the ability to widely apply their knowledge". Being aware of their own development is important, specially considering how much time, energy and resources are put into studying English; as well as how many ambitious goals and dreams are depending on it.

Before going into more details about participants' experiences, it is important to remember that, as discussed in the *Overview of the multilevel institute* section, the institute claims that the classes are focused on the four main English skills: writing, reading, speaking, and listening.

Overall, advanced students noticed a development in their speaking and listening English skills because of the multilevel classes. Some also found that the least development was in their writing and reading skills; while others do not attribute their development in

writing and reading to the multilevel classes itself, but to their own efforts to study outside of the class.

Participant Esther noted:

My pronunciation got better. My writing, I still do not know for sure. (…) Sometimes we are in a group with beginners, and I have to explain to them how to go about a topic when the teacher is not around. I think this also helps me with my speaking too. (I, 03/15/2021, p. 12)

Esther shared that through her interactions with beginners, when providing scaffolding, she improved the speaking skills, confirming what Paulo Freire (1966) claims that "the one who teaches is learning while teaching, and the one who learns is teaching while learning" (p. 12). On the other hand, she is not certain whether her writing skills improved, which was the skill she wanted to improve by studying at the multilevel classes, as observed in earlier sections. If she is not sure about her writing skills development, that might indicate either that she did not improve or that she simply does not know how to measure such development, which could be done by using metacognitive strategies, according to McGuire (2015).

Participant Andrew noted:

I think my speaking and listening developed. Because I have contact with the students, in English. Writing is the one I developed the least. Not because of the multilevel, but because of me. I think that if I studied harder, I would get better in those areas too. (I, 03/12/2021, p. 13)

Andrew affirms that his speaking and listening skills developed because of his interaction with peers, whereas his writing skills did not develop as much. Andrew assumes that his lack of development in writing is due to his own lack of effort, as he said: "Not because of the

multilevel, but because of me. I think that if I studied harder, I would get better in those areas too".

Isabella noted: "My speaking developed well in the multilevel. The other ones were on my own: songs, TV shows, reading books" (I, 03/08/2021, p. 12). Isabella affirmed that her speaking skills improved because of the multilevel, and different from Andrew, she believes her own efforts outside of the classroom improved the other skills (listening, writing, and reading), and not the multilevel per se, suggesting what motivated student she is.

Similarly, Juliet noted:

Speaking got better because it is the one skill that I can't practice by yourself. Writing: I think there is a development, but not because of the multilevel. Listening: at the beginning I felt a difference because I was a beginner, but now, not anymore. Writing and reading: there is a development but not due to the multilevel. I think that is because the writing and reading activities are at the end of book, as separated activities. So, the difficulty level is not harder than what I can do. (I, 03/19/2021, p. 14).

Juliet also shared about her speaking skills development. She mentioned that her improvement in writing is not because of the multilevel, but because of her own efforts, which is a testament to what a motivated student she is. According to her, the difficulty level of the writing and reading activities are not higher than she would be capable of doing, and that is why she does not see an improvement in her writing because of the multilevel.

Participant Greg affirmed:

Listening and speaking got better. Writing not so much. Because we do not write a lot, there is not a lot of writing exercises, it is more focused on speaking and listening. Reading not so much either. The texts are short, and always have images too.

Greg's quote seems to suggest a criticism to the multilevel classes, which advertises that the focus of the classes are the four English skills, however, Greg affirmed that the real focus of the classes is in speaking and listening, since writing and reading activities seem to be secondary to speaking and listening activities, which Juliet also seemed to suggest.

As discussed in the literature review, development can happen through meaningful interactions and scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978) across levels of proficiency in multilevel EFL classes. Through these shared experiences, all advanced students believe that their speaking skills are the ones who developed the most, which could be due to meaningful interactions and scaffolding in class.

Participants focused on answering about how they perceive their improvement related to their time in class, and I was able to grasp their perception on which skills they perceived as improved because of the multilevel, and which improved because of their own efforts outside of the classroom. On the one hand, it is important to recognize that despite being advertised that the institute offers classes whose focus are in the four English skills, most participants did not perceive the writing and reading skills to be the focus of the classes, which requires clarification and explanation, so that students are not creating expectations that cannot be reached. On the other hand, when students said, "I think there is a development, but not because of the multilevel", they are dividing their learning experience in half; when truly, their entire learning process is somehow connected, and even though it is not perceived, there might be implicit knowledge among those undeveloped skills, as implicit is the knowledge without awareness (Reber, 2013; Rebuschat, 2013).

Ohta (2005) states that adult learners may develop proficiency in classrooms, but the out-of-classroom learning setting is also relevant for their development, which includes what the participants mentioned as "songs, TV shows, reading books", as well as exchange partners,

at conversation tables, and, as for more advanced speakers, the use of English with friends and colleagues. When Andrew explains the reason for his lack of development in the writing skills, by saying: "not because of the multilevel, but because of me. I think that if I studied harder, I would get better in those areas too", he seems to understand that a learning process is a cycle and therefore, depends on many factors, such as: scaffolding by both people and external sources.

Ohta (2005) affirms that learners' development may be also scaffolded by materials such as textbooks, worksheets, and dictionaries; in the multilevel EFL classes, by their homework and, project assignment, for example, as well as all the efforts that are taken by the students out of the classroom. Ohta (2005) proposed that:

> Rather than understanding the ZPD as a strictly interpersonal space, it may be more useful to consider how the mechanisms of the ZPD may be internalized over the course of development such that literate adults become able to manage the ZPD for themselves as they interact both with people and with other L2 sources. (p. 506)

Therefore, just as the multilevel classes reflects the "reality" of multiple levels of proficiency, so, too, do the materials the students engage with. This study understands that all English skills development pointed out by the participants are part of their course and cycle of development, which allows students to manage the Zone of Proximal Development for themselves, through both scaffolding and interaction with classmates and teachers, and external L2 sources such as: book materials, internet, and entertainment.

To conclude this section, the findings suggest that for participants to acquire a declarative knowledge of the English language, that is, knowledge permanently stored in memory and constantly used for executing specific skills (DeKeyser, 2017), they must engage in metacognitive strategies (McGuire, 2015). This approach provides students the ability to

judge they own learning development, and to understand whether their development is superficial or if they can accurately and widely apply their knowledge in real situations (McGuire, 2015).

Beginner students' experiences

Challenges the multilevel

This research found that beginner students find multilevel EFL classes challenging in terms of prioritizing English in their lives and preparing for the class in advance; and managing their anxieties, such as caring about peers' opinions of their low English skills and feeling frustrated for not being able to comprehend the classes.

Prioritizing English and pre-class preparation. When asked "what is the challenge of the multilevel?", some beginner students described challenges such as: prioritizing English in their lives and having a pre-class preparation. As discussed in the *Advanced Students* section, it is important to consider participants' contexts, and personal lives to better understand the data. All beginner students' participants had full-time jobs, which demanded most of their daily schedule. Considering their realities, it is understandable how prioritizing English, by for example, having a pre-class preparation was perceived as a challenge.

Participant Pietra mentioned that prioritizing English and pre-class preparation are her biggest challenges in the multilevel classes. She noted:

> To prepare. I have to dedicate more time to study at home. It is not enough to just attend classes. I need dedication to study. And having a young child, I have to study like you can see here now, I have to study when she sleeps, or when her father stays with her in the living room. If I dedicated more outside of the classroom, I would develop more. (I, 03/19/2021, p. 8)

According to her, having a child makes it harder for her to concentrate in taking English learning as a priority in her life, as consequently preparing for classes. As mentioned in the *Participant's Profile*, during the interview, we were constantly being interrupted by her child, which suggests that for her, prioritizing English and preparing for the classes is a real challenge. By saying "If I dedicated more outside of the classroom, I would develop more", she is aware that in multilevel classes studying at home is essential, as noted by Shibukawa & Taguchi (2019, p. 314), "the pre-class preparation time plays a promising role for deepening students' understanding during the (…) class time in the flipped classroom settings". As previously discussed in this thesis, multilevel EFL classes can be considered *flipped classrooms*, as students are expected to work on information and content outside of class (Davis & Minifie, 2013).

Similarly, participant Lucas noted: "The biggest challenge is that you have to take efforts on your own. (…) the biggest challenge is to dedicate. You have to do the exercises at home (…)" (I, 03/23/2021, p. 8). According to Lucas, prioritizing English is the biggest challenge, which includes pre-class preparation, being dedicated and taking efforts on their own to improve in the language learning. Participant Evelyn also shared that she is striving to dedicate more: "(…) I am striving to do the activities before the class to be better prepared. I have to go beyond the activities" (I, 03/20/2021, p. 8). When Evelyn said she is *striving*, it indicates that pre-class preparations is a challenge for her, but she tries. She also mentioned that she needs to study beyond the activities, indicating that she tries to take efforts on her own to develop in the language.

Participant Kate noted: "Teachers ask a lot from us. We must prepare before the class, and all that" (I, 03/08/2021, p. 5). According to Kate, teachers require students to dedicate. Even thought Kate did not specify what "ask a lot" means, we know that there is a difference between simply being a rigorous teacher and engaging learners in actual active learning

elements, such as meaning-making inquiry, action, imagination, invention, interaction, hypothesizing and personal reflection (Cranton, 2012) as well as teaching them to become equal partners in the learning process (McGuire, 2015). As I discussed before in the *Advanced Students* section, these active learning elements were not deeply observed in either advanced nor beginner students' experiences and observation notes, specially when the observed teacher did not promote any of these elements when a student struggled to communicate in one my observations.

To conclude this challenge, participant Leo noted: "My routine is very busy, and because of that, perhaps I should be trying harder to study more. (…) so, I try to prepare for my classes in the weekends" (I, 03/08/2021, p. 5). Having similar experiences to the others, Leo is more specific about having a busy routine that prevents him from prioritizing English in his life; however, he still takes efforts to prepare for classes during the weekends, which indicates how motivated he is, as *effort* is one of the elements of motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021).

All beginner student participants shared that finding this balance between their own personal lives and taking control of their own learning, by prioritizing English and taking the time for pre-class preparation, is an important part of studying in a multilevel EFL class, and that, it determines whether students have a good development or not, indicating once more that multilevel classes can indeed be considered *flipped classrooms*, where students are expected to come to class better prepared (Weimer, 2015). It is interesting to note that this challenge was also observed among the advanced students. The further section *Differences and Similarities* will better discuss and relate both experiences.

Anxiety. As discussed in the literature review, this study found that another common challenge among beginner students is *foreign language anxiety* (FLA). Participants described

feeling anxiety and insecurity about their interactions with advanced students, such as: caring about peers' opinions of their low English skills and feeling frustrated for not being able to comprehend the classes.

Briefly recalling, Foreign Language Anxiety could be classified into two different types: debilitating (harmful) anxiety and facilitating (helpful) anxiety (Alpert & Haber, 1960). The effects of debilitating anxiety could be direct as reducing class participation or indirect such as fear, frustration, and worry (Oxford, 1999). However, facilitating anxiety helps learners to perform well in their language learning (Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019). This study has found the presence of both debilitating and facilitating anxieties.

