IMPLEMENTATION OF A DIDACTIC SEQUENCE USING A STORY-BASED METHODOLOGY TO TEACH ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN A YOUNG LEARNERS' CLASSROOM

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MASTER'S REPORT

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to improve the four basic language skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing in Third grade 8-9 year old learners at a private school in Cali through storytelling as an alternative to teach English as a foreign language. The work reviews some concepts such as the characteristics of young learners, the use of short stories as an educational tool in the language classroom, and some approaches to teach English to young learners. As a result, students from the participant group improved significantly their reading and speaking skills by the end of the school year. Among the conclusions it is stated that the use of short stories in the EFL classroom provides students with opportunities to use language in a meaningful way.

Key words: Storytelling, short stories in the EFL classroom, young learners.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English to young learners is a challenge for any language teacher. Children who are in the process of learning a second language get highly motivated through activities such as playing, singing, creating handcrafts and moving around in order to interiorize knowledge. These activities that are related to the children's natural growing process are sometimes omitted in the English classroom, instead, it is common to find that the activities proposed to young students are related to structure learning and the activities that require movement, expression and creativity are left in second place.

Children need not only being exposed to the language but they also need to receive input through engaging activities in order to create positive emotions towards learning. The experience of reading short stories and being immersed in worlds of fantasy could be the starting point for raising motivation and creating the passion for learning English.

This master's report reviews the importance of the use of short stories in the language classroom and the story-based methodology which brings to the light the implications that the activity of storytelling has in foreign language learning. Additionally, it concludes that teachers and practitioners in the English teaching field could benefit from the activity of telling stories, activity that has accompanied us since early times to the learning of English as a foreign language.

1. RESEARCH PROBLEM

In Colombia, English as a foreign language is taught since the pre-primary and primary school. The rationale behind this practice is that knowing English will assure current youngsters a better future, with a wide variety of working and academic opportunities.

In spite of the exposure to this language and the inclusion of English as one of the main subjects in schools, most language teachers are not trained in the teaching of English to young learners, and the methodologies, resources and activities proposed in the language classroom are not adequate to address these ages.

The lack of resourcefulness and creativity in the young EFL classroom is one the reasons why students tend to lose their interest in the learning of English and their natural capability as language learners is not exploited. Young learners are characterized by being active learners who experience great motivation in the English classroom through activities that are connected to the ones they normally do on their daily basis such as the listening of short stories, an activity that has accompanied human beings since the use of storytelling as a way to preserve history and culture.

Since the beginning of the school year 2015-2016, third grade students showed interest in activities related to the guide book "super Minds". These learners enjoyed listening to songs and rhymes. However, the listening activities that required more concentration in order to understand general and specific ideas from conversations were difficult for them due to their lack of vocabulary and the speed of the dialogues. When doing this kind of activities, students expressed confusion and they managed to understand only a few words.

Additionally, these students had difficulties with their oral production. In reading aloud, their pronunciation and intonation failed to convey the meaning and sense of the text.

According to the data compiled by the second grade English teacher in the last trimester of the previous year 2013-2014, the activities that resulted more

complicated for these students were the ones related to reading comprehension and writing. In the final recommendations, this teacher pointed out that this group struggled with the comprehension of written texts, so they required constant guide from the part of the teacher to help them to understand specific ideas and the following of written instructions, thus at this age, according to the school requirements, they are in the process of being more autonomous and they are asked to follow short simple instructions by themselves.

On the other hand, in the school year 2015-2016, basic III students showed low interest in writing activities. Most of them wrote short simple sentences and their lack of vocabulary made it difficult for them to write short paragraphs. Even though these students have worked with descriptions of animals and people during the previous grade, they expressed not to feel comfortable when doing writing activities due to its difficulty. In fact, this kind of activity was the less interesting for them.

Another factor that influenced the low interest in reading and writing was the lack of the use of other materials different from the guide book. When these students were in second grade, they used to work on activities from the guide book exclusively and not any other kind of materials and types of texts.

1.1 RESEARCH CONTEXT

Freinet School

Freinet School is a private institution located in La Buitrera km 3 in the city of Cali. It is a countryside place which offers students the possibility to explore and be in contact with nature. Freinet School was founded in 1992 by the Betancurt sisters with fourteen students and twelve employees. Nowadays the school has 780 students and 116 employees out of which 61 are teachers, 15 of them English teachers. The school offers its educational program to the population of Valle del Cauca, especially high socioeconomic stratum people from Cali and Jamundí.

Freinet School's pedagogical proposal is grounded on four institutional bases that encompass the learner: *Active methodology, research, bilingual education and social-affective formation*. As its name reveals, the institution philosophy goes around the principles of Celestin Freinet, the French pedagogue who gave relevance to learning through experience. According to Freinet's principles, children learn thanks to their curiosity; this is the main reason for the school to work through projects because students need to experiment, observe and work in a cooperative way in order to develop critical, creative and analytical thinking.

Individual monitoring is another relevant factor for the school. Students are seen as integral beings, they are observed holistically taking into account their emotional, affective and cognitive aspects. All these observations are carried out in six meetings along the school year (two per trimester) with the team of educators, psychologists, and coordinators of all the areas of study.

Bilingualism at Freinet School

Freinet School does not have an immersion program in English because the institution considers that children should have the same opportunities of learning. According to this idea, the study of the concrete sciences such as math, social and natural sciences is done through the L1 and not through a second

language; if a student has difficulties in learning a second language, he or she will probably have difficulties with cognitive processes carried out through its use. For this reason, English at Freinet School is studied as an independent subject and its learning process does not affect other areas.

Freinet's bilingual program is developed by the Language Center, where English is taught as a foreign language due to the characteristics of its students who share Spanish as native language and who use English in a non-English speaking country. The program is based on the Common European Framework focusing on the acquisition of communicative competence. Students are supposed to reach C1 level by the end of their learning process through 13 levels, each one of 10 months, from kindergarten to high-school.

