



REVISTA KRONOS

Storytelling effect on reading comprehension skills of EFL learners in upper basic education

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ABSTRACT This study aims to examine the effect of storytelling on reading comprehension skills and students' perceptions of this technique. It involved thirty-four eighth-grade students in upper basic education and used a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods. The students were given both a pre-test and a post-test focusing on specific reading comprehension sub-skills: skimming, scanning, and deducing meaning from context. The pre-test was conducted before implementing the storytelling technique, and the post-test was administered after the intervention to assess its impact and measure the learners' progress. Additionally, a questionnaire was used to gauge the students' perceptions, supplemented by field notes taken by the researcher to enrich and reinforce the information gathered during the intervention. The results were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The initial pre-test results indicated low performance in reading comprehension skills among the students. However, following the intervention, the post-test results showed a moderate improvement in their reading comprehension skills. These findings demonstrate the effect of storytelling and the positive perceptions of students regarding this technique in EFL classes.

KEYWORDS storytelling, reading comprehension, students' perceptions.

FECHA DE RECEPCIÓN 12/04/2024

FECHA DE APROBACIÓN 20/11/2024

Efecto de la narración sobre las habilidades de comprensión lectora de estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera en educación básica superior

RESUMEN Este estudio tiene como objetivo examinar el efecto y las percepciones de los estudiantes sobre la narrativa de historias en las habilidades de comprensión lectora. El estudio involucró a treinta y cuatro estudiantes de octavo grado de educación básica superior y utilizó un enfoque mixto que incorporó métodos cualitativos y cuantitativos. Se les administró a los estudiantes tanto una prueba inicial como una prueba final centradas en habilidades específicas de comprensión lectora: ideas principales, detalles específicos y deducción de significado del contexto. La prueba inicial se llevó a cabo antes de implementar la técnica de la narrativa de historias, y la prueba final se administró después de la intervención para evaluar su impacto y medir el progreso de los estudiantes. Asimismo, se aplicó un cuestionario para evaluar la percepción de los estudiantes, complementado con notas de campo tomadas por el investigador para enriquecer y reforzar la información recopilada durante la intervención. Los resultados fueron analizados mediante estadísticas descriptivas. Los resultados iniciales de la prueba indicaron un bajo rendimiento en las habilidades de comprensión lectora entre los estudiantes, pero después de la intervención, los resultados de la prueba final mostraron una mejora moderada en sus habilidades de comprensión lectora. Estos hallazgos demuestran el efecto de la narrativa de historias y las percepciones positivas de los estudiantes sobre esta técnica en las clases de EFL.

PALABRAS CLAVE narrativa de historias, comprensión lectora, percepciones de los estudiantes.

INTRODUCTION

Reading stands out as a vital skill in the pursuit of English language proficiency. It holds significant importance among the four core English language skills, contributing profoundly to both academic and personal growth. Mastery of reading enables individuals to access diverse perspectives and knowledge while enhancing communication (Levlin & Waldmann, 2020).

Recognizing the significance of this skill, the curriculum emphasizes the development of reading skills. That is why (Ministerio de Educación [Mineduc], 2019) established that at the end of the eighth grade, students are expected to reach an A1.1 English level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), enabling them to derive significance from texts by using contextual clues and linguistic cues.

Alvarez and Ha (2022) note that Ecuadorian EFL teachers tend to prioritize teaching vocabulary and grammar in their curriculum. However, this traditional approach neglects the use of modern and innovative teaching methods, which limits students' exposure to active learning strategies during reading activities. This lack of engagement with innovative techniques may contribute to the persistently low levels of English reading comprehension among learners. As a result, there is a growing recognition of the need to enhance reading skills by adopting more dynamic and inventive teaching techniques. In response to these challenges, teachers require an effective approach to help students understand what they read and find enjoyment in the learning process.

Consequently, storytelling has been identified as a convenient solution because it strengthens comprehension, encourages the use of imagination and creativity, and helps students consider new ideas (Dvalidze & Shota, 2022). In this context, storytelling is seen as a valuable educational tool to enhance students' foreign language reading comprehension skills. Stories present a unique opportunity to address these obstacles by providing uninterrupted narratives, diverse vocabulary, and exposure to various grammatical structures (Bettering Youth Team, 2021).