When asked about their biggest anxieties and insecurities about learning English in a multilevel class, participants mentioned interacting and communicating with advanced students, in terms of caring about other opinions and feeling frustrated for not understanding the classes. Participant Leo shared: "(…) The challenge is to not feel frustrated when we do not understand all of it. But at least, try to understand the context of the class" (I, 03/09/2021, p. 7). According to Leo, the challenge of the multilevel is to not feel frustrated when they are not able to understand the class, which relates to *test anxiety*, defined as "a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 127), fear of failure representing the fear of not understanding the lessons, teachers, and peers. Similarly, participant Pietra shared how difficult it is not to feel frustrated in those situations:

> If I can understand a bit of what the advanced student is saying, I feel okay and comfortable. If the person speaks too fast and I am not getting the context of the conversation, I feel desperate. I feel sad, I feel like I don't know anything.

She continued: "(…) We spend most of the time trying to understand them (…)" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 8). According to Pietra, she is insecure about interacting with advanced students, because it

takes time to understand what they are saying, and when she does not understand, the feeling

of frustration and *test anxiety* take over. Even though those anxieties could be perceived as

negative at a first sight, they might also have the potential to co-occur with the excitement in

trying to understand advanced peers, teachers, and the class, which according to Dewaele and

MacIntyre (2014) facilitates progress in foreign language learning.

Participants Kate, Lucas, and Evelyn shared similar anxieties. Kate noted: "(…)

perhaps an advanced student could be laughing at my pronunciation" (I, 03/08/2021, p. 5).

Lucas also noted: "What are they going to say about me? (…) I was in a class where I knew

some of the advanced students, and I thought "they will know that I don't know anything" (I,

03/23/2021, p. 5). Evelyn noted: "Speaking. I have a lot of difficulties with speaking. Maybe a

fear of speaking wrong. I am okay with writing, reading. But when I have to speak, I freeze"

(I, 03/20/2021, p. 5).

The three participants expressed anxieties related to *communication apprehension*,

which is a form of situational anxieties related to interpersonal communication and oral

expression (Argaman & Abu-Rabia, 2002), and *fear of negative evaluation*, which is the feeling

of "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and expectation

that others would evaluate oneself negatively" (Horwitz et al. 1986, p. 127). Young (1991) also

have explained a learner's self-esteem relates to foreign language anxiety. Overall, people with

low self-esteem are more worried about what other people think about them, which increases

the level of anxiety (Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019). It is not my place to affirm whether those

participants suffer from low self-esteem; however, their experiences suggest a high level of

anxiety towards interacting with advanced students, which in the long-term might cause them

to "naturally segregate themselves from the more outspoken or advanced-level students" (p.

2), as Mathews-Aydinli and Horne (2006) noted.

Benefits of the multilevel

This research found that beginner students believe multilevel EFL classes are benefiting in terms of the interaction with advanced students, as it represented the real world, exposed them to future grammatical topics, taking them out of their comfort zone. For beginners, the interaction with higher levels was both a challenge and a benefit.

Representation of the real world. Some participants believed that the multilevel classes provided a real-world experience in terms of allowing them to interact with different levels of proficiency. When asked "What is the biggest benefit of the multilevel?", participant Kate noted: "The interaction among students from different levels. Because when I travel abroad, I won't be speaking only with people from the beginner level, for example. It boosts me! I believe the multilevel is a representation of the real world" (I, 03/08/2021, p. 6). According to Kate, even though her interactions with advanced students are a challenge and give her anxiety, it is also a benefit, as it energizes her to keep on improving. Similarly, participant Leo noted: "It is the method that better represents the reality outside the classroom, after all, when you speak to someone, you don't know what their level are. (…) the multilevel expresses the daily life of someone who speaks English" (I, 03/09/2021, p. 10). Kate and Leo expressed the same opinion about the multilevel EFL classes: it represents the real- world, in which people with different levels of proficiency interact among each other.

These excerpts confirm what Carr (2005) stated, that multi-level classes bring about an increase in the diversity of students in terms of proficiency, background, and experience, as also noted by the participant Evelyn: "It brings up not only our reality, but other people's realities too" (I, 03/09/2021, p. 10), in which, multilevel classes are "built on the premise that diversity is not a challenge to be overcome, but an asset and a resource that promotes learning. All classrooms are diverse" (Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003, p. 16).

Exposure to future grammar topics. According to the participants, multilevel classes provide the benefit of giving beginners a glimpse of future grammar topics, which will be studied as they advance in the English learning process, and consequently, take beginners out of their comfort zone.

Participant Evelyn shared:

When you are discussing about a topic with people from the same level as yours, it is like you are stuck. It is like you spend a long time doing the same thing. In the multilevel, you begin to familiarize yourself with something you will study in 2 months, for example. It is way more efficient. (I, 03/20/2021, p. 11)

According to Evelyn, the advantage of studying in a multilevel class is that beginners are exposed to future grammatical topics while studying their own topics, and for her that is more efficient than same level classes. Evelyn described the feeling of being "stuck" when only interacting with beginners. Kate also noted: "when I see the advanced students, I feel challenged to get there too. When I studied in the same level school, I did not feel challenged to move forward, I was in my comfort zone" (I, 03/09/2021, p. 10). Participant Lucas and Pietra also described that their interaction with advanced students as takes them out of their comfort zones. Lucas said: "(…) having this experience with people who know more than I do, takes me out of my comfort zone" (I, 03/09/2021, p. 10). Pietra also mentioned: "(…) I think this is super interesting because it takes you out of the comfort zone" (I, 03/23/2021, p. 09). It is interesting how the exact phrase "comfort zone" was repeated a lot. While it is not clear why, this might indicate that beginner students are completely aware that, in the multilevel classes, making efforts is essential to succeed.

Through participants' quotes, it is noticeable how the interaction with advanced students prepares beginner students for future grammar topics, which awakens their curiosity

to research more about a future topic, taking them out of their comfort zone, which is their own level. Participant Isabella, an advanced student, shared an interesting experience from when she was a beginner student:

> When I was a beginner, I remember an advanced student learning past continuous, and there was the use of "have been". And I got home and researched about it. But I was mixing up "*been*" with "*bean*". And I wondered: "Why is he talking about *beans* all the time?" It is funny, but it was interesting, because it made me curious about it when I was just a beginner. I even asked my teacher at the time, and she told me not to worry about it, as it was a content for the future. But she told me: "no, it is not *beans*". (I, 03/08/2021, p. 10)

Her experience provides an interesting example. As all students in the class are used to sharing their current grammar topics through verbal activities, reading, and speech, Isabella did not have a chance to read the word *been*, rather, she only heard it from advanced peers and the teacher. This experience awakened her curiosity, which brought her to research more about it. However, due to her lack of knowledge about the past continuous grammar, she could not find an answer, and assumed that *been* meant *bean,* as at that point, that was the most familiar sound. However, she could not understand why the student would say *bean* in every sentence, which indicated that she needed an explanation.

Ashton's (2018) study found that some multilevel teachers also observed as a benefit of the multilevel "the ability for students to operate at a level above their year level" (p. 112), which confirms Isabella's experience. When in contact with advanced students, beginners were exposed to future grammar topics, which affected them positively, as some took the time to learn more. It is interesting to note the teacher's posture in Isabella's experience: possibly, knowing that the exposure to future grammatical topics could cause anxiety in beginner

students, s/he did not try to explain the correct meaning of *been*, which could have made her more confused; rather, the teacher clarified that the meaning was not *bean,* while inviting her to focus on the beginners' grammatical topics.

As discussed in the previous section about advanced students' experiences, it is worth noting the contrast between what both advanced and beginner students perceive as a benefit of multilevel. Both groups see the interaction across levels as the main benefit; however, in two contrasting but complementing aspects: a) advanced students when they review beginners' topics and b) beginner students when they are exposed to advanced level's topics. More on this will be discussed in the further section *Differences and Similarities.*

Interaction and proficiency

As discussed in the previous section, beginner students' experiences in terms of interaction among levels were described as a benefit of the multilevel classes and essential to their own development. According to the participants, advanced students are inspirations, and they provide help, as according to them, teachers' help was deemed insufficient.

Advanced students as inspirations. Most beginner students perceived advanced students as inspirations, and a representation of what they can become. Participant Evelyn noted: "When I see people from the advanced level, I see that as a fuel to get there too!" (I, 03/20/2021, p. 10), indicating that observing and interaction with advanced students energizes her. Similarly, participant Lucas mentioned: "(…) they told me that when they started, they were worst than me. So, I have a target to reach. To see how people developed and how much they learned in their learning process (…)". Knowing that other students went through a similar path to become advanced students gives him energy to continue. On the same way, Kate and Leo noted: "The advanced ones inspire me. I want to be like them" (I, 03/08/2021, p. 10).; "(…) I want to be where they are" (I, 03/09/2021, p. 09).

Participants' quotes clearly suggest that having advanced students in their classrooms serves as inspirations of who they want to be, a characteristic that seems to be more present in multilevel classes. Words participant used, such as "fuel" and "target", reveal that by interacting with advanced students, beginners feel motivated and energized to continue studying English, which relates to the concept of L2 Motivational Self- System, based on the belief that the way in which people see themselves in the future plays an important role in giving them energy in the present to continue doing what they are doing to achieve their goals (Dörnyei, 2009b). More on L2 motivation will be discussed in the next section *Motivations to study in a multilevel class.*

Advanced students provide assistance. Instead of inspiring beginner students from afar, according to the beginner students, advanced students provided assistance in the classroom, as the teachers' help was deemed insufficient.

Participant Pietra noted:

When I first started, the teacher would put us in small groups, the advanced students would help me. (…) I think it helps a lot to be assisted by an advanced student. (…) The advanced classmates have a lot of patience with us in the beginner level. (I, 03/19/2021, p. 09)

According to her experience, being assisted by advanced students in small groups helps her perform better in class and aligns to Kim's (2017) opinion that "(…) interaction does foster L2 development" (p. 127). Similarly, participant Lucas shared: "when we are in the small groups, there is a pressure to speak. But they (advanced students) are very friendly and kind with me. (…) I feel more comfortable to make mistakes" (I, 03/23/2021, p. 7).

It is interesting to note that from both experiences, advanced students do have patience with beginners, making them feel comfortable, which aligns to what Sato & Viveros (2016, p.

107) stated: "proficiency does not define how much of a collaborative mindset the learners may possess". Through *scaffolding* and collaborative mindset, advanced students support beginners to achieve success in activities they are not able to perform alone (Vygotsky, 1978), which is beginners' potential zone of development.

On a deeper level, participant Evelyn noted:

Once I had some advanced students in my small group and they shared about their experiences and said: "we've been through what you are going through, keep pushing, be patient, and do not be afraid to speak in English and to ask questions" (…) many people give up because there is no support from more advanced people. I think that the advanced students should help the others to develop. It is not enough to have the help only from the teacher. (I, 03/20/2021, p. 11)

Evelyn's experience is extremely important because it confirms that the level of proficiency is not definitive to whether a student has a collaborative mindset towards the peers or not (Sato & Viveros, 2016). Her experience suggests that advanced students not only provide assistance in terms of content or activities, as Kate shared: "To interact with the advanced students make me learn new vocabularies" (I, 03/08/2021, p. 09), but also emotionally, providing strategies on how to cope with the beginner level, such as: "do not be afraid to speak in English and to ask questions" and encouraging them to participate on their own learning process. It is interesting to note that, according to Evelyn, some students end up giving up on their studies due to the lack of support from advanced students, which indicates that, indeed, multilevel classes are a better fit for highly motivated students.