The English program at Freinet School is organized as follows:

LEVELS		GRADES	HOURS PER WEEK
Beginners	Beginners I	Kindergarten	8
	Beginners II	Transition	8
Basic	Basic I	First	10
	Basic II	Second	10
	Basic III	Third	10
Intermediate	Intermediate I	Fourth	10
	Intermediate II	Fifth	10
	Intermediate III	Sixth	10
High Intermediate	High Intermediate I	Seventh	10
	High Intermediate II	Eighth	10
	High Intermediate III	Ninth	10
Advanced	Advanced I	Tenth	8
	Advanced II	Eleventh	8

The language center has created a "pull out program" that gives students the opportunity to develop their foreign language in a different context in which English is the only vehicle of communication and the environment of this bilingual area represents an opportunity of being in contact with the target language. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the relation of the child with her/his social

environment plays an important factor in her/his maturation process and formation of attitudes and motivation.

From intermediate to high levels, students reach this "pull out program" in which students are placed in three language levels regarding the Common European Framework (*basic, independent and proficient*). According to the results of a language proficiency test and their English teachers' criteria, students are placed in the appropriate level.

Basic III students, aged 8-9 years, finishing their foundation process in the target language, are motivated by teachers to take risks and be more independent. These students understand simple oral and written texts, they are learning how to use the dictionary as a reading comprehension support and they are learning how to write short paragraphs and participate in simple oral presentations using basic structures and the vocabulary and expressions learnt in class.

These students are enthusiastic and committed with the activities presented in English class. They love learning new words, reading short stories, making handcrafts and listening to songs and conversations. These students have also the opportunity to be in contact with English at home through the use of ICT devices, TV programs and music.

Activities, resources and materials at Freinet Language Center

As it was mentioned above, the language center is a special place in which students from Freinet School go to have their English classes and practice the target language. This place offers students several activities during the school year that support a living experience of the different celebrations related to the Anglo culture such as the thanksgiving day, Christmas, Saint Valentines and Saint Patrick's day. Other activities that are developed by the language center are: Trip around the world in which students, once a year, prepare a project to show different issues about the target culture (food, dances, art) and the English camp that is a special day in which students from fifth grade stay at school camping and enjoying different activities to practice English and live an immersion experience.

In order to support the students' learning process, the language center has resources that teachers can use to develop their classes such as: video beams, tape recorders, 2 smart boards, posters, flashcards and different books (children's literature, informative books, dictionaries, among others). The newest acquisition is a portable laboratory that is used to do listening activities. This new resource engages students in listening activities because they are motivated to learn and they can focus their attention easily.

As a Cambridge school, Freinet works with its materials and course books in order to prepare students for the international certificates: PET, KET and FCE. The course book used as a guide in preschool and primary grades is the series Super Minds and at high school grades is the American English in Mind, both from Cambridge University press.

1.2 IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The importance of this study relies on the usefulness of a methodology based on short stories in the young learners' classroom. The didactic sequence proposed here is a springboard to further research being that the teaching of English to young learners in Colombia requires new horizons and better practices that fix with the characteristics of our context and our students.

Children need special teachers who are capable of creating a proper learning environment through the use of different methods, techniques and strategies. For this reason, knowing more about the advantages of storytelling in the language classroom could be a departing point to create new studies that favor the learning of English in early ages.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

How can Basic III students at Freinet School overcome difficulties in their four basic English skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing through the reading of short stories?

2. OBJECTIVES

2.1 General Objective

To implement a language teaching strategy based on short stories to help a group of third-graders at Freinet School to overcome their basic skill difficulties in English.

2.2 Specific Objectives

- To identify English skills difficulties in a group of third-graders at a private school and help these children overcome those problems through different activities related to short stories.
- To describe the learning effects of such strategy on these children's skills in English.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Storytelling

Since early years in history, storytelling has been an inherent part of humanity. This art, that is considered as the oldest of all has been practiced and passed on from generation to generation in order to preserve knowledge and traditions. This practice is defined as "an art form, through which we have preserved our heritage, passed on traditions, learned skills, and most importantly, developed our limitless imaginations. Storytelling is at the heart of human experience; a means by which we gain a better understanding of ourselves and our world" (The North Dakota Center for the book, 1992. p, 212).

Even though the early forms of storytelling are exclusively oral, this practice is also supported with printed resources. According to Pellowski (1991), storytelling could be chanted or sung and this could also be accompanied with pictorial or printed resources, something that has allowed storytelling to be an important part in education.

Additionally, Davis (2007) arrives to the following conclusions in relation to the relevance of storytelling for human history and how it has evolved over time:

1. Storytelling grew from the playful elements of human nature and satisfied a need to self-entertainment. We are gifted with an imagination; we can create something out of nothing. Children do this automatically through imaginary friends and words.
2. It fulfilled a need to explain surroundings; the physical world. As humans we are logical creatures, we need to make sense of things, to find the rhyme and reason behind evolution.
3. It evolved through the intrinsic urge to communicate and share experiences. Part of being human is the desire to form bonds, family units etc.
4. It developed as a means of explaining and substantiating the supernatural forces believed to be present in the world at that time, thus satisfying

religious beliefs. Again this is partly linked to our need to make some sort of sense of things, even if they appear beyond our understanding.

5. It fulfilled an aesthetic need for beauty, regularly and form through expressive language and music.

6. It was born from a need to record history, to chronicle the deeds of ancestors and in so doing   keep them alive for years to come.

(Davies, 2007. p,4)

Bearing in mind these ideas, storytelling has evolved with humans as part of their innate capacity to communicate. It has been an important activity to develop imagination and to explain incomprehensible events. It is also seen as one of the first forms of education. As stated by Pederson (1995)**,** "Storytelling is the original form of teaching".

3.2 The use of short stories in the EFL classroom

Children are used to listening to short stories as an everyday life activity since early years. Parents and grandparents read aloud bedtime stories to kids, a custom that is part of any person's childhood. Stories help to develop children's imagination and creativity; it is a way to go to fantastic places and to meet strange creatures without travelling physically but mentally.

Short stories have not been used as pure entertainment; they have also been used for teaching purposes. In schools, reading short stories in class have served as a strategy to support literacy processes and to develop different skills in the foreign language classroom. Miller and Pennycuff (2008), argue that using storytelling in the classroom is one way to address literacy development by improving oral language, reading comprehension, and writing.

Using short stories in the language classroom offer young learners numerous advantages. "Stories are the most valuable resource you have. They offer children a world of supported meaning that they can relate to. Later on, you can use stories to help children practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing" (Slatterly & Willis, 2001, p. 96).