Similarly, storytelling plays a key role in fostering social and emotional development. Through shared stories, individuals establish meaningful connections, fostering feelings of comfort and joy. This connection not only motivates language learners to persevere in their studies but also cultivates a positive attitude towards foreign language education (Bala, 2015). Thus, storytelling serves as a bridge to both academic success and emotional well-being in educational settings.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

Numerous studies have investigated the impact of storytelling on improving reading comprehension. For instance, research conducted by Satriani (2019) aimed to examine the advantages and difficulties of incorporating storytelling into literacy education. The findings indicated numerous benefits of implementing a teaching program, including using two languages as the medium of interaction, providing appropriate learning materials and various media, using dramatization to convey character expressions, assessing moral values as an evaluation tool, developing students' literacy skills, sparking imagination, enriching vocabulary, and enhancing students' reading comprehension and interest.

Similarly, the study conducted by Hà and Bellot (2020) sought to evaluate storytelling as a technique for enhancing reading comprehension in the primary EFL classroom.

It involved 44 eight-year-old students, divided into two equal groups. They were Catalan/Spanish native speakers, and their English level was pre-A1. The findings indicated that storytelling aids children in recalling, comprehending, and applying vocabulary related to specific topics and grammatical structures featured in stories. Similarly, storytelling was found to be equally effective as other teaching techniques, such as games and exercises, in enhancing students' comprehension of separate sentences.

Likewise, another study was carried out by Hazliana et al. (2023) aimed to analyze the effectiveness of the storytelling method to improve reading comprehension. An experimental research design was used to measure the difference between the experimental group, who received treatment, and the control group, who received a conventional method. The research results showed that before the test phase, the control group of students exhibited superior reading comprehension levels. However, in the post-test phase, the experimental group, which received the storytelling as a treatment, surpassed the control group in terms of reading comprehension performance. Nevertheless, the outcomes revealed that there was a slight distinction between the control and experimental groups in both the pre-test and post-test phases. This suggests that storytelling could potentially assist students in enhancing their reading comprehension.

Finally, Yulianawati et al., (2022) study aimed to examine how elementary students engage with storytelling for reading comprehension. Storytelling, an ancient communication form, is found to be effective in language teaching due to its engaging nature. The research, employing a qualitative case study, involved 31 elementary students and utilized classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews. The results show that students actively engage with storytelling, which positively influences their attitudes and behaviors during English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reading activities. From an educational standpoint, the study proposes storytelling as a valuable method for enhancing reading comprehension in elementary education settings.

Previous studies show that using storytelling can be a positive support in students' reading comprehension skills, at the same time as storytelling plays a role in motivating language learners to persevere in their studies. It has a positive impact on students' attitudes towards foreign language education.

METHOD

The study employed a mixed-method approach to gather data, utilizing both numerical and narrative formats. This integrated quantitative and qualitative methods to capture detailed insights, explore participant experiences, and formulate hypotheses for future exploration (Molina, 2016). This combination strengthens the information needed for the study and provides a better understanding of the variables of the research (Proudfoot, 2022).

The research used an action research model called Exploratory Action Research (EAR), which actively contributed to problem-solving by being an integral part of the issue, following two stages: exploration and action proposed by Smith and Rebolledo (2018).

PARTICIPANTS

This research was conducted at a public institution in Loja, Ecuador, in the academic year 2023–2024. Thirty-four eighth-grade students aged 12–13 participated in the present action research study. The participants were chosen through convenience sampling, which involved selecting individuals from the target sample based on practical criteria. These

criteria included easy accessibility, geographical proximity, and availability to the researcher at a specific time (Gay et al., 2012).

INSTRUMENTS

The primary tools used were a pre and post-test administered before and after the intervention to measure students' reading comprehension, as well as a questionnaire to understand the students' perceptions about the use of storytelling, and field notes taken by the researcher to complement and support the information collected during the intervention.

RESULTS

This study aimed to examine the effect and students' perceptions of storytelling on reading comprehension skills.