When Evelyn mentioned that "it is not enough to have the help only from the teacher", it suggests a reality of the multilevel EFL classes: teachers must adapt to each level to provide the proper assistance. This has already been noted by Ashton (2018) as a challenge that

multilevel teachers face: a "sense of frustration and guilt that no matter how hard teachers worked, the quality of teaching, and assessment grades, were not as good as they would be in a single level class" (p. 113). This might suggest that multilevel teachers in general should also be scaffolded, through in-school support, professional development etc., so that they also have the tools and strategies to teach in a multilevel class. As described by the participant Evelyn: "The teacher has to have the patience to serve the beginner and the advanced students. And the advanced students also need patience to deal with the lower levels (…) We all must find this balance" (I, 03/08/2021, p. 09), indicating that students and teachers should find a balance.

On this topic of teachers' role in the classroom, when asked "in your opinion, what is the teacher's role in the class?" participants shared their experiences. Kate noted: "The teacher provides guidance, according to the level" (I, 03/08/2021, p. 12). Leo shared: "To be the guide" (I, 03/08/2021, p. 12). Pietra mentioned: "To provide guidance. The teacher does not focus on teaching. He guides us into conversation. In the multilevel, the teacher is less teacher and more of a person who provided guidance. The teacher directs the studies more than teaches" (I, 03/08/2021, p. 12). As observed, most participants agreed that the teachers' role in the multilevel was to provide guidance, which might suggest why some participants believe teachers' help is insufficient: having the role to provide guidance, and not necessarily to be individually solving students' questions and doubts, advanced students also seemed to be expected to provide assistance to beginners.

This was observed in one of my observations, in which the teacher in that class expected the advanced students to help beginner students: "Teacher said to the beginners: 'do not to be afraid to ask questions to your advanced classmates whenever you need'" (O, 03/11/2021, p. 2). This note suggests that the teacher not only was aware of the advanced students *scaffolding* the beginners, but also expects them to provide that assistance at any time beginners needed. However, as discussed in the *Advanced Students' Experiences* section, it is important to note

that advanced students did not for the most part want to be perceived or function as teachers, and therefore, they should not be expected to assist beginners at any cost. As beginners, advanced students are also students in the multilevel class, and require *scaffolding* from peers and teachers to continue developing in the English language.

Learning while teaching. In terms of beginner students' interaction among themselves, some beginner students believed that there must be a mutual help among beginners, which allowed them to learn while teaching. As mentioned, some beginners believed that they learn best when they teach others, providing a mutual help among each other, as observed:

Participant Pietra noted:

Nowadays, I can help the ones that know less than I do. I think we take in better when we teach someone. I have always studied explaining the content to myself, and when I am teaching someone, I assimilate better. (…) When I am able to help someone, yes, I feel good. (I, 03/08/2021, p. 12)

According to Pietra, she reinforces her knowledge by teaching, or helping other beginners, confirming what Paulo Freire (1966) claims that "the one who teaches is learning while teaching, and the one who learns is teaching while learning" (p. 12), besides that, she finds satisfaction providing assistance to other beginners, which indicates that she has a collaborative mindset.

Similarly, participant Evelyn shared: "We need to me mature enough to realize that we are there to help each other. When we are in small groups, and there is someone from my level who is struggling, I try to help" (I, 03/20/2021, p. 13). According to Evelyn, it is important to be "mature enough" to be able to help other, which according to Sato and Viveros (2016) means to have a collaborative mindset towards assisting other peers. As discussed in previous sections,

having a collaborative mindset, regardless of the proficiency level, might determine whether the student adapts to the multilevel or not.

This mutual help among beginners was also observed in the classroom observations, in which beginner students provided assistance to other beginners who had just started at the multilevel school. In observation 2, I noted: "Beginners: one of the students corrected the other saying: 'the right way is 'he *has* blond hair' and not he *have* (…)'" (O, 03/11/2021, p. 1), suggesting that peer feedback was present among beginners. Peer feedback can be beneficial to L2 learners, as indicated by Lyster and Sato's (2012) study findings that the provision of peer feedback resulted in improved accuracy and fluency. Similarly, in observation 3, I noted: "One beginner student was more of a "leader" in the small group and corrected the students while they were reading or speaking" (O, 03/11/2021, p. 3). The 'leader' student, who was the participant Evelyn, provided corrective and immediate feedback to the other beginners in the small group, which indicates another example of peer feedback. According to Choi and Iwashita (2016), having an expert in small groups work who can provide appropriate assistance, regardless of their proficiency, "can help to create a positive L2 learning environment, which might lead to L2 development in learners' ZPD through effective peer mediation" (p. 130). Another note was: "A beginner student asked "should we do it (the activities) on our own, or in group? A student replied that in group would be much better". The sentence "much better" might suggest that the beginner student perceived mutual help and *scaffolding* as tools for a better performance in class (Vygotsky, 1978).

Both interview excerpts and observation notes point us to a beneficial characteristic of the multilevel classes: beginner students believe that assisting other beginners makes them learn better, confirming Ohta's (2005) affirmation that adult peers do not need to be necessarily more capable or more advanced in order to provide assistance in the Zone of Proximal

Development, which is the zone in which the learner is not able to perform alone but could do so when assisted by others (Vygotsky, 1978).

On the other hand, two participants shared that too much interaction with other beginners made them feel "stuck" in their learning development. Participant Evelyn pointed out: "When you are talking about a topic with people from the same level as you, it is like you are stuck. It is like you spend a long time doing the same thing" (I, 03/20/2021, p. 13). Even though Evelyn mentioned before her willingness to help beginners, she seems to think that too much interaction with people from the same level could make her feel stuck. Similarly, participant Kate mentioned:

> There have been some moments that I feel frustrated to be in a group with only beginners, because if I were in a group with someone who knows more, I could be learning from them, and forcing myself to speak only in English. But this is personal, and something that I need to work on myself. Maybe I am wrong, but when I am with other beginners, I feel like I am dragging, behind, and not moving forward. (I, 03/08/2021, p. 10).

Kate's quote also suggested that she can be dissatisfied by being constantly in groups with other beginners, which gives her frustration and a feeling of being stagnated.

In my classroom observations, I noticed that most of the small groups were divided by same levels, which minimized the multilevel nature, at least for those moments. As the participants, I also wondered during my observations about the effectiveness of having small groups divided by same levels, instead of mixed proficiency levels. In observation 2, I noted:

> Division of groups according to their levels. I wonder how effective this is for students once the school is supposed to be multilevel; Beginners in small group: I wonder if the

"same level" moments in the classroom are good for their skills development or not. (O, 03/11/2021, p. 3)

Both interview quotes and observation notes suggested that mutual help among beginners can be beneficial or not. If beginner students were to be always placed in small groups with other beginner students, it is possible that the diverse aspect of the multilevel would be missing; however, if the beginner students were to be always placed with advanced students, it is also possible that some beginners would miss that opportunity to bond and relate to others who are facing the same challenges as a beginner student in a multilevel class.

Therefore, our data suggest that a beneficial mutual help among beginners depends on the frequency in which it is applied in the classroom. As Choi and Iwashita (2016) affirm, teachers should consider how learners position themselves in the small groups, either as a novice or an expert; and instead of assigning small groups based on their proficiency, it would be more beneficial to appoint "effective and collaborative members as a mediator in small group work" (p. 130) which would enhance the "creation of cooperative classroom environment" (p. 130), and help to create a positive English learning environment (Choi & Iwashita, 2016).

Remote learning experiences. The remote learning experiences for beginners were similar to the advanced students' experiences. Some believed that remote learning affected the interaction among classmates, while others believed the remote learning to be a good chance to study English, providing flexibility in busy days. As observed in the *Participants' Profile* section, their divergent opinions were influenced by their different lifestyles.

When asked about how they see the interaction with all levels in the remote learning, participant Pietra answered: "I think it is great. (…) if the classes were in-person, I would not be able to attend at this point in my life" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 12), indicating that because of her

current life situation, full-time worker, and mother, she is only able to study English because it is online. Similarly, participant Kate noted:

> I think it is good. Many things that we had in the in-person, they were able to keep in the remote learning, like the small groups, sharing the screen, writing on the whiteboard. I don't think this will be harmful at the moment. It is an adaptation to the moment we are living in now. (I, 03/08/2021, p. 10)

According to Kate, many of the in-person features could be reproduced in the online classes, such as having small groups, being able to share content through screen sharing etc., which for her means that the interaction is good. She continued:

> The interaction depends on the student. There are some students that I know were shy in the in-person classes, but they are more comfortable online. And others that were more extroverted after the classes, get a bit sad in the online classes for not having that face-to-face contact. For me, it has been easier. I am home, I am more comfortable. (I, 03/08/2021, p. 10)

Kate's experience is that the interaction depends on each student's experience. Some adapted better than others due to their shy or extrovert personalities. In her opinion, she prefers the remote learning because she feels more comfortable being at home.

> Similarly, participant Leo shared:

> Some people like it, others don't. It depends on the personality of each student. And, about the interaction, it depends on the maturity and the level. These days the remote learning has been wonderful for me. It is way more flexible, and I prefer. If in the future I have the option to go back to in-person classes, or to continue online, I will continue online.

According to Leo, each student in their individuality deals differently with the interaction, which depends on their personalities, and level of proficiency. He prefers the remote learning, as it is more flexible for his life.

On the other hand, participant Lucas shared a different opinion, that the interaction was affected by the remote learning. He noted: "In-person, it is easier to bond with the classmates and teacher; you can ask a quick question to the classmate sitting next to you, and you don't have that in the remote learning" (I, 03/23/2021, p. 09). According to Lucas, the interaction happens more naturally in face-to-face classes, when he said it is "easier to bond". Another aspect is the informal chi chat that the remote learning lacks to offer, which according to Vygotsky (1978) is essential for learning to take place more effectively, through sociocultural environment and through dialogue.

Similarly, participant Evelyn noted about the interaction:

I see that is more between teacher and one student at a time. Occasionally, there is an interaction among students in the whole group; but it happens more in the small groups. At least in my class, I do not see interaction among students in the big group. (…) The in-person class is warmer. The online is colder. And then, students turn off the camera, mute themselves (…). (I, 03/20/2021, p. 03)

According to her, the interaction among students is more visible in small groups than in big groups. She also mentioned that in her class, students usually turn off their cameras and mute themselves, which makes her classes feel less personal and more distracting. Similarly, Dörnyei (2019a) affirms that student engagement is overall a challenge specially at a time when social media has been intensifying students' social life, constantly bombarding young people with information from different sources, and strongly intending to capture their attention (Dörnyei, 2019a).

My observation notes also suggested how the remote learning negatively affected the interaction. During all observations, there were students with muted microphones and cameras off, specifically in observation 2, which I noticed the following: "Not a lot of interaction among the students themselves. It is more teacher-student interaction in the big group; some of the students were not too excited about the class, or at least their facial expressions suggested that" (O, 03/11/2021, p. 2), indicating that even those whose cameras were on, seemed to be struggling with the remote learning. As previously discussed, the remote learning is not the only cause for those behaviours, as considering the difficult COVID-19 situation, people's anxiety might have increased considerably. However, remote learning is a consequence of the pandemic.

As previously mentioned, Hartshorn and McMurry's (2020) study revealed that on average, the negative effect of transitioning to online teaching and learning was perceived severely by students, as a "hindrance that actually undermined student language development and created additional stress" (p. 15). Mahyoob (2020) also found that "students are not happy with distance education and many obstacles have been encountered" (p. 152). Both studies align to the minority of the beginner students' experiences in this thesis, Lucas, and Evelyn. On the other hand, other studies show that even though there are challenges related to the remote learning during the pandemic, such as: communications, interaction, assessment and assignments, online education experience, technology use tools, time management, stress and anxiety, students were positive and perceived the effectiveness of online learning during the pandemic (Rajab, Mohammad, Gazal, & Alkattan, 2020), which aligns to most of the beginners' experiences: Pietra, Kate and Leo.