In terms of motivation, young learners tend to be engaged when short stories are brought to class as part of the material to learn the target language. They associate this reading activity to the pleasant experiences they have had since their early years. For a kid, reading a story means to have fun and it is seen as a relaxed and an interesting activity, something that allows meaningful learning. According to Sánchez (2004), stories can provide a highly motivating, engaging and realistic source of genuine language interaction in the classroom. They are "living language" in which the teller becomes the source of language, and pupils are actively involved in understanding. This same author argues that the inclusion of short stories in the language classroom results motivating for children, they help to exercise their imagination, and the repetition of expressions and structures presented in the stories allow children to have a solid foundation for secondary school.

Pedersen (1995, p. 2) also supports the positive effects of including short stories in the language classroom by pointing out that "stories enable ESL children to have an experience with the powerful real language of personal communication, not the usual 'teacherese' of the foreign language classroom… the full range of language is present in stories".

It is common to find that in the language classroom the textbook is used as one of the main elements for teaching, this is one of the reasons why including short stories in the daily practice could give dynamism to the English class and can raise students' interest toward the target culture.

Previous studies related to the inclusion of short stories in the language classroom have shown that this strategy results beneficial to support the students' language learning process. Al-Mansour and Al-Shorman (2011) carried out a study in two groups of an elementary Saudi school in order to compare the effects of storytelling aloud with the traditional reading alone method. The experimental group showed a significant improvement in reading comprehension skills. The authors concluded that storytelling aloud had a positive impact on their students' language process, increasing participation and self-confidence in the participants.

Hillman (1975) and McCormick (1977) also revealed in their studies that reading aloud to children benefit students in the learning of vocabulary and language structure, additionally it helps to improve receptive and decoding skills. Other positive effects of including short stories in the language classroom on the different English skills have been drawn by Sanchez (2014). In her project report she demonstrated the importance of storytelling and its contribution in the development of the five linguistic skills (speaking, reading, listening, writing and oral interaction) in an English elementary foreign language classroom. Through the development of a didactic sequence, learners could participate in different activities related to the Story 'The Grufalo' in which they had the opportunity to produce in the target language thanks to the interaction with different activities and learning situations that supported the improvement of the English skills.

Additionally, Illán (2007) presented the results of a research project in which short stories were used as a tool to increase motivation and interest among foreign language students. According to the results, first grade students who were exposed to everyday storytelling reading aloud during a school year showed higher interest towards the target language.

More recently, Kalantari and Hashemian (2016) conducted a study in which story based methodology was used as a strategy to improve learners' vocabulary knowledge in two groups of young EFL learners from a language center in Iran. Results of data analysis showed that using short stories to teach English helped students from the experimental group to increase vocabulary compared to the control group.

According to these studies, it is possible to draw as a conclusion that the inclusion of storytelling in the language classroom brings a lot of benefits for young learners; it helps to increase vocabulary, it supports the improvement of language skills and it is also a tool that promotes motivation and awareness towards the target language.

3.3 Young Learners characteristics

The age factor is one of the aspects to take into account in the language learning process. According to Phillips (1994) young learners are categorized in two groups, the first one is formed by children from five to seven years old and the second one by children between eight and eleven years old.

Children from five to seven years old are characterized by their imagination; they do not have a clear separation of what is real and what is fiction. The understanding of the world for this first group is done through their senses and they love to play and learn while having fun. (Scott and Ytreberg, 1991). One of the most relevant characteristics of young learners is that they are recognized for being enthusiastic towards learning; they are active learners who acquire second language naturally using unconsciously some elements they already recognize from their L1 process.

According to Krashen (1982) there are different ways to learn a second language; one of them is by acquisition, term that is related to a subconscious process. This author argues that language acquirers are not usually aware of the fact that they are acquiring language, but are only aware of the fact that they are using the language for communication. This is the case of children from five to seven years old who are not focused on form but on content and they learn thanks to the interaction they have with language through meaningful activities such as playing, singing, and making handcrafts. If these elements are included in the language classroom it is possible to provide young learners with a rich learning environment.

On the other hand, children from eight to eleven years old are less childish and they can clearly understand what is real and what is not. These kids are characterized for being active participants in their learning process and they can choose the activities they enjoy the most. These learners are a little bit more aware of their own learning process and can understand and develop more complicated tasks. According to Scott and Ytreberg (1991), children in these ages can solve tasks in which they discover simple grammatical rules.

When children are immersed in the language classroom, it is necessary to bear in mind the differences among them according to their learning stages and special features that depend on their previous experiences and individual characteristics. In general terms it is possible to find some common characteristics that are necessary to take into account when teaching a second language. Brumfit, Moon & Tongue (1997), state that young learners are characterized by being enthusiastic towards learning, they enjoy activities related to their interests and they need physical movement as stimulation for their thinking.

Additionally to the previous characteristics, Recio (2005, p. 63) presents the following table in which she includes the young learners' characteristics supported by some authors and her observation evidence:

Children are:	Research, teaching literature, and observation evidence:
Good at language understanding (at a holistic level)	- are already very good at interpreting meaning without necessarily understanding individual words (Halliwell, 1992). - rely heavily on oral language (Cameron, 2003).
Uninhibited in language production	- already have great skill in using limited language creatively. - take great delight in talking (Halliwell, 1992; Cameron, 2003) - are less inhibited than older learners to talk in the foreign language (Cameron, 2003). - most lack self consciousness when they speak a new language (McIlvain, 2004).
Willing to engage in language construction within their cognitive capacity	- have fun with language: i.e. rhyming and alliterations - need and enjoy repetitions (McIlvain, 2004). - require that language learning opportunities have appropriate literacy (language) demands.
Developing nascent literacy skills	(…) ´literacy teaching needs to be sensitive to the development of first language literacy, to the differences between the first language and the English in the relationship between spoken and written forms and to the learners´ knowledge of spoken English´. (Cameron, 2003:108).

	• may not be ready for certain structures and complexities in either first or second language (McIlvain, 2004).
Indirect but active in learning style	• frequently learn indirectly rather than directly • are continuously asking questions, wondering (Tizard and Hughes, 1984)
Engaged in understanding the world and constructing reality	• are always searching for meaning (Cameron, 2003), causing them to be actively involved in a process of formulating the rules that lead to the understanding of the world (Wells, 1987) • like to process new experiences, ask questions, experiment (Donaldson, 1987; Tizard and Hughes, 1984).