PRETEST AND POSTTEST RESULTS

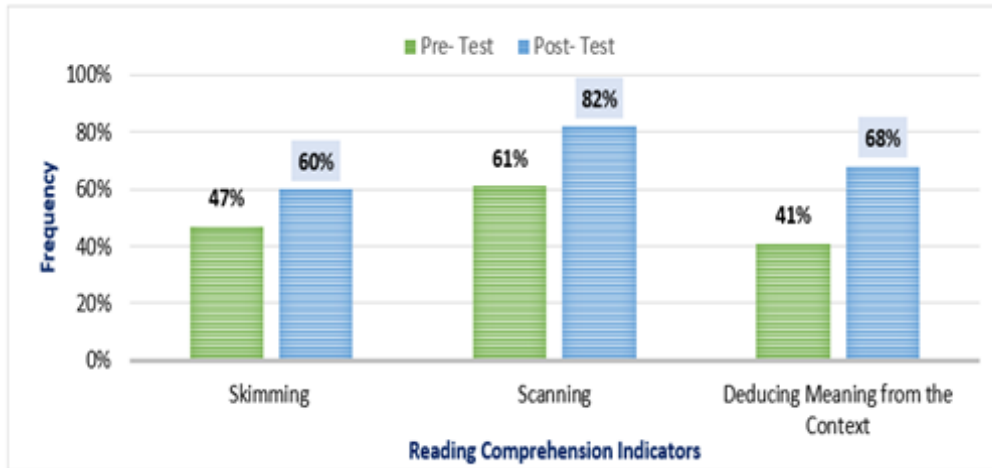
Before implementing storytelling, a pretest was administered to measure the initial learners' reading comprehension skills regarding three reading comprehension sub-skills: skimming, scanning, and deducing meaning from the context. Participants' pre-test results showed a mean score of 4.87 (out 10). In addition, the post-test results indicated a mean score of 6.97 in the post-test (out 10), with a difference of 2.10 points, indicating a moderate improvement after the intervention.

Table 1. Mean score differences between reading comprehension pretest and posttest

Indicators	Score	NS	Pretest	Posttest	Difference
Skimming	3/3	34	1.41	1.79	0.38
Scanning	3/3	34	1.84	2.46	0.62
Deducing Meaning from the Context	4/4	34	1.62	2.72	1.10
TOTAL	10/10	34	4.87	6.97	2.10

Note: This table presents the average results of the pretest and posttest in each of the evaluated indicators.

As shown in Table 1 the first reading comprehension sub-skill, called skimming and referring to the identification of main ideas, presented an average score of 1.41 in the pre-test, which increased to 1.79 in the post-test, showing a difference of 0.38 points. Likewise, scanning (identification of specific details), obtained an average score of 1.84/3, while in the post-test it experienced an increase of 0.62 points, reaching an average score of 2.46. Finally, regarding deducing meaning from the content, the pre-test yielded a score of 1.62, which increased to 2.72 in the post-test, reflecting a moderate increase of 1.10 points.

Figure 1. Changes pretest and posttest

Note: Comparative bars of the percentage of reading comprehension indicators during the pre-test and post-test

Given that the variable indicators do not have an equal value, therefore, a proportional adjustment is implemented to ensure equitable weighting of the components, expressed in percentages, and to highlight the variance in the change of each indicator between the pretest and post-test.

Firstly, concerning the first sub-skill evaluated, skimming, there was an increase in the percentage before and after the intervention. Before the intervention, the percentage was 47%, and after the intervention, there was an increase of 13%, resulting in a post-test percentage of 60%. On the other hand, scanning showed an increase of 21%, rising from 61% in the pretest to 82% in the posttest. Finally, deducing meaning from the context increased from 41% to 68% after the use of storytelling, showing a difference of 27%.

Overall, there was a moderate improvement observed regarding the use of storytelling to enhance reading comprehension among students. The data reveals an increase across all three indicators, with scanning demonstrating the most significant improvement in percentage, followed by deducing meaning from the context and finally skimming.

QUESTIONNAIRE AND FIELD NOTES RESULTS

The information collected through the questionnaire aims to understand students' perceptions of the use of storytelling. The questionnaire consists of seven questions divided into three categories: engagement in language learning, storytelling genres, and reading comprehension. Along with the field notes taken by the researcher to support and contrast the information, they are represented in the following tables.

Table 2 illustrates that the students responded positively to the first statement regarding whether storytelling activities motivated them to participate actively during classes. This is reflected in 59% of students who answered strongly agree and 38% of participants who selected agree, indicating that this teaching technique was attractive to the participants, even though 3% disagreed. Furthermore, when students were asked if storytelling increased their interest in engaging with classmates during class activities, 50% strongly agreed, while the other 50% agreed, indicating a mostly positive and balanced response. Regarding item 3, which indicates that storytelling contributed to creating a positive atmosphere in English classes, a considerable percentage 68% strongly agreed, and 32% agreed.