As observed, most beginner students believed the remote learning to be a good opportunity to study English during a busy adult life, which most participants had, as they study or work full-time jobs and have families to take care of. Others believed the in-person classes

to be more interactive and personal. As observed in Hartshorn and McMurry's (2020) study, some people might perceive it as stressors triggering a crisis, while others view it as beneficial. The findings on this section also indicate that participants' lifestyles and circumstances played an important role in whether the remote learning was perceived as beneficial for them or not. To conclude, as Kim (2017) affirms, it is mot ideal to set comparisons among characteristics and learning outcomes of face-to face and remote learning interaction, as these two forms involve different conditions from cognitive, affective, and social perspectives; therefore, it is not surprising that research findings as well as this thesis demonstrate differences between face-to-face and remote learning interaction.

Motivations and demotivation

As discussed in the literature review, and in the *Advanced Student's Experiences,* most researchers agree that L2 motivation consists of a behavior of *choice, persistence,* and *effort* (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). This study identified two kinds of motivations among beginner students: motivations to begin (choice) and motivations to continue studying English in a multilevel class (effort and persistence).

Motivations to begin. As briefly mentioned in the *Participants' Profile* section, beginner students' motivations to begin their studies at the multilevel EFL institute, which is also interpreted as *choice*, ranged from participants' desire to experiment a different learning method, to the short duration of the program, and expectations to pass English proficiency tests.

Participant Evelyn explained that how her *choice* to begin studying English at the multilevel EFL institute was particularly based on her unsuccessful experiences in same level schools. She noted: "I have always felt demotivated going to traditional English school (…) so I wanted to try something different" (I, 03/20/2021, p. 03), indicating that she did not have a specific reason for choosing multilevel classes rather than trying a different method. Similarly, Leo, who had studied in another multilevel EFL institute before the current one, shared that

even though the previous school was also multilevel, his speaking was not good enough. He noted: "(…) but my speaking wasn't good enough. And now, before giving the next steps in my job, I need to be fluent, and I looked for a school who would provide a different perspective" (I, 03/09/2021, p. 03), which is the multilevel institute this study focused on. His quote suggests that his *choice* for the multilevel classes was also based on trying a different method of learning. Pietra also shared: "Now, I am trying this multilevel school, because I found the method interesting" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 02), indicating that multilevel was her *choice* because she wanted to try a different method of learning.

Participant Lucas commented on his *choice* for the multilevel classes. He noted: "If I were in a same level school, I would have given up already. The fact that it is a short time also motivated me a lot" (I, 03/23/2021, p. 03), indicating that learning in a short period of time is important for him. Participant Kate shared: "I found the school, but first as a workplace, and then in January, I started studying there. The fact that is a shorter time, 18 months, also attracted me. (…)" (I, 03/08/2021, p. 03), suggesting that she chose to study there first, because that was her workplace, and second, because it was a shorter program time.

As observed in the *Participants' Profile* section, none of beginner students had a successful background learning English with previous experiences. Except for Lucas, all beginners studied in public schools their whole lives, where the English teaching is neglected, as extensively discussed in chapter 1; and later in life attended same level English schools before the multilevel school; but did not see any improvement in their English skills. Like the advanced students Juliet and Esther, Lucas studied in private schools his whole life, and never had experienced studying English in other English schools before the multilevel one. He affirmed: "I studied English since elementary school in private schools, but it was not enough to become fluent" (I, 03/23/2021, p. 02). Therefore, most of the data suggest that their *choice* for the multilevel classes was based on experimenting a learning method other than the same

level English courses, which as they described in the interviews, did not bring any benefits for them.

It is interesting to note that, among all the participants in this study, three studied in private schools their whole lives, and had never had experiences studying English in other English schools before the multilevel one; whereas the other 7 participants all studied in public schools their whole lives and did study in several English schools before the multilevel one. This suggests that, the ones who studied in public schools felt an earlier necessity to learn English than the ones who studied in private schools, indicating that even though those who studied in private schools ended up also at the multilevel school, they seemed to have waited longer to look for opportunities to deepen their English knowledge, perhaps due to an advantage in having more contact with the English language than the other participants, mostly due to their families' financial resources.

Vygotsky mentions that learning depends on the purpose or motivation for learning, which explains why learners focus their attention on activities that are fulfilled with purpose (Yang & Wilson, 2011). Perhaps, when the participants chose to study English in a multilevel class, this *choice* was fulfilled with the purpose of achieving their individual goals, which will be discussed next. In other words, based on Vygotsky's ideas, it might be possible that advanced students see in the multilevel EFL classes a higher possibility of fulfilling their purposes (Yang & Wilson, 2011).

Motivation to continue. Motivations to continue studying in a multilevel English class (which is also interpreted here as *persistence* and *efforts*) are mainly based on participants' *whole identity* and *mental imagery* (Dörnyei, 2019b); and to notice advanced peers becoming fluent in English; and to notice their own development, which is the result of their own *efforts*.

As discussed in the literature review, the notion of *persistence* is closely related to the idea of *L2 Motivational Self-System* (Dörnyei, 2009b). This study has found evidence for beginner students' *whole identity,* as the transformation that learning English can cause in oneself (Dörnyei, 2009b), and *mental imagery*, in which someone with a developed ideal self could see themselves vividly in the future in, which relates to *vision,* a "vivid mental image of the experience of successfully accomplishing the goal" (Dörnyei 2019a, p. 58).

Participant Pietra noted: "My first motivation is to feel included. Second, for the master's program application (…)" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 02), indicating that her *whole identity* is based on feeling included in a society that privileges who speaks English. Pietra also visualizes herself studying a master's degree in her own city, which is her *mental imagery*, and to reach this goal, she needs to pass the English test. Participant Lucas also shared:

> My motivation is to gain confidence. In my job, I had to send an e-mail in English, and it was very difficult. Beyond my dream to learn English, I want to have the confidence to write and speak in English. Simple things like, if I need to travel for my job, or someone is speaking in English on the phone, I could say: "give me the phone, I speak English". Things like that. English for me will represent that confidence. (I, 03/23/2021, p. 02)

According to Lucas, knowing English will represent having self-confidence. His *whole identity* is the transformation that learning English can cause in his life, such as, being able to effectively write an e-mail or speak on the phone in English; and his *mental imagery* is visualizing himself being able to execute those activities confidently. Similarly, participant Evelyn shared: "In my job, I need English to communicate with foreign clients" (I, 03/23/2021, p. 02).

Similarly, participant Kate shared:

My boyfriend is fluent in English. So, he only watches movies in English, he can understand the songs in English. And I ended up feeling behind. Because I wanted to be with him and understand a movie for example, but I could not. So, that motivated me as well. Also, for my professional life. I think there are more opportunities for me, as an architect, if I know English. (I, 03/08/2021, p. 4)

According to Kate, knowing English will give her a sense of belonging. Her *whole identity* is the transformation that learning English can cause in her life, such as, being able to share that in common with her boyfriend, watching movies in English, for instance. Her *mental imagery* is visualizing herself having more professional opportunities as an English speaker. Similarly, participant Leo shared: "Professional growth" (I, 03/09/2021, p. 4), indicating that his *whole identity* is the professional growth that knowing English can provide him.

Different from the advanced students, beginners did not seem to have such ambitious goals with learning English, as most of their motivations to continue are based on improving their current daily activities, such as: being able to watch a movie in English with a partner, reply to emails and make phone calls in English, to be approved in a Brazilian university English test, and enhance their current or future job opportunities by knowing English. Those are the most reliable reasons for their long-term effort and could have the power of making them persist throughout the learning process (Dörnyei, 2019a). Therefore, the idea that this short multilevel program is going to prepare those beginners to achieve their goals is more plausible than the ones described by the advanced students.

Other factors that contribute to some participants' motivation to continue is to notice advanced students' improvements as well as their own improvement in the English language, which is based on their *efforts*. Participant Lucas noted: "It motivates me to see people who are in the advanced student understanding right away what the teacher asks, discussing the topic

(…) to see how people developed and how much they learned in their learning process motivates me to continue" (I, 03/23/2021, p. 4), indicating that he finds motivation by watching advanced students' improvements and their progress. He continued: "Also, to see my own development, which is very nice! I did not know what *would* mean. But I found out by studying on my own" (I, 03/23/2021, p. 4), suggesting that seeing his own improvement also motivated him. Leo also shared: "My project was done only by my knowledge. It was even a surprise for me, I did better in the speaking than in the writing. I was very happy with my results. And that motivates me!" (I, 03/09/2021, p. 5). According to Leo, noticing his own development through the project assignment surprised and motivated him.

Still related to *efforts*, participant Lucas shared: "if you are waiting for the teacher or school to show you or awake in you the desire to learn and to take action, you will be left behind. (…) The challenge is that you need to desire to learn." (I, 03/23/2021, p. 8). This quote is interesting because it suggests that highly motivated students may benefit more from this multilevel approach, and it is supported by what many advanced and beginners said about needing to take a lot of *efforts* on their own, for instance, preparing for the class. As Jodai et al. (2013) affirm, we can only say a learner is motivated to learn a second language when they try to do so.

The motivations to continue studying English in a multilevel class seem to be linked, again, to the interaction across levels. Data from both groups suggest that while advanced students are motivated by seeing beginners' improvements, beginner students are motivated by seeing how far advanced students have come. This suggests that multilevel classes motivates both group of students in similar ways, allowing one level to be inspired by the other, creating a balanced learning environment. Another common motivation to continue studying English in a multilevel class was when beginner students saw their own development in the language. As mentioned before, students' development was also the fruit of their efforts to learn the

language, meaning that only then, one could say those students are indeed motivated (Gardner, 1985).

Demotivation. As discussed in the literature review, demotivation is arguably a greater issue in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) than motivation (Thorner & Kikuchi, 2019). *Demotivation* describes learners who were once motivated but have lost their motivation, which means that a demotivated learner may become motivated again (Thorner & Kikuchi, 2019). *Demotivators*, according to Kikuchi (2015) are the specific internal and external forces or factors that reduce the motivational basis of an ongoing action and as these forces happen, a state of demotivation may be reached.

With that in mind, this study found that beginner students reported mainly two demotivators of the multilevel EFL classes: when they are not able to engage in classroom conversations, which relates to lack of pre-class preparation (see *Challenges of the multilevel* section), and remote learning. Participant Pietra shared: "(…) One thing that demotivates me is when I can't interact in the class. I am very shy, and sometimes when the teacher asks me a question, I can't answer it right away. I can't discuss" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 5), indicating that when she is not able to interact and engage in conversation, she feels demotivated. However, she continued: "But when I can prepare, I feel comfortable" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 5), which suggests that pre-class preparation allows her to interact more in class, which makes her feel motivated again.

Both participants Lucas and Kate shared similar experiences. Lucas noted: "What makes me insecure is when I do not prepare for the class beforehand, and I have to give a quick answer, I feel insecure" (I, 03/23/2021, p. 6), indicating that in his case, the lack of preparation for the class is closely related to feeling insecure. Kate also shared: "When I have to speak or give an answer to a question, and I don't know what to say or how to answer, I can get

frustrated" (I, 03/08/2021, p. 5), indicating that she feels frustrated when she can not interact. What Pietra called *demotivation*, Lucas and Kate called *insecurity* and *frustration*. As discussed in the *Anxiety* section, Kate and Lucas share the same anxiety as to what others think of their English skills. Their quotes suggest that, here in the beginners' experiences, there seems to be a correlation between *pre-class preparation, foreign language anxiety* and *demotivation*. Based on Sakai and Kikuchi's (2009) six common external/internal demotivators in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, *Experiences of failure* seems to be the one that best described their experiences, as the experience of not being able to engage in class.