Characteristics of young children as language learners. (Recio, 2005, p.63)

3.3.1 Factors influencing EFL young learners learning

Being inside a young learner's classroom requires having a lot of energy, sympathy, enthusiasm towards teaching, and an excellent classroom management. The young language teacher is a model to follow. As Dörney (2001) points out, whatever is done by a teacher has a motivational, formative, influence on students. If the teacher shows the enthusiasm and love on what is done in the classroom, students surely will be infected with these positive feelings toward the class.

Lesson planning should include meaningful activities for kids; it is important to immediately catch their interest with the idea to manage in a proper way the children's short spans of attention. Motivation in the classroom is also promoted thanks to the kind of activities and materials the teacher brings to the class. This last idea is supported by Dörnyei (2006, p. 63) who states that "students will not be motivated to learn unless they regard the material they are taught as worth learning".

Creating a functional and an appropriate place for learning and being in contact with the foreign culture is a must in the young language classroom. The physical environment promotes the students' interest in learning and practicing the language. Visuals and classroom organization help kids to feel they are in a comfortable environment and enhance their active participation. In words of Fleta

(2007, p.14) "teachers, as linguistic models, should create an environment that facilitates conversational interaction and plan activities to communicate in English and to participate in the classroom life from day one, from start to finish, and everywhere at school".

The implementation of a clear routine in the young learner's classroom is a factor that highly influences the young learners' process. When children know what the daily schedule is and know how the things work in class; they will be more secure of themselves and the group members can easily help each other creating a relaxed atmosphere in which students feel free to participate. This proper learning environment increases positive attitudes in kids and helps in the construction of a cohesive group in which students help each other. Dunn (2008) supports this idea arguing that children need to be provided with the right type of experiences and for that he states that young learners need to feel secure in the language classroom; the activities proposed to them need to be linked to their interests and these ones should be related to the topics they already know in their home language.

As it was mentioned above, teachers need to provide students with a proper learning environment according to their needs and characteristics and it is also important to implement the right methodologies and approaches that could favor the learning of English at these ages.

3.4 Approaches and methodologies in the young learners' classroom

In order to understand story telling with EFL children, it is important to understand more about approaches and methodologies in young learners' classrooms. In this way it will be easier to find the proper teaching strategies at these ages.

Interest in the teaching/learning of English as a foreign language in the young learners' classroom has grown rapidly in recent years. Since an early age children start to learn English as a requirement in society and the teaching of this language has become one of the main subjects in schools, bringing the need of looking for the appropriate ways to teach young learners.

Children learn different from adults and they have certain characteristics that require the use of special approaches, methodologies, techniques and activities in the language classroom in order to take advantage of their capacities and cognitive development. There has also been increasing recognition that students have different ways of learning, and that many different learning and teaching methods can be effective (Baker and Westrup,2000). The following are some of the methodologies, approaches and methods that served as a support for developing some activities that came from the reading of short stories in the participant group. Although these ones are not the core approaches and methodologies of the project, they were a complement in the implementation of strategies to help students to improve their difficulties.

3.4.1 Total Physical Response

In 1977, James Asher proposed this method based on the characteristics of first language acquisition. The first characteristic that he took into account is that children have a lot of input before they speak. The second is that children learn thanks to movement and physical contact. This feature is related to the behaviorist conception: stimulus-response.

According to Asher (1977), the total physical response has as a purpose to lower learners' affective filter by allowing the student to have verbal input. This method allows students to react to language without thinking too much, facilitates long term retention, and reduces student anxiety and stress, something that results being positive for children who are starting their language learning process and do not have enough elements to produce in the target language.

Some activities related to this method are identifying pictures, words, body parts, mimic games, following classroom instructions, among others.

3.4.2 Natural Approach

This approach was implemented by Krashen and Terrell in the 1980s as a counterpart of the traditional grammar-based approaches. They state that

language is best taught when it is being used to transmit messages, not when it is explicitly taught for conscious learning.

According to this idea, second language could be acquired naturally as the L1 process, focusing more on communication than on form. In this approach the only vehicle of instruction is the target language.

Children are considered as natural acquirers (Dunn, 2008), for this reason the natural approach is considered to be successful when teaching languages to children. These special learners do not focus on language form but on content. They learn how to use language if they are exposed to an appropriate input.

Some of the activities in the natural approach are related to the TPR method, there are also other activities that could be used in a starting level such as supplying meaningful input based on pictures, answering yes/no questions, listing words, reading stories, and playing games that do not require a lot of oral production.

3.4.3 Communicative Language Teaching

This approach started being recognized in the 1980s and its main focus is done on the significance of language functions. According to this approach language is acquired thanks to the interaction in communicative and social activities. Some remarkable features of Communicative Language Teaching according to Nunan (1991) are the emphasis on learning through interaction, the use of authentic texts, the provision of opportunities for language use and the relation of the activities to students' personal experiences.

According to these characteristics, this approach results positive in the young language classroom because children enjoy participating in activities that simulate real-life situations such as games, role-plays, dialogues and games that are part of the activities children normally do when playing.

3.4.4 Story-Based Methodology

This methodology is the base of this research project. The use of short stories in the young language classroom is one of the main resources for teachers, nowadays this practice has increased and numerous studies related to the use of this resource has been published in recent years (Ellis and Brewster, 2014; Illán, 2007; Sánchez, 2014; Urbancová, 2006).

The story-based methodology provides students with the opportunity of linking their experiences and interests and the English language learning. Children enjoy listening to stories and from them it is possible to plan activities that engage and motivate children in the learning of English. Stories can provide an ideal introduction to the foreign language as they present language in a repetitive and memorable context; they can also serve as a springboard for a wide variety of language learning activities (Ellis & Brewster, 2014).