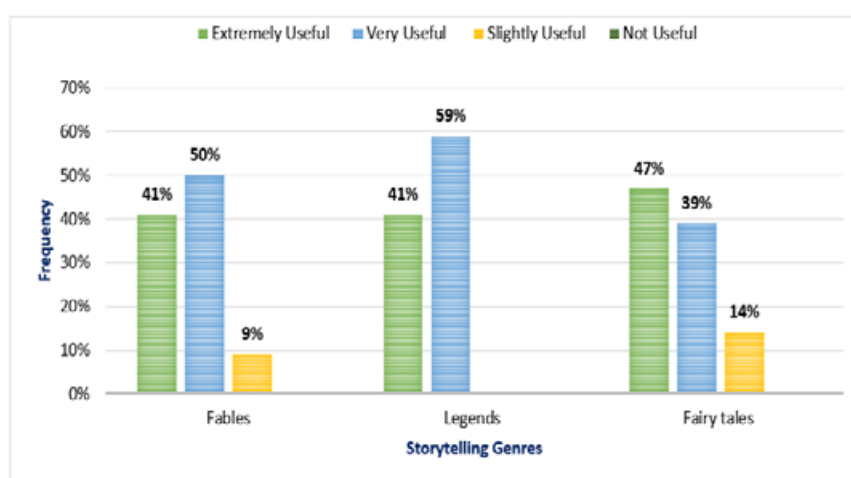
Table 2. Students' perception on engagement in language learning

Item	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
1	The storytelling activities motivated me to actively participate during classes.	59 %	38%	3%	0%
2	Storytelling increased my interest in engaging with classmates during class activities.	50%	50%	0%	0%
3	Storytelling contributed to create a positive atmosphere in English classes.	68%	32%	0%	0%

Note. SA= Strongly Agree, S= Agree, D= Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree

Several students highlighted the qualities that made them appreciate a positive environment through the use of storytelling, mentioning that classes were interesting and amusing.

Figure 2. Perceived usefulness of storytelling genres for reading comprehension



Note: Comparative bars of storytelling genres on reading comprehension.

Item number 4, which corresponds to the category of storytelling genres and their perceived usefulness for reading comprehension, features a distinct scale that considers the following aspects: extremely useful, very useful, slightly useful, and not useful.

Firstly, fables known for their concise narratives and moral lessons received considerable praise. Specifically, 41% of respondents deemed them extremely useful, while 50% considered them very useful. Only 9% found fables to be slightly useful.

Likewise, legends, with their rich cultural and historical contexts, also garnered positive feedback. A significant 41% of students rated them as extremely useful, while 59% found them very useful. Notably, no students indicated that legends were either slightly useful or not useful.

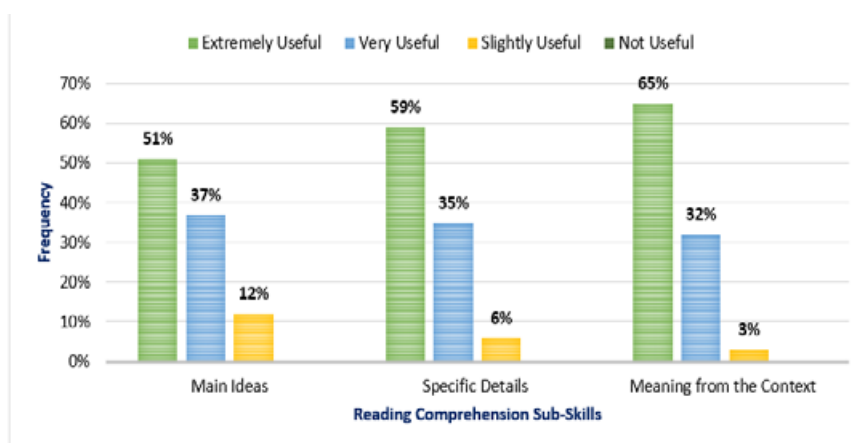
Moreover, fairy tales, celebrated for their imaginative elements and universal themes, also received appreciation. Nearly half of the respondents (47%) regarded them as extremely useful, while 39% found them very useful. Additionally, 14% considered fairy tales slightly useful.

As seen in Table 3, considering students' perception regarding the effect of storytelling on reading comprehension, two items stand out: 5 and 6. They detail that, regarding the use of legends, fables, and tales, 35% of the students strongly agreed, while 65% chose to agree. Similarly, for understanding words and phrases, the majority responded positively, with 56% of participants strongly agreeing and 44% selecting to agree.

Table 3. Students' perception of storytelling effect on reading comprehension

Item	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
5	Storytelling with legends, fables, and fairy tales helped me increase my reading comprehension.	35%	65%	0%	0%
6	Storytelling helped my understanding of English words and phrases.	56 %	44%	0%	0%

Note. SA= Strongly Agree, S= Agree, D= Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree

Figure 3. Perceived usefulness of storytelling regarding reading comprehension.

Note: Comparative bars of reading comprehension sub-skills with the use of storytelling.