Participant Evelyn shared how demotivating the remote learning is for her. As previously discussed in the *Interaction among leaners* section, Lucas and Evelyn were not satisfied with the transition to online classes mainly due to the decrease in the interaction among students. However, Lucas never mentioned that the remote learning was causing him demotivation, she simply shared his opinion that the interaction decreased. On the other hand, Evelyn did. Participant Evelyn mentioned: "Currently, the challenge is the remote learning, and I feel demotivated" (I, 03/08/2021, p. 5), clearly indicating that the remote learning causes demotivation, being *Characteristics of classes* the *demotivator* (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009).

Participant Leo, contrary to all beginner students, affirmed that he does not have any *demotivator*. He noted: "My desire to learn English erases anything that could demotivate me. My routine is very busy, and because of that, perhaps I should be trying harder to study more. But this does not motivate me" (I, 03/09/2021, p. 7), indicating that Leo is a highly motivated student.

English Skills Development

As mentioned before, it is important to remember that, as discussed in the *Overview of the multilevel institute* section, the institute claims that the classes are focused on the four main English skills: writing, reading, speaking, and listening.

Overall, beginner students reported to have noticed a higher development in both speaking and writing because of the multilevel classes, which was most perceived after the project assignment presentation feedback from the teacher. In second place was reading skills and in last place, listening skills.

When asked "How do you see your English skills development in the multilevel school?", participant Pietra shared: "I see that my grammar skills improved a lot. Even though I studied English before, I see an improvement. As the vocabulary improves, I end up speaking more" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 8). According to Pietra, her grammar improved, and consequently her speaking skills too, as DeKeyser (2017) stated, "skill is a form of knowledge" (p. 16); in this case, grammar can be considered the *knowledge* and speaking is the *skill*. She continued:

> This is something interesting in the multilevel that I forgot to mention before. Because we are challenged to speak more, I noticed that some of the things I used to say were wrong. And the teacher gives me feedback, and even other students give me feedback too in my intonation, pronunciation. And I think this is very nice! (…) the second (project) one was better, and that's when I noticed a progress, because I did not have to memorize it, I had to study and present it. That was a good experience. (I, 03/19/2021, p. 8).

Her experience is interesting because it suggests because she received feedback from the teacher and peers, she noticed error patterns in her intonation and pronunciation, and consequently, noticed an improvement in her speaking skills. She also perceived her

improvement after her project assignments. Evelyn also perceived a development in her speaking skills: "After my last project presentation, I saw a lot of improvement in my speaking. I got some feedback on the verb tenses. In two months, I improved a lot! (…)" (I, 03/20/2021, p. 8). Like Pietra, Evelyn perceived an improvement in her speaking skills after the feedback on the project assignment. She also noted: "I developed a lot in my writing too! I still have to get better in the connecting words, but I will get there!" (I, 03/20/2021, p. 8). According to Evelyn, her writing skills also improved in the multilevel classes.

Similarly, participant Lucas noted: "Speaking and reading. All of them are connected, but the ones I see the most improvement are those. The worst for me is still the listening, specially when it comes from native speakers" (I, 03/23/2021, p. 9). As Pietra and Evelyn, Lucas also perceived an improvement in his speaking skills, but not in his listening skills. Leo, on the other hand, perceived a development in his listening skills. He noted: (…) "My listening skills, in terms of interpretation, got way better. Also, the writing improved a lot, in terms of having more vocabulary. But I still need to improve more in the speaking" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 11). Similarly, Kate saw an improvement in her writing skills, and wanted to improve her speaking skills, as noted:

> I see a development in writing and reading. I still have some difficulties with the speaking, even though I see some minor progress when I am in class. I see my progress when I have to answer the questions from the book, when I am reading, I can understand the context, the overall idea. My project presentation was good, I was able to present without reading it. (I, 03/08/2021, p. 8)

Kate, as some of the other participants, perceived an improvement in her speaking after the project assignment presentation. Overall, participants provided proof of their development by giving examples of how they noticed such development: a) feedback on their project

assignments; b) being able to do things they were not able before, such as: responding to e-mails in English, reading books, watching TV shows without the subtitles, as Leo described: "(…) When I receive an e-mail in English from my job, and I understand easily, instead of going to Google Translate right away. I only use subtitles and translations are to check, but it is not a necessity anymore" (I, 03/19/2021, p. 11).

As discussed in the literature review, development can happen through meaningful interactions and scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978) across levels of proficiency in multilevel EFL classes. Through these shared experiences, three out of five beginner students believed that their speaking and writing skills developed the most, which might be due to meaningful interactions and scaffolding in class, as well as effective feedback from teachers and peers, as described by the participants. When the interviews happened in March 2021, most beginner students had either just started their studies at the multilevel institute or were enrolled for no longer than four months. Based on that, their descriptions of development and learning process were quite impressive. These achievements, beyond proof of development in the English language, are also evidence of scaffolding provided to students (Ohta, 2005) as an important tool for growth and development in and outside of the multilevel classroom environment.

On the one hand, it is important to recognize that despite the institute advertising that it offers classes focused on the four English skills, most participants did not perceive an improvement in their reading or listening skills. However, most of these undeveloped skills might have been implicitly acquired throughout the short period of time in which participants experienced multilevel classes.

To conclude this section, it is important to note the importance of immediate feedback for the development of students, as most of them received meaningful feedback on their project assignments. That perhaps suggests why beginner students noticed a higher development in

their writing skills compared to advanced students: most advanced students shared how they lack immediate feedback; that is, the lack of immediate feedback might be related to lower writing skills development. Also, as with advanced students, this section's data suggest that to judge their own development, and to understand whether their development is superficial or if they can accurately and widely apply their knowledge in real situations, beginner students must engage in metacognitive strategies (McGuire, 2015).

Differences and Similarities

This section compares and contrasts advanced and beginner students' experiences in multilevel EFL classes. By highlighting the most compelling similarities and differences, this section also answers the research question: What are beginners and advanced Brazilian English learners' views and experiences of multilevel EFL classes? This question is considered in terms of the following aspects: challenges and benefits, interaction and proficiency, motivation and demotivation and English skills development.
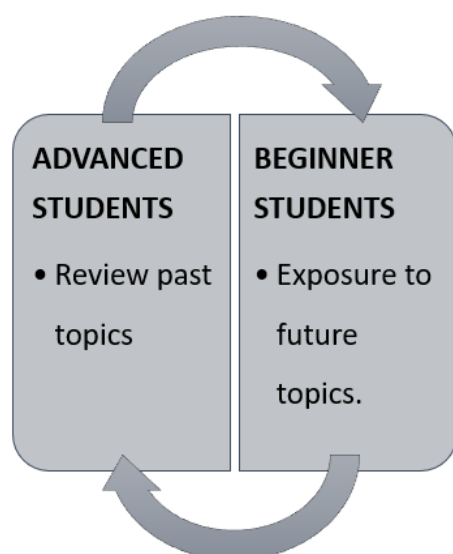
Challenges and Benefits

This study found differences and similarities in terms of the challenges and benefits advanced students and beginner students experienced. In terms of the differences in challenges, data suggested that while advanced students perceived as a challenge keeping focus and managing the time in the class and having patience with beginners, beginner students did not mention those challenges. This might suggest that due to their low level of proficiency, beginners are more attentive to the class, and avoid distractions that could lead them to miss important parts of the lessons. Another difference is related to the types of anxieties both groups experienced. Advanced students' anxieties were related to communicating with English native speakers and fear of being unaware of their own errors in the language, while beginners' anxieties were related to caring about their advanced peers' opinions of their low English skills, and not being able to comprehend or interact in class. Somehow, the advanced students' and

the beginners' anxieties related, as both groups feel anxious when interacting with people with higher-level proficiency in English. As a similarity, both groups mentioned that prioritizing English and having a pre-class preparation was their biggest challenge, indicating that this challenge might be a reasonable outcome of the multilevel EFL classes.

In terms of differences in benefits, while advanced students perceived as a benefit to be forced to speak English in class, beginners did not make mention to that, which might suggest that advanced students are expected to communicate more in English during the class than beginner students, specifically due to their higher-level skills. As similarities, both groups perceived being in contact and interacting with each other as the biggest benefit. For advanced students, this interaction allowed them to review beginners' content and for beginners. It was also a representation of the real world, where people do not always communicate with others from the same level of proficiency and allowed them to be exposed to future grammatical topics (See Figure 1). These data indicate that both groups benefit from the interaction among each other in different, but coherent ways.
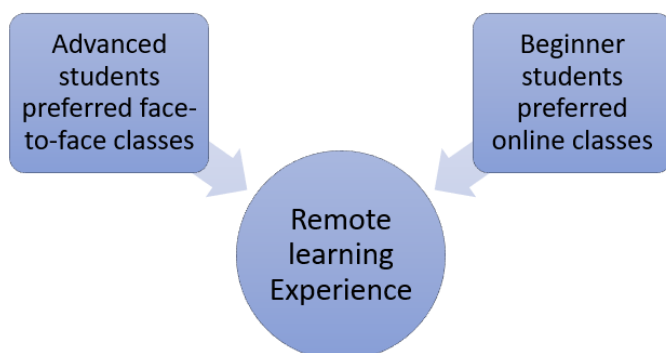
Figure 1

Benefits of interacting with each other:

Interaction and proficiency

This study also found differences and similarities in terms of how advanced students and beginner students experienced interaction in multilevel EFL classes. While beginner students reported that advanced students provided assistance, as teachers' assistance was deemed as insufficient, advanced students affirmed that even though they assist beginners, they do not wish to be considered teachers, and therefore, that they still required scaffolding from teacher and peers. At the same time, advanced students recognized that beginners also provided assistance, by reminding them of forgotten past topics and grammar.

About their interaction among their own levels, beginners reported that they learn while teaching other beginners in small groups; but they also reported the feeling of being stuck when frequently assigned in small groups with only beginners. Advanced students reported that not every advanced student is indeed a high-level English speaker. Both groups expressed divergent opinions about the remote learning. Most advanced students preferred the face-to-face classes, while most beginners preferred the remote learning. As a tentative explanation, participants' preferences are related to their current life circumstances, and/or personal preferences (See Figure 2).

Figure 2

Differences in remote learning experience

Note: Participants expressed different opinions about the remote learning.

Motivations and demotivation

This study also found differences and similarities in terms of how advanced students and beginner students experienced motivation and demotivation in multilevel EFL classes. Both groups reported similar motivations to begin their studies at a multilevel class: those ranged from the participants' desire to experiment a different learning method, program focus on adult learning, short duration of the course to expectations to develop specific skills, and to pass English proficiency tests. In terms of their motivations to continue studying, both groups reported their personal reasons and goals. Different from the advanced students, beginners did not seem to have such ambitious goals with learning English, as most of their motivations to continue were based on improving their current daily activities, such as: being able to watch a movie in English with a partner, reply to emails and make phone calls in English, to be approved in a Brazilian university English test, and enhance their current or future job opportunities by knowing English; whereas advanced students' goals were mainly to live and study abroad and to achieve a high score in proficiency tests (See Figure 3). Therefore, the idea that this short multilevel program is going to prepare beginners to achieve their goals might be more acceptable than the ones described by the advanced students. Both groups also found motivation to continue by noticing their own development in English, as well as each others' development: beginners noticing advanced students becoming fluent, and advanced students noticing beginners' improvements.