When applying a story based methodology there are three phases to follow (plan, do and review). These three phases are represented in the following chart:
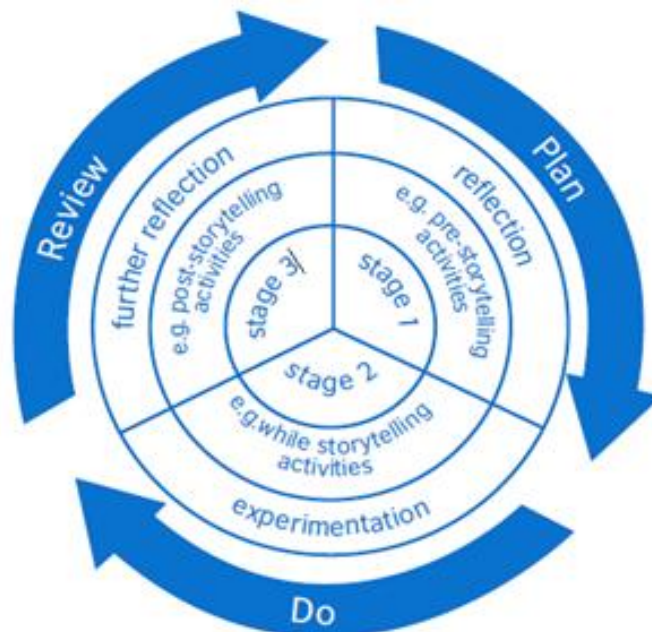

Figure 1. Story-Based phases by Ellis & Brewster (2014)

According to Ellis and Brewster (2014) these phases enable young learners to perceive their learning progress from pre and post storytelling activities to a concrete outcome, something that results meaningful for them. These authors suggest that in stage 1 (Plan) could be beneficial for children to start by a warm up activity related to the story followed by stage 2 (Do) in which is presented the main activity that also must follow the three steps (plan, do, review). As a final suggestion, the authors argue that in stage 3 (Review) it results useful to end the lesson by proposing a rounding up activity and if it is possible to set homework.

The three stages of the Story-Based methodology can be applied to most classroom contexts with little disruption (Ellis & Brewster, 2014). Each stage could include different activities apart from the proposed by the author and it is also possible to use other approaches and techniques to support the development of the activities around the reading of a short story in the language classroom such as TPR and the communicative approach.

To conclude, the story based-methodology provides a wide range of possibilities to teach English to young learners; it fixes with the special characteristics they have and promotes active participation by the part of the students. Using short stories in the EFL classroom is a strategy that allows teachers to approach children to the target language in a meaningful way because they serve as a departing point to develop different language activities according to students' interests and needs.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This project follows the principles of an Action Research which is a methodology introduced by Kurt Lewin in the 1930s as part of the social sciences. In the educational field, this methodology was strongly supported by John Elliot and Jack Whitehead in the 1970s, who conceived it as an opportunity of educational development for teachers. The main purpose in an action research study is to solve a problematic issue in the classroom by following some basic steps such as planning, observing, applying and reflecting.

4.2 Participants

The implementation of the didactic sequence was done at Freinet School in two groups of third grade, one with 24 and the other with 25 students (49 students in total). These groups were in basic III level and the average age of students went from 8 to 9 years old. At this level, students are finishing their foundation stage and they are getting ready to go to the pull out program at the Freinet Language Center in which they require to be more autonomous.

A special characteristic of these students is that in general terms they enjoyed being part of Role Plays and dialogues. These groups were always committed to participate in this type of activities because it implicated the representation of characters, movement and expression, something that broke with the common classroom routine. However, it was possible to observe in the development of these activities that some students had problems of intonation and pronunciation and a few part of the group showed intimidated and insecure when they were in front of their classmates.

These students had an intensity of 10 hours of English a week. They had access to different materials such as the textbook "Super Minds", internet and the photocopiable material provided by the teacher.

4.3 INSTRUMENTS

In order to collect data for this project the following instruments were used:

Teacher's Observations: They were carried out during the classes to gather information about students' behaviors, difficulties, development of the activities and effectiveness of the strategies used in class.

Videos and pictures: These kinds of instruments were used to register students' productions in oral and written activities and the development of the different activities proposed during the implementation of the didactic sequence.

Grades of students: In order to identify students' difficulties in each skill, it was taken into account **t**he final grades of students from the first trimester. On the other hand, to establish the effectiveness of the implementation of the didactic sequence**,** the students' final grades from third trimester were taken into account. These grades were used to compare the pre- and post-application of the story-based methodology.

To obtain the final grades it was used the following assessing tools that were designed to evaluate students' understanding of the stories read in class and the other topics covered in the course:

ASSESSING TOOL	ACTIVITIES	SKILL
Quizzes	• Students developed worksheets with matching, fill in the gaps and true and false activities. • Students completed charts to specify each element of the story (Title, characters, setting, problem and solution). • Students wrote the description of the	Reading Writing

	characters of the story using models and vocabulary given by the teacher.	
	• Students listened to some characters descriptions to identify them.	Listening
	• Students listened to vocabulary about physical descriptions (adjectives) and match what they listen with the correct image.	
	• Students answered to open questions about the elements of the story Title, characters, setting, problem and solution).	Speaking
	• Dialogues	
	• Puppets presentations	
	• Oral Presentation (Shoes design)	
Midterm Exam	• Students answered to some questions about all the topics they have studied in class related to the short stories and the other topics presented in the guide book "Super Minds". The exam is divided in 4 parts according to each skill.	Integrated skills (one grade per skill)
Module Exam	• Students answered to 30 questions about all the topics seen in the whole trimester.	Integrated skills (one final grade)

Short Stories: According to the students' characteristics, it was decided to include the reading of short stories as an approach to teach English as a foreign language, taking into account that the inclusion of literature in the classroom could influence positively students towards learning the target language and also because reading short stories is associated to an activity that all children are used to do in their growing process, something that results interesting, engaging and meaningful.
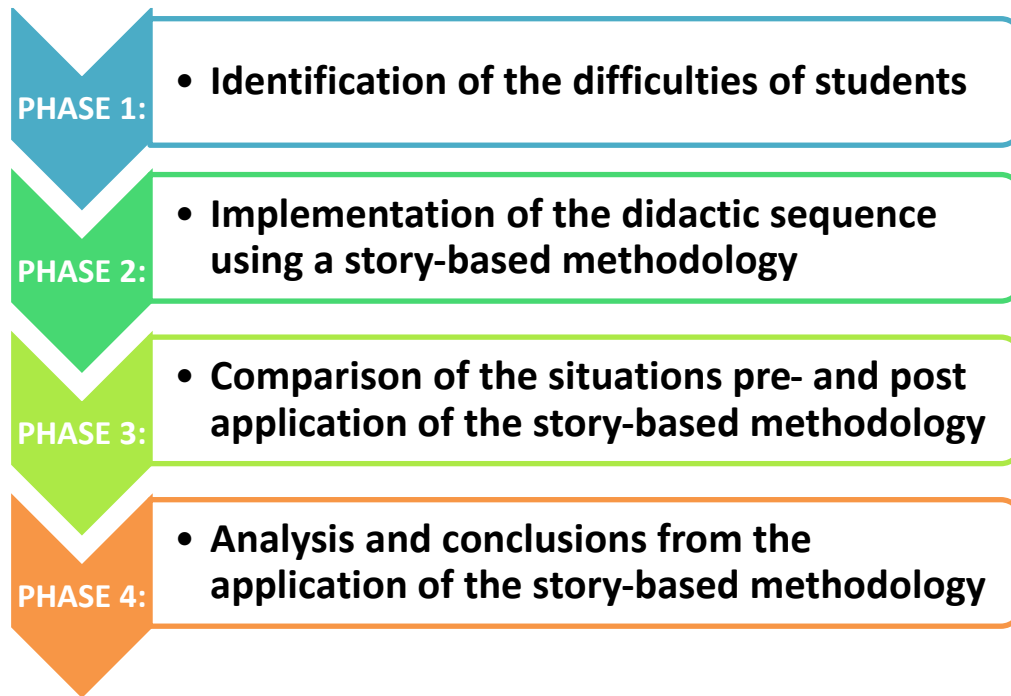
The use of short stories in the language classroom could be a perfect ally to support the English learning process; in this case students presented some difficulties in the four skills that could be overcome through the activities proposed from the use of literature. The activities included in each stage of the didactic sequence (Plan, Do, Review) proposed to two groups of third-graders at Freinet school were related to three short stories, each one was read in one of the three terms of the school year 2015-2016. The following were the three short stories chosen to design the teaching sequence:

Name of the Story	Publishing House	Level
The Fisherman and his Wife	Oxford University Press	Beginner 2
The Shoemaker and the Elves	Oxford University Press	Beginner 1
The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse	Oxford University Press	Beginner 2

The criteria for selecting the books responded mainly to suggestions presented by Ellis & Brewster (2014). Some of these are the level of students' proficiency to which the book was addressed, the kind of words and expressions presented in the books, the relation of topics to the learners' interests according to their age, the appropriateness of illustrations to support the text and the presentation of cultural aspects of the target culture.
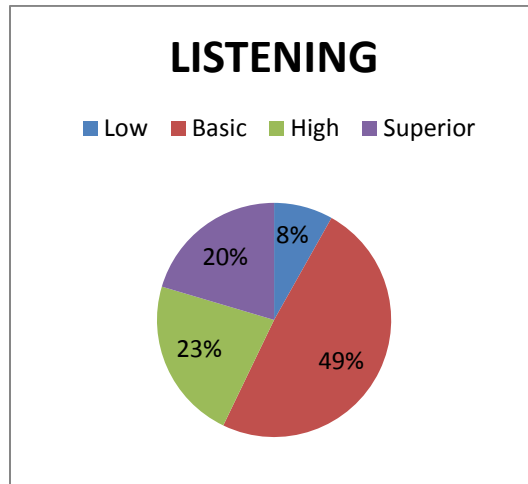
4.4 PROCEDURE

For the development of this Action Research it was necessary to create and follow 4 phases as it is observed in the following scheme:

PHASE 1:
- **Identification of the difficulties of students**

PHASE 2:
- **Implementation of the didactic sequence using a story-based methodology**

PHASE 3:
- **Comparison of the situations pre- and post application of the story-based methodology**

PHASE 4:
- **Analysis and conclusions from the application of the story-based methodology**

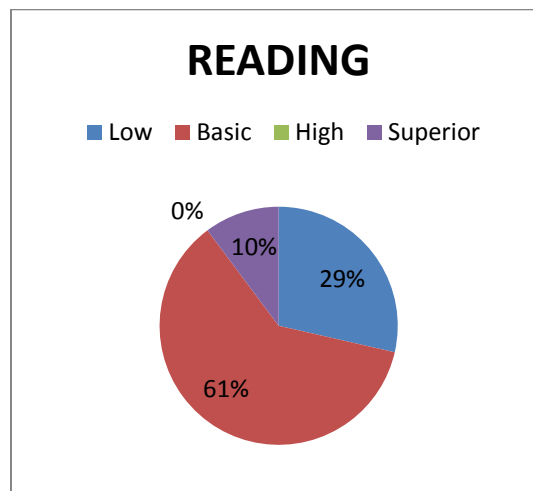The graph above is explained as follows:

4.5 Phase 1: Identification of the difficulties of students

To establish students' difficulties before the implementation of the didactic sequence, the following students' final grades from the first trimester were taken into account. Each graph describes the percentage of students located in one of the four academic levels proposed by Freinet School. In a scale of 5.0 as maximum grade, the low level goes from 1.0 to 2.9, the basic level from 3.0 to 4.0, the high level from 4.1 to 4.6 and the superior level from 4.7 to 5.0. Also included is the graph related to the final grade that shows the weighting of all the grades obtained in each skill at the end of the term.
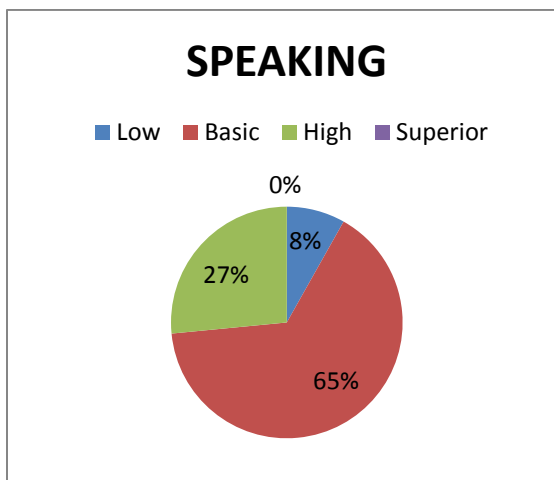
Graph 1. Listening before implementation

As it can be observed in the above graph, most of the students are located in a basic level (49%), followed by a 23% of students in high, 20% in superior and 8% in a low level.
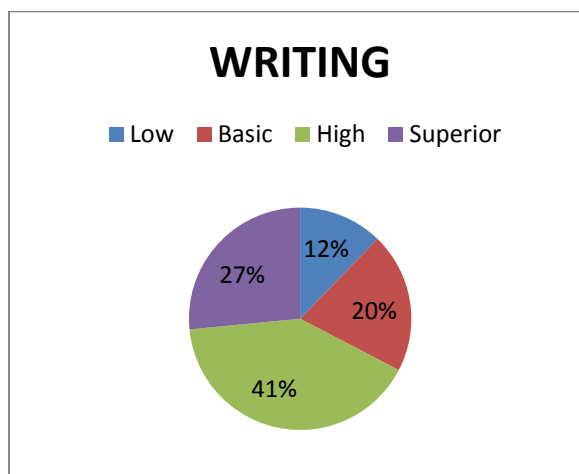

Graph 2. Reading before implementation

In the reading skill, more than half of the students are located in a basic level with a 61%. On the other hand 10% of the group is located in a superior level and a significant part of the group (29%) is located in a low level.