The analysis of Figure 3 indicates the perceived usefulness of storytelling on reading comprehension among students, with varying degrees of effectiveness noted across different sub-skills. Firstly, regarding the main ideas, 51% of students found it extremely useful. Additionally, 37% considered it very useful, while 12% perceived it as only slightly useful. Moving on to the specific details, 59% of students found it extremely useful, with 35% finding it very useful, and 6% regarding it as slightly useful. In terms of the ability to deduce meaning from context, 65% perceived it as extremely useful, while 32% found it very useful, and only 3% found it slightly useful.

DISCUSSION

The present study found that storytelling helped improve the reading comprehension skills of eighth-grade students who were learning English as a foreign language (EFL). This was evident from the variation in the mean scores before and after the implementation of storytelling, showing a moderate change of 2.10 points. The results were in accordance with the main research objective, which aimed to examine the effect of storytelling on reading comprehension skills among upper basic education students at a public institution in Loja during the school year 2023-2024.

The results showed that eighth-grade students who were exposed to storytelling demonstrated an improvement in their English reading comprehension skills. Following the introduction of storytelling, a significant positive difference in scores between the pretest and posttest results was observed. These findings align closely with those acquired through Hãand Bellot (2020) and Hazliana et al. (2023) who suggested that storytelling

improves students' reading comprehension skills and creates a dynamic learning environment. Likewise, through storytelling, students can express their social experiences and gain insight into diverse perspectives. Particularly, young learners demonstrate a strong interest in hearing stories repeatedly, facilitating the subconscious absorption of language elements (Huang, 2006). Moreover, they actively engage in narratives, allowing teachers to introduce or reinforce vocabulary and sentence structures within a varied, memorable, and familiar context (Atta, 2012).

In addition, students reported enjoying storytelling, citing that diverse narrative genres captured their attention and interest. Furthermore, they felt motivated to participate and showed improved accuracy in answering questions. Overall, the use of storytelling helped students practice the content and prevented them from having comprehension problems. These findings corroborate those reported by Satriani (2019) and Yulianawati et al., (2022) in their studies. For example, Satriani (2019) highlighted that storytelling incorporates bilingual interaction, diverse teaching materials, dramatization for character expression, evaluation of moral values, enhancement of reading and writing skills, stimulation of imagination, expansion of vocabulary, and cultivation of comprehension and interest in reading.

According to Yulianawati et al. (2022), for instance, they argue that storytelling contributes significantly to student motivation and engagement with reading activities. They contend that incorporating storytelling into the classroom can enhance student behavior and attitudes toward English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Therefore, by using storytelling as a teaching technique, student reading comprehension can be promoted. The findings of the present study indicate that the introduction of storytelling in English classes will benefit Ecuadorian upper basic education students by improving their reading comprehension skills.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of storytelling's effect on the reading comprehension skills of eighth-grade students demonstrated its positive impact, particularly using fables, legends, and fairy tales. The results revealed a moderate improvement in reading comprehension scores between the pretest and posttest. Specifically, students showed the most significant progress in the "scanning" indicator, followed by "deducing meaning from the content." However, some challenges remained in the "skimming" indicator, highlighting difficulties in identifying main ideas. Addressing these challenges in future interventions could further enhance comprehension outcomes.

Furthermore, the findings indicated that most students perceived storytelling as a highly engaging and beneficial tool for reading comprehension. They appreciated the activities, particularly those involving legends, which were the most favored genre. The use of storytelling not only increased students' motivation and participation but also fostered a positive and enjoyable classroom atmosphere, making the learning process more effective and appealing. These conclusions underscore the value of storytelling as an educational technique in EFL classrooms, while also pointing to areas for further exploration and improvement, such as tailored strategies for enhancing skimming skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In this research work, the time frame of the intervention plan was a limitation, constraining the depth and sustainability of the intended effects. In this situation, it is essential to

consider that the nature of the research requires extending the duration of the intervention by at least one term in order to assimilate and internalize the research. This extension will allow researchers to gain a clearer understanding of the impact and effect of the research, which would help achieve more concrete and favorable results.

Therefore, the post-test and questionnaire to find out the students' perceptions had to be carried out online, using google docs documents. For this reason, it suggests implementing repetitive measures throughout the period of time to analyze the progress of the students to measure their advancement. These repeated measures could provide more reliable data on the effectiveness of storytelling over time.

CONTRIBUCIONES DE LA AUTORA

Mabel del Cisne Palacio Guerrero: conceptualización, investigación, redacción – borrador original, análisis de datos, revisión y edición.

IMPLICACIONES ÉTICAS

Los autores declaran que no existen implicaciones éticas.

CONFLICTO DE INTERÉS

Los autores declaran que no existen conflictos de interés financieros o no financieros que podrían haber influido en el trabajo presentado en este artículo

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