Figure 3

*Differences in motivation to continue*
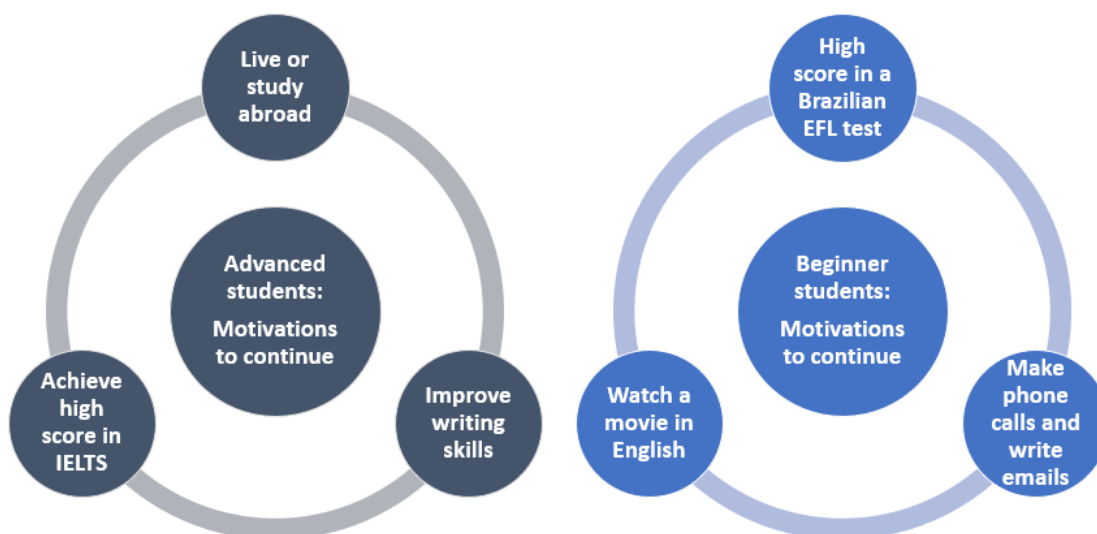
Participants' demotivators presented a few differences and similarities. Advanced students reported that the need to lower their own English skills in order to adapt to a small group with beginners is a demotivator, while beginners reported to be demotivated when they are not able to engage and interact in class due to their lack of pre-class preparation. As another difference is that while advanced students mentioned the lack of immediate feedback as a demotivation, beginners did not make mention to the lack of immediate feedback; on the contrary, most beginners reported having received meaningful immediate feedback from teachers and peers, which helped them perceive their own development. As a similarity, in both groups some participants reported that the remote learning is a demotivator; even though, in total, five participants preferred the remote learning, and five preferred the face-to-face classes. This data suggest that, indeed, the opinions on remote learning are divergent among participants, as previous research suggested.

English Skills Development

In terms of English skills development, both groups presented differences and similarities. As similarities, most advanced students as well as beginners perceived a higher development in their speaking skills due to the multilevel EFL classes, more specifically, seven of ten. On the other hand, most beginner students also perceived a higher development in their writing skills, whereas none of the advanced students did, or at least did not attribute their development to the multilevel classes. Most advanced students also perceived a higher development in their listening skills, whereas only one beginner perceived it as improved. Overall, neither advanced nor beginner students reported an improvement in reading skills, which might indicate that, even though the institute advertises its focus on the four English skills, the focus on reading needs to be re-evaluated (See Figure 4). As a tentative explanation, these data also suggest that the perceived lower improvement in specific skills relates to the lower amount of immediate feedback in those areas.

Figure 4

Differences and similarities in skills development
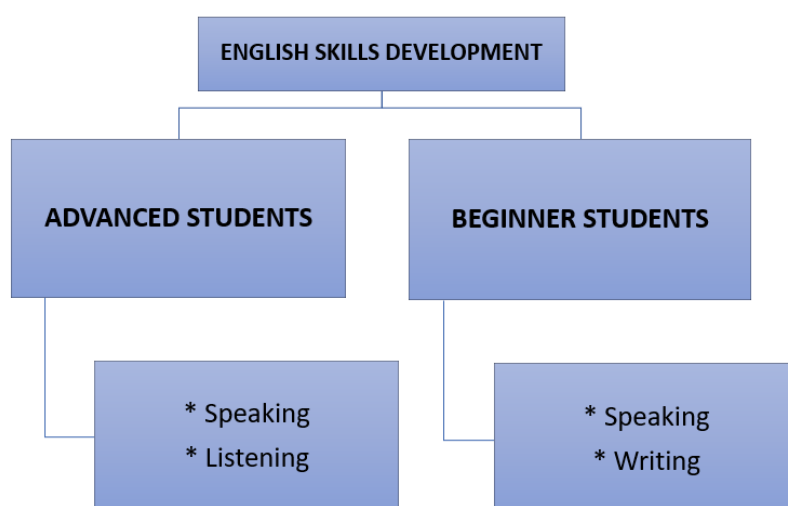
Note. Both groups developed in speaking skills. None of the groups developed in reading skills due to multilevel.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendation

Multilevel EFL classes are diverse classes in which learners from different backgrounds, life experiences and language skills are placed together in one group. In the Brazilian EFL context, a few schools are approaching the multilevel method as their official method, claiming its effectiveness for teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language. The multilevel institute in which this research was conducted confirms participants' perceptions that multilevel EFL classes mirror real-life situations in English-speaking countries, as people do not always communicate with others from the same English level of proficiency. Rather, they are in constant communication with people from different backgrounds, countries, cultures and consequently, English levels of proficiency.

Research on teachers' experiences (Ashton, 2018; Ashton 2019) in multilevel classes show that there are both challenges and benefits to adult English learners studying in multilevel English classes. However, up until the pilot study discussed in this thesis, and this thesis, there was a gap in the research when it comes to exploring learners' lived experiences and views of multilevel English classes. Because of that, this study aimed to understand and explore Brazilian advanced and beginner students' experiences in multilevel EFL classes.

Even though advanced and beginner students were at different stages of learning, this study has found that participants experienced multilevel classes both differently and similarly in terms of the challenges and benefits, how they perceived their interaction with each other, motivations to study in a multilevel institute, demotivators, and how they perceived their own English skills development.

Data indicated that both groups believed the biggest challenge of the multilevel was to prioritize English in their lives, by having a pre-class preparation, indicating that this challenge might be a reasonable outcome of the multilevel EFL classes. Data also indicated that *flipped classrooms* currently represents multilevel EFL classes in which students are expected to work

on information and content outside of class, and come prepared to class (Davis & Minifie, 2013). Therefore, data suggest that highly motivated students may benefit more from this multilevel approach, which is supported by what many advanced and beginners said about needing to take a lot of efforts on their own, for instance, preparing for the class. As Jodai et al. (2013) affirms, we can only say learners are motivated to learn a second language when they try to do so.

Addressing one of the challenges described by advanced students, some data emerged indicating that this seems to be a reasonable outcome: the number of levels and/or assessment frameworks used at the multilevel institute might be limiting to teachers, in terms of assessing students' actual learning trajectories (Knoch and Macqueen, 2017). Then, even though students might still do well in their project assignments, as assessments are subjective, they might be prematurely approved to the next level, as observed in interviews' quotes and classroom observations. Therefore, future research should focus specifically on assessment practices in multilevel EFL classes, collecting actual documental data from the institute.

On the topic of interaction and remote learning experience, data from this study suggest that participants' lifestyles and circumstances played an important role in whether the remote learning was perceived as beneficial for them or not. Therefore, setting comparisons among characteristics and learning outcomes of face-to face and remote learning interaction is not ideal. Claiming that one way is better than the other is also not ideal, as these two forms involve different conditions from cognitive, affective, and social perspectives (Kim, 2017); therefore, it is not surprising that the findings from this study as well as several others (i.e., Hartshorn and McMurry, 2020; Mahyoob, 2020; Rajab, et al, 2020) demonstrated differences between face-to-face and remote learning interaction and students' experiences.

Data suggest that one of the reasons that led participants to prefer face-to-face classes was the highly distracting online environment, which was also a challenge described by advanced students as related to the *focus and time management in class*. Therefore, data indicate that multilevel classes require extensive teacher leadership and *classroom management*, which is closely related to how the teacher manages and deals with leadership in the classroom. Even though multilevel classes could be considered as *flipped classrooms*, the challenges described by the participants suggested that perhaps more leadership in the classrooms would be helpful to minimize distractions among learners and to better manage the time students have in class, so that students are able to learn in an environment conducive to successful instruction (Brophy, 1996). However, it is also important to recognize that there are aspects of classroom management that may affect multilevel EFL classes in a particular way, such as students' unwillingness to speak in English and students at different levels of language proficiency (Macias, 2018).

As part of the challenges of the multilevel approach, participants shared their anxieties and insecurities. Data suggest that advanced students' personal and interpersonal anxieties are related to being unaware of their own errors, and uncertain if they are on the right path to achieving the next zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Throughout the data analysis, it became clear that advanced students lack immediate feedback from their teachers, and that general and direct questions from students receive a response, whereas spontaneous errors do not receive correction, as observed in the section *Demotivation*. Therefore, data indicate that the solution for these anxieties might be to receive more immediate feedback or to provide students a clearer explanation of how and why the teachers give feedback in certain ways and certain times, to alleviate frustration. Besides providing more immediate feedback, data also suggest that advanced students reported the need for special attention to teaching grammatical topics despite multilevel EFL classes being considered *flipped classrooms*, as

even though they are advanced students, they are still learning English, and therefore, require guidance specific to their level.

Beginner students' personal and interpersonal anxieties are related to *communication apprehension* and *fear of negative evaluation* (Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019). Data suggest that these anxieties must be somehow mitigated by creating awareness, as in the long-term, those might cause beginners to naturally segregate themselves from the more outspoken or advanced-level students (Mathews-Aydinli & Horne, 2006).

In terms of benefits, data suggest that both groups performed better when being scaffolded by peers, either higher or lower level, through *collaborative scaffolding,* where scaffolding is not necessarily from expert to novice, but bidirectional in collaborative peer interaction (Vygostky, 1978; Sato & Viveros, 2016), also indicating that having a *collaborative mindset*, regardless of the proficiency level, might determine whether the student adapts to the multilevel or not (Sato & Viveros, 2016; Watanabe & Swain, 2007).

Similarly, in terms of beginners' experiences, some data emerged indicating that a beneficial mutual help among beginners depends on how often it is applied in the multilevel classrooms, as some beginners reported feeling "stuck" when frequently assigned in groups with students from the same level. Therefore, data suggest that teachers should consider how learners position themselves in the small groups, either as a novice or an expert; and instead of assigning small groups based on their proficiency, it would be more beneficial to appoint leaders or mediators for each small group work, which would create a cooperative and positive English learning environment (Choi & Iwashita, 2016). Data also suggest that when advanced and beginners interact with higher levels, these are perceived as inspirations to who they want to become. This relates to the concept of L2 Motivational Self- System: the belief that the way

in which people see themselves in the future plays an important role in giving them energy in the present to continue doing what they are doing to achieve their goals (Dörnyei, 2009b).