Graph 3. Speaking before implementation

According to the above graph, the final results of the speaking skill show that 65% of the students are located in a basic level, followed by 27% in high and 8% in low.

Graph 4. Writing before implementation

In the writing skill, it is possible to observe that 41% of the students are located in a high level, followed by 27% in superior, 20% in basic and the rest of students are located in a low level (12%).

Graph 5. Final Grade before implementation

The final grade graph shows that students from the participant groups are located mostly in a high level with a 45%, followed by 43% of students in a basic level, 10% in superior and 2% in a low level.

According to the above grades and the information gathered by the teacher in the observations before the implementation of the didactic sequence it is possible to establish that basic III students presented the following general difficulties:

SKILL	ASPECT	DESCRIPTION OF THE DIFFICULTY	CAUSE
Listening	Specific details	• Students struggled with the identification of specific details from oral texts such as descriptions and dialogues.	Students had lack of vocabulary. They needed more practice in activities that require the identification of specific ideas.
	Speed	• Students did not get the ideas of oral texts due to the speed of the dialogues.	In previous grades students used to listen to simple texts that were slow according to their level. In third grade students required more practice with faster listenings.
	Source	• Students did not understand some oral texts when they were taken from other sources different from the English textbook.	Students were exposed to few types of oral texts and they only worked with the listenings presented by their English guidebook.

	Vocabulary and expressions	• Students did not identify some common expressions and words from the listening activities.	Students had limited vocabulary and expressions.
Reading	Elements of a narrative text	• In narrative texts, students could identify characters and settings from the story but it was difficult for them to describe them.	Students did not deepen into activities that required the description of specific features of each element of the story. They only identified names and places without describing them.
	Key words	• Students did not identify some key words that were important to understand written texts.	Students were not given a list of key words before the reading activities and they had lack of vocabulary.
	Specific ideas	• Students got a general idea of written texts but they struggled with the identification of specific ideas.	Students were not familiar with activities that require the identification of specific ideas. They had lack of reading strategies that could help them to go beyond the general idea.
	Open answers	• Students answered closed questions from written texts but they had difficulties when the questions required an open answer.	Students answered closed questions with true or false and yes or no in reading comprehension activities. They were not used to answering open questions due to their writing level.
	Written instructions	• Students required constant guide from the part of the teacher to understand and follow written instructions.	Students were not autonomous to follow written instructions. They felt insecure if the teacher did not read them aloud several times.
	Word translation	• Students blocked themselves when they did not understand a specific word and they did not continue reading until they discovered the meaning of the word in Spanish.	Students had a strong need of knowing the vocabulary in Spanish. They felt that the only way to understand was the translation technique. They had lack of reading comprehension strategies to get words from context.

	Sequence of events	Students identified the events in narrative texts but they had difficulties in classifying them in each moment of the story.	Students only worked with the stories presented in their English guidebook. They were not familiar with activities related to the identification of the three moments of a short story.
Speaking	Pronunciation	Students had difficulties with the pronunciation of some words in reading aloud activities.	Students tended to say the words with Spanish sounds. They needed to reinforce English phonics.
	Intonation	Students had some intonation problems when declaiming poems and rhymes. This difficulty was also present in reading aloud activities.	Students needed more exposure to listening activities that could help them to identify the intonation of the target language. They had interference of the Spanish intonation.
	Fluency	Students had lack of fluency in oral activities such as dialogues, role plays and presentation of familiar topics.	The lack of vocabulary made students to lose fluency in oral activities. Some students did not remember well the information they needed to present.
	Tone	Students spoke in a low tone making difficult to understand what they were saying.	Students felt insecure in oral activities. They did not speak loud to prevent being the center of attention.
	Oral Anxiety	Some students felt anxious when presenting oral activities in front of their classmates.	Students did not like to be corrected in front of the class. They felt insecure about their pronunciation.
	Use of English	Students used a lot of Spanish for expressing basic needs and ideas in the classroom.	Students were not motivated to use the expressions in class. These students had lack of vocabulary and did not have the need of communicating in English because they were understood in their home language.

Writing	Vocabulary	Students had limited words to express their ideas in written activities.	Students had lack of vocabulary and forgot easily the ones already taught in previous grades.
	Structure	Students had difficulties in structuring a short descriptive paragraph.	Students used to write short descriptive sentences and they have not enough practice in writing paragraphs. They needed models to follow in order to identify a structure.
	Punctuation	Sometimes students omitted punctuation marks in writing activities or used them as in Spanish.	Students were in the process of knowing the punctuation marks in their home language and they transferred this Spanish knowledge to English.
	Spelling	Students had difficulties with the proper spelling of some words. In some cases, they had problems of omission, changing of order, addition and substitution.	Students associated some words to the Spanish writing. Sometimes, this difficulty was presented due to lack of attention.

4.6 Phase 2: Implementation of the didactic sequence

The following chart shows the sequence of activities based on the reading of short stories that were implemented as a strategy to improve the difficulties presented by students at the beginning of the school year:

BOOK	STAGE	ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE FUNCTION	TIME
The Fisherman and his Wife	Plan	**Story words** Students look for a list of key words chosen by the teacher in the dictionary before reading the story, then they associate these words to some flashcards.	To identify key words from the story.	Identifying	30 minutes
		Predictions of the Story Students look at the cover of the book to predict the possible title, setting, characters and events of the story. They drawing a picture related to the predictions.	To predict possible aspects and events of the story.	• Predicting • Anticipating	1 hour
	Do	**Reading the beginning** The teacher reads aloud the first part of the story. Students answer some oral questions related to the reading and then they write a short paragraph from the board with all the ideas given by the students to summarize the beginning of the story. Below the paragraph students draw a representative picture about this part of the story.	To i*dentify* which *story events* occur at the beginning of the story.	• Identifying • Checking understanding • Summarizing	1 hour and 30 minutes
		Reading the middle The teacher reads aloud the second part of the story. Students answer some oral questions related to the sequence of events (what the wife wants: a cottage, a big home, a castle and a palace). Then students write in the notebook a paragraph from the board with the ideas given by them to summarize the middle of the story. Below the paragraph students draw a representative picture about this part of the story.	To i*dentify* which *story events* occur in the middle of the story.	• Identifying • Checking understanding • Sequencing • Summarizing	1 hour and 30 minutes