Some data emerged indicating that, contrary to what some advanced students described as being a benefit, multilevel classes do not necessarily force students to speak in English all the time during the class. Rather, it suggests that advanced students communicated in Portuguese in class for mainly two reasons: 1) for their own convenience and comfort, and 2) to clarify the meaning of what they said first in English. Therefore, data suggest that perhaps the ideal benefit lies on the institute's clarification to be provided around ideal language use in the school, determining criteria for how and when to use Portuguese in class, while providing approaches and techniques to guide teachers on how to use Portuguese appropriately in class. Consequently, students and teachers would know what to expect from the English classes (Nanda, 2021).

In terms of participants' motivations, data suggest that advanced students have ambitious goals and views of themselves as English language users, such as living and studying abroad, achieving a high score in proficiency tests, and improvement in writing skills. However, the idea that this short multilevel program (18- 24 months) is going to prepare students better requires careful consideration, specially when it comes to tangible goals such as writing development and IELTS proficiency test. Thus, whether the multilevel is going to directly benefit them in their future is uncertain. On the other hand, beginners did not report goals as ambitious as the advanced students, as most of their motivations to continue were based on improving their current daily activities, such as: being able to watch a movie in English with a partner, reply to emails and make phone calls in English, to be approved in a Brazilian university English test, and enhance their current or future job opportunities by speaking English. Therefore, the idea that this short multilevel program is going to prepare beginners to achieve their goals seems to be more achievable than the ones described by the

advanced students. In any case, much more extensive research is required to establish whether multilevel methods yield greater success for students in terms of achieving such aims.

Related to participants' English skills development, data show that most participants of this study perceived their speaking skills as the higher development due to multilevel EFL classes. On the other hand, it is important to recognize that despite being advertised that the institute offers classes whose focus are in the four English skills, most advanced students did not perceive any improvement in their writing skills, and most beginners did not perceive any improvement in their listening skills, which requires clarification and explanation, so that students are not creating expectations that cannot be reached. Overall, neither advanced nor beginner students reported any improvement in reading skills, which might indicate that even thought the institute advertises its focus on the four English skills, the focus on reading also needs to be re-evaluated. As a tentative explanation, this data might suggest that the perceived lower improvement in specific skills relates to the lower amount of immediate feedback in those areas and/or focus of the multilevel classes.

Therefore, this study's data suggest that participants' entire learning process is somehow connected, and even though it may be not perceived, there might be implicit knowledge among those undeveloped skills, as implicit is the knowledge without awareness (Reber, 2013; Rebuschat, 2013). Data also indicate that in the multilevel EFL classes, learners' development may be also scaffolded by, for instance, their homework and project assignment as well as all the efforts that are taken by the students out of the classroom. As the multilevel classes reflect the "reality" of multiple levels of proficiency, so, too, do the materials the students engage with (Ohta, 2005).

Recommendations

This section offers a few recommendations to teachers, students, and to multilevel institutes managements, which were perceived as possible outcomes and audiences of this research. Based on the collected data and analysis, students should carefully consider the time they invest studying English to reach their goals, as taking efforts outside of the classroom is not only important for a good development in the multilevel classes but also for achieving their specific aims and life goals. Considering that multilevel classes are a better fit for highly motivated students, students should also consider ways to mitigate their own foreign language anxieties, as in the long-term those can become demotivators. Besides that, students should also strive to acquire a collaborative mindset towards peer interaction, as data suggest that having a collaborative mindset, regardless of the proficiency level, might determine whether the student adapts to the multilevel. Finally, students should engage in metacognitive strategies, as those enhance students' abilities to judge their own learning development, and to understand whether their development is superficial or if they can accurately apply their knowledge in real situations.

Considering data that suggest that multilevel classes require extensive teacher leadership and classroom management, multilevel teachers should strive to implement more leadership in the multilevel classrooms, which would be helpful to minimize distractions among learners and to better manage the time students have in class, so that students are able to learn in an environment conducive to successful instruction. Similarly, teachers should consider how learners position themselves in the small groups, either as a novice or an expert; and instead of assigning small groups based on their proficiency, it would be more beneficial to appoint leaders or mediators for each small group work, which would also create cooperative and positive English learning environment. Teachers could also play an important role in alleviating students' frustration and anxieties by providing more immediate feedback or

providing students a clearer explanation of how and why they give feedback in certain ways and certain times. Besides that, teachers should also give a special attention to teaching grammatical topics, as data suggest that students require more guidance specific to their own levels.

Finally, a few recommendations emerge for multilevel institutes managements. As data suggested, managements should provide clear communication about what students can expect in terms of the ideal language use in the school, determining criteria for how and when to use Portuguese in class, while providing approaches and techniques to guide teachers on how to use Portuguese appropriately in class. Regarding the teaching focus of the multilevel EFL classes, managements should provide clear clarification and explanation to what are the actual skills multilevel classes promise to focus on. This clarification focus should be supported by their book materials, and other media resources. It is insufficient to simply mention on the website what is the teaching focus, as even though it is currently advertised that the 4-skills are the focus of the classes, evidence shows that the high focus is on speaking, and few to none focus on reading skills. It is important for managements to communicate expectations so that students are not disappointed. As data suggest, some students struggled with the transition from face-to-face to remote instruction. Therefore, managements as well as teachers-facilitators should elaborate strategies and ways that interaction can be promoted and maintained in the online environment.

To conclude, these were constructive recommendations with a view to improving students' experiences by bringing different perspectives towards the multilevel EFL classes. This research findings will ideally lead to the schools developing more effective tools for further professional development on multilevel EFL teaching and teacher education programs.

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<u>**Appendix A**</u>
E-mail script: Permission to Conduct Study

Date: _____
Mr./ Mrs._____

Head of School

_____

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
I am currently enrolled in the Master of Education program at University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, MB Canada, and am in the process of writing my master's thesis. The study is entitled "Exploring Brazilian English learners' experiences in multilevel EFL classes". This study has been approved by the Education Nursing Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba.

I hope that the school administration will allow me to recruit 10 students to be participants in interviews taken place at mutually convenient time, as well as the permission to conduct classroom observations, which could be further scheduled with the English instructor.

If approval is granted, I ask the school administration to distribute the recruitment letters (attached to this letter) to the students and teachers. Teachers will not be considered participants in this study; however, I also need teachers to agree to have their classroom observed by me. Interested individuals will be given a consent form to be returned to me at the beginning of the interviews and classroom observations.

Students' participants will be interviewed on-line via Zoom. The interview process should take no longer than 60 minutes. The results will be used as data for my thesis in addition to other potential uses such as, journal publications and presentations. The participants identities as well as the ▮▮▮▮▮▮ **institute name and brand** <u>**will not**</u> **be identified in the study.** The only costs that will be incurred to your school/center and the individual participants are to print the letter of permission (school) and consent forms (participants).

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. Please contact me at my email address: ▮▮▮▮▮▮ or phone number ▮▮▮▮▮▮ if you have any questions or concerns. I would be happy to answer.

If you agree, kindly sign below, scan and send it to my e-mail address. Alternatively, kindly submit a signed letter of permission on your institution's letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this study at your institution. I kindly ask for the distribution of the recruitment letter to all beginner students. Interested students that meet the inclusion criteria can contact me directly.

Sincerely,

Thaís Silva Santos, University of Manitoba.

cc: Dr. Clea Schmidt, Advisor, University of Manitoba, ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇

Approved by: _____ Date: _____

Thaís Silva Santos, "Exploring Brazilian English Learners' experiences in multilevel EFL classes". January, 2021.

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Appendix B
Recruitment Letter (Students)

Dear students,

My name is Thaís Silva Santos and I am a Master of Education student from the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, MB, Canada. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study "Exploring Brazilian English Learner's experiences in multilevel EFL classes."

You are eligible to be in this study because you are a student enrolled at a multilevel EFL institute.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be part of an individual interview (about one hour) via Zoom about your experiences as an adult English learner in your English classroom as well as I will conduct an hour observation in your English class. I would like to audio record your interview and the class I observe in my smartphone and then I will use the information to write about your experience for my master's Thesis. Note that you will not be identified in my research. This study has been approved by the Education Nursing Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you would like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇ or WhatsApp ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇

Sincerely,

Thaís Silva Santos, University of Manitoba.

cc: Dr. Clea Schimdt, Advisor, UofM.

Approved by: _____

Thaís Silva Santos, "Exploring Brazilian English Learner's experiences in multilevel EFL classes". January, 2021.

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Appendix C
Recruitment Letter (Instructors)

Dear instructors,

My name is Thaís Silva Santos and I am a Master of Education student from the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, MB, Canada. As part of my research study entitled "Exploring Brazilian English Learner's experiences in multilevel EFL classes", I will be conducting classroom observation in three English classes at multilevel EFL classes.

I would like to request your permission to conduct an hour observation in one of your classes.

If you allow me to sit (on-line) in one of your classes, I would like to audio record your class in my smartphone and then I will use the information to write what I observed about students' experiences in multilevel EFL classes, which will be data for my master's Thesis. Note that you, as an instructor, will not considered a participant in my study, and I will be observing students' interaction among each other. Also note that neither you nor the students will be identified in my research.

This study has been approved by the Education Nursing Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to agree to have your students observed in your class or not. If you would like to agree or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ or WhatsApp ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓

Sincerely,

Thaís Silva Santos, University of Manitoba.

cc: Dr. Clea Schmidt, Advisor, University of Manitoba,▓▓▓▓▓▓

Approved by: _____

Date: _____

Thaís Silva Santos, "Exploring Brazilian English Learner's experiences in multilevel EFL classes". January, 2021.

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Appendix D
RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

(Individual Interview and classroom observation)

Title of Study: "Exploring Brazilian English Learner's experiences in multilevel EFL classes."

Principal Investigator: Thaís Silva Santos, █████████

Master of Education student, University of Manitoba, completing master's thesis.

Professor/Supervisor: Professor Dr. Clea Schmidt, █████████

University of Manitoba.

Sponsor: Not applicable

Funder: Not applicable

> This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore adult Brazilian English learners' views and experiences of multilevel EFL classes, particularly, beginners and advanced students studying at █████████ institutes across Brazil. Data collection instruments include 10 individual interviews and 3 hours of classroom observations. This study will ascertain nuances of experiences among Brazilian English learners in these multilevel EFL classes. Besides that, the results will be relevant for teachers-facilitators, and private English schools' management,

foregrounding perspectives on multilevel EFL classes. Through this study, I also hope to understand the extent to which the multilevel EFL method can promote equality among learners, or if it tends to reinforce educational inequality among English learners, which has been part of the Brazilian society for so long. The study findings could also potentially lead to the schools developing more effective tools for further professional development on multilevel EFL teaching, teacher education programs and mentoring, and future changes to the English as Foreign Language teaching in the Brazilian Public education system.

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a **beginner <u>or</u> advanced English student** at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ a multilevel EFL English Institute.

Please select the option that **best** applies to you.		
☐ I am an **ENGLISH STUDENT** consenting **only** to participate in an hour individual interview.	☐ I am an **ENGLISH STUDENT** consenting **only** to be observed during a class.	☐ I am an **ENGLISH STUDENT** consenting to participate in an hour interview **AND** to be observed during a class.

You are being asked to consent for a classroom observation as part of the research data collection in this study because you are an **English Instructor** at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Instructor, please check the box if this applies to you.
☐ I am an **INSTRUCTOR** consenting to have my classroom observed for an hour. I am aware that I am not a participant in this study, and therefore, I am only consenting to have Thaís Silva Santos observing my students during a class.

OBS: A total of 10 participants will be asked to participate in individual interviews.
A total of 3 English instructors will be recruited to consent on classroom observations.

Study procedures

- The methods of data collection for this study will be individual interviews and observations.
- The principal investigator will be conducting the individual interviews via Zoom and classroom observations will be taken place online.

Individual Interviews

- You will be asked some questions relating to your experience being an English

Learner at ███████.These questions will help us to better understand your experiences in this context.

- The sessions will be audio recorded and the audio recordings will be transcribed and translated into English by Thaís Silva Santos to ensure accurate reporting of the information that you provide.
- No one's name will be asked or revealed during the individual interview. However, should another participant call you by name, Thaís Silva Santos will remove all names from the transcription.
- The audio recordings will be stored in encrypted, and password secured computer files before and after being transcribed. The audio recordings will be kept until the completion of the principal investigator's M.Ed. program (sometime in July/2021), and the coded transcriptions and interview notes as well as the translations into English will be kept indefinitely, as the principal investigator would like to use the data for publications.
- The results will be provided to you electronically if you wish to receive it.

Classroom observations

- With the consent of the instructor and students, Thaís Silva Santos will conduct an hour classroom observation in each of the 3 classrooms. A total of 3 hours of observation will be conducted.
- The participants of the classroom observations will be adult English learners (from all levels of proficiency) present in each classroom in which I conduct observation, and who provided consent to be observed.
- No one's name will be asked during the observation. However, should another participant be called by name; Thaís Silva Santos will remove all names from the observation notes.
- If a student does not consent to being observed, s/he will not be considered as a participant. Instructors are also not considered as participants; therefore, Thaís Silva Santos will make sure to not document in the observation notes any input from students who did not consent to be observed nor from instructors.
- Thaís Silva Santos will focus on observing students who consented to be observed. She will focus on each student's behaviour and interaction patterns among each other.
- The observation notes will be stored in encrypted, and password secured computer files. Observation notes as well as the translations into English will be kept indefinitely, as the principal investigator would like to use the data for publications.

Benefits

While there are no direct benefits for the participants, you may find it interesting to take part of the study and to reflect about your own experiences in the process of learning English as a Foreign Language in a multilevel class.

Risks and Discomforts

There are minimal risks to you by participating in this research. It is possible that talking about the English learning process might be emotional, embarrassing, or stressful for you. Thaís Silva Santos, Staff as well as your English Instructor will be available if you feel like

there is anything that has come up for you during the individual interview that is upsetting.

Confidentiality

We will do everything possible to keep your personal information confidential. Your name will not be used at all in the study records. We will use pseudonyms or refer to participants as 'a student' or 'an instructor' in the master's thesis and any other presentations and publications that may come out of this study. A list of names and addresses of participants will be kept in a secure file so we can send you a summary of the results of the study. If the results of this study are presented in a meeting, or published, nobody will be able to tell that you were in the study. Please note that although you will not be identified as the speaker, your words may be used to highlight a specific point. The collection and access to personal information will follow provincial and federal privacy legislations.

The interviews' audio recordings will be transferred from Thaís Silva Santos' phone (deleted from the phone) to a password secured and encrypted computer. If any of your research records need to be copied to any of the above, your name and all identifying information will be removed. No information revealing any personal information such as your name, address or telephone number will leave the principal investigator's computer, which will be destroyed after the completion of the M.Ed. program at the University of Manitoba.

Audio recordings of the individual interviews will be transcribed, translated into English, which will be used for data analysis. Observation notes will be translated to English. The coded transcription and interview notes and observation notes, as well as the translation will also have printed copies at Thaís Silva Santos' home office, in the files (Research - interview transcripts and notes) and (Research - Translation).

The audio recordings will be kept until the completion of the principal investigator's M.Ed. program (sometime in July/2021) in a password secured, encrypted computer. The coded transcriptions, interview notes and observation notes, as well as the translation into English will be kept indefinitely as the investigator would like to use the data for publications. Only the Thaís Silva Santos and the Professor Dr. Clea Schmidt (from The University of Manitoba) will have access to them and know your name.

Cost/ Payment for participation

The only cost that will be incurred to you is to print this consent form, sign, scan and e-mail it to the principal investigator. You will receive no payment or reimbursement for any expenses related to taking part in this study.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal from the Study

Your decision to take part in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, or you may withdraw from the study at any time by simply letting the principal Investigator know via email.

Thaís Silva Santos will not be able to withdraw already collected data once the analysis has started, which will take place approximately in April/2021. Therefore, contact Thaís Silva Santos by the first week of April/2021 if you would like to have your data removed from this study.

Your decision not to participate or to withdraw from the study will not affect your services

received at ███████. As a student, your participation or discontinuation in this study will not constitute an element of your academic performance nor will it be part of your academic record at ██████

Feedback

Do you want a summary of the data? Please, check yes or no.		
I want a summary of the data. (Approximately by 09/2021)	☐ Yes	☐ No
(If yes, please check.)	☐ Canada Post	☐ Electronically

Dissemination of the study

The research results will be disseminated in a master's thesis and potential publication and presentations. Confidential data, like the audio recording, participants' contact information and consent forms will be destroyed sometime in July/2021, after the completion of the principal investigator's M.Ed. program, and the rest of it (transcribed audios, interview notes and translations, and observations' notes) will be kept indefinitely, as there will be potential publications.

Questions

If any questions come up during or after the study contact the principal investigator Thaís Silva Santos███████

For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact The University of Manitoba, Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at the Fort Garry campus via e-mail:

humanethics@umanitoba.ca or phone number is 204. 474 7122.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way. This research has been approved by the Education Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) at the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204. 474 7122 or humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

<u>Consent Signatures</u>

Participant signature:_____Date_____ (day/month/year)

Participant printed name: _____

I, the undersigned, have fully explained the relevant details of this research study to the participant named above and believe that the participant has understood and has knowingly given their consent.

Printed name:_____   Date_____ (day/month/year)

Signature: _____ **Role in the study: Principal**

Investigator

Printed name:_____   Date_____ (day/month/year)

Signature: _____ **Role in the study: Supervisor**

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Appendix E
Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol Project: "Exploring Brazilian English Learners' experiences in multilevel EFL classes".

Time of Interview: 60 minutes.

Date: _____

Place: Zoom (Video Call)

Interviewer: Thaís Silva Santos

Interviewee: _____

Position of Interviewee: Online/ Video call.

The purpose of this qualitative study, (case study design) is to explore adult Brazilian English learners' views and experiences of multilevel EFL classes studying at **a multilevel English institute in Brazil. The schools' name will not be identifiable in this study.** Data collection instruments include 10 individual interviews with beginners and advanced students and a total of 3 hours of classroom observations, in which interaction patterns among students will be observed. Both data collection instruments will be carried out remotely. This study can determine whether there are common experiences among Brazilian English learners in multilevel EFL classes. Besides that, the results will be relevant for teachers-facilitators, and private English schools' managements, bringing different perspectives towards the multilevel EFL classes. Through this study, I also hope to understand whether the multilevel EFL method promotes equality among learners, or if it only reinforces education inequality among English learners, which has been part of the Brazilian society for so long. The study findings could also potentially lead to the schools developing more effective tools for further professional development on multilevel EFL teaching, teacher education programs and mentoring, and future changes on the English as Foreign Language teaching in the Brazilian Public education system.

Interview questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about your previous experiences learning English (from childhood to adulthood).

3. How long have you been studying English for? How long at a multilevel English Institute?
4. Why are you studying English? What is your motivation?
5. What is your level at the school?
6. When you started, what were your expectations about studying English in a multilevel EFL classroom?
7. Did your expectations change over time?
8. How did you experience a multilevel EFL class as a beginner/ intermediate/advanced English student in the months of classes?
9. How do you currently experience it?
10. What are your insecurities about studying English in a multilevel EFL classroom?
11. What do you like about a multilevel EFL class the most?
12. What do you dislike about a multilevel EFL class the most?
13. How do you feel in an English class alongside people that have studied English for longer than you?
14. How do you feel in an English class alongside people that have studied English for a shorter time than you?
15. If you could change one thing about the multilevel classes, what would you change?
16. In the classroom, do you feel like all your classmates (including you) are treated equally?
17. How is your relationship with your teacher?
18. How does your teacher deal with the fact that students have different levels of fluency?
19. How do you perceive your English skills development in a multilevel class? Do you see improvements overtime?
20. Comparing the multilevel EFL classes to other ways of studying English known by you, which one do you prefer? Explain.
21. Would you recommend the multilevel EFL classes to someone who does not have any knowledge of the English language?
22. What are some other important experiences you would like to share?
23. In one word, how do you describe your experience in the multilevel EFL classes?

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<u>Appendix F</u>
RESEARCH OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Date: March 1- 11, 2021

Site: Zoom Meeting

Researcher: Thaís Silva Santos

Description of Environment: (describe static characteristics of the environment here)

Description of Group: (describe the whole group here, e.g., physical/space characteristics)

NOTES

Time	Focus	Observable Behaviour (What can you see? What can you hear?)
time of transi-tions	Whole group? small group? pair? individual?	Point form description of sequence of events/activities, for example: • composition of small groups or pairs • interaction patterns • movements observed • critical incidents • description of people – walking slowly, dress, etc.

Inquiry	Theory—Interpretation
What are you thinking?	How do you interpret the data?
What are you feeling?	What does the data mean?
What are you wondering about?	What more do you need to know?
What connections are you making?	How does the data fit with the frameworks informing the research?
What patterns do you see?	
What anomalies do you perceive?	Insights

University of Manitoba | Research Ethics and Compliance

PROTOCOL APPROVAL

To: **Thais Silva Santos**   **(Advisor: Clea Schmidt)**
            Principal Investigator

From: **Zana Lutfiyya, Chair**
            Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

Re: **Protocol # E2020:092 (HS24473)**
            Exploring Brazilian English Learners' Views and Experiences of
            Multilevel EFL Classes

Effective: January 14, 2021   **Expiry:**   January 14, 2022

Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) has reviewed and approved the above research.

ENREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans – TCPS 2 (2018)*.

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

i.   Approval is granted for the research and purposes described in this application only.

ii.   Any changes to this research must be approved by the Human Ethics Office (HEO) before implementation.

iii. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be reported to the HEO immediately.

iv.   This approval is valid for one year only. A Renewal Request Form must be submitted and approved prior to the above expiry date.

v.   A Study Closure Form must be submitted to the HEO when the research is complete prior to the above expiry date, or if the research is terminated.

vi.   The University of Manitoba (UM) may request to audit your research documentation to confirm compliance with this approved protocol, and with the UM *Ethics of Research Involving Humans* policies and procedures.

Funded Protocols: Email a copy of this Protocol Approval, with the corresponding UM Project Number, to ResearchGrants@umanitoba.ca

University of Manitoba | **Research Ethics and Compliance**

AMENDMENT APPROVAL

February 10, 2021

To: **Thais Silva Santos** **(Advisor: Clea Schmidt)**
Principal Investigator

From: **Andrea Szwajcer, Chair**
Research Ethics Board 2 (REB 2)

Re: **Protocol # E2020:092 (HS24473)**
Exploring Brazilian English Learners' Views and Experiences of
Multilevel EFL Classes

Research Ethics Board 2 (REB 2) has reviewed and approved your Amendment Request received on **February 2, 2021** regarding the above-noted protocol.

REB 2 is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans – TCPS 2 (2018)*.

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

  i.   Approval is granted for this amendment only.

  ii. Any further changes to this research requires subsequent amendment approvals from the Human Ethics Office before implementation.

  iii. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be reported to the Human Ethics Office immediately.

  iv. Amendment Approvals do not change the protocol expiry date. Please refer to the original Protocol Approval or subsequent Renewal Approvals for the protocol expiry date.