		Reading the end The teacher reads aloud the last part of the story. Students answer some oral questions related to the final events then they write in the notebook a paragraph from the board with the ideas given by them to summarize the end of the story. Below the paragraph students draw a representative picture about the end of the story.	To i*dentify* which *story events* occur at the end of the story.	• Identifying • Checking understanding. • Summarizing	1 hour and 30 minutes
		Characters' Description Students describe the Fisherman, the wife and the magic fish using expressions, words and previous models given by the teacher. They draw a picture according to each description.	To describe the characters of the story.	Describing	2 hours
		Reading aloud: After listening to the teacher's reading students take turns to read aloud each part the story.	To practice pronunciation and intonation.	Storytelling	20 minutes
	Review	**Individual Reading:** Students read individually the whole story (silent reading).	To review the whole story.	Reviewing	20 minutes
		Comprehension activity: Students complete some sentences about the things the wife wants every time she gets a new wish. The activity has 5 sentences and each one has a related picture (a cottage, a big home, a castle and a palace).	To identify specific aspects from the story.	Checking and assessing understanding	30 minutes
		Story Map: Students fill a chart with the title of the story, the characters, the setting, the problem and the solution of the story.	To identify the main elements of the story.	• Identifying • Checking and assessing understanding	30 minutes
		Sequence of the Story: Students read five sentences related to the story and they number them according to the correct sequence of events.	To identify the sequence of events.	• Sequencing • Assessing understanding	20 minutes

		Confirmation of hypothesis: Students re-read the initial predictions of the story they wrote in the notebook in the plan stage. Then they re-write the sentences in the notebook classifying what is true and what is false.	To check the initial predictions of the story.	Confirming Predictions	30 minutes
		Role Play: Students perform the whole story (The Role Play has 6 parts). Before presenting students practice in groups of 3 the assigned part of the representation. This presentation is the closing activity.	To increase English oral communication skills.	Performing Assessing	4 hours
The Shoemaker and the Elves	**Plan**	**Story words** Students look for a list of key words chosen by the teacher in the dictionary before reading the story, then they associate these words to some flashcards.	To identify key words from the story.	Identifying	30 minutes
		Predictions of the Story Students look at the cover of the book to predict the possible title, setting, characters and events of the story. They drawing a picture related to the predictions.	To predict possible elements and events of the story.	• Predicting • Anticipating	1 hour
	Do	**Reading the beginning** The teacher reads aloud the first part of the story. Students answer some oral questions related to the reading and then they write a short paragraph from the board with all the ideas given by the students to summarize the beginning of the story. Below the paragraph students draw a representative picture about this part of the story.	To identify which story events occur at the beginning of the story.	• Identifying • Checking understanding • Summarizing	1 hour and 30 minutes

		Reading the middle The teacher reads aloud the second part of the story. Students answer some oral questions related to the sequence of events (what the wife wants: a cottage, a big home, a castle and a palace). Then students write in the notebook a paragraph from the board with the ideas given by them to summarize the middle of the story. Below the paragraph students draw a representative picture about this part of the story.	To i*dentify* which *story events* occur in the middle of the story.	• Identifying • Checking understanding • Sequencing • Summarizing	1 hour and 30 minutes
		Reading the end The teacher reads aloud the last part of the story. Students answer some oral questions related to the final events then they write in the notebook a paragraph from the board with the ideas given by them to summarize the end of the story. Below the paragraph students draw a representative picture about the end of the story.	To i*dentify* which *story events* occur at the end of the story.	• Identifying • Checking understanding. • Summarizing	1 hour and 30 minutes
		Reading aloud: After listening to the teacher's reading students take turns to read aloud each part the story.	To practice pronunciation and intonation.	Storytelling	20 minutes
		Characters' Description: Students describe the Shoemaker, his wife and the elves following the model given by the teacher and the previous descriptions from the first book. Students are asked to start with an introductory sentence, then to include physical aspects and details of personality. Finally students draw pictures for each description.	To describe the characters of the story.	• Identifying • Checking understanding. • Summarizing	2 hours
	Review	**Individual Reading:** Students read individually the whole story (silent reading).	To review the whole story.	Reviewing	20 minutes

		Comprehension Activities: Students develop a worksheet about the story as follows: **1.** Students complete simple sentences about the story; each sentence has a key picture to help students to answer. **2.** Students match some expressions with the correct character. **3.** Students complete 4 short paragraphs with some key words (each one is related to a specific part of the story) then they match each paragraph with the correct picture of a character.	To identify specific aspects from the story.	• Checking understanding • Assessing understanding of specific elements of the story	45 minutes
		Confirmation of hypothesis: Students re-read the initial predictions of the story they wrote in the notebook in the plan stage. Then they re-write the sentences in the notebook classifying what is true and what is false.	To check the initial predictions of the story.	Confirming Predictions	30 minutes
		Designing shoes: Students create an original shoes design using different materials. Students are given a model to follow and a list of useful words to write the description of their own shoes (colors, designs, accessories).	To describe an object using expressions and words previously worked in class.	• Describing objects	3 hours
		Dialogue "At the shoe shop": Students perform a dialogue between a customer and a shop assistant at a shoe shop. Students practice before the presentation in pairs assigned by the teacher.	To increase English oral communication skills.	• Asking for information • Giving information • Assessing oral production	3 hours

The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse	**Plan**	**Story words** Students look for a list of key words chosen by the teacher in the dictionary before reading the story, then they associate these words to some flashcards.	To identify key words from the story.	Identifying	30 minutes
		Predictions of the Story Students look at the cover of the book to predict the possible title, setting, characters and events of the story. They drawing a picture related to the predictions.	To predict possible aspects and events of the story.	• Predicting • Anticipating	1 hour
	Do	**Reading the beginning** The teacher reads aloud the first part of the story. Students answer some oral questions related to the reading and then they write a short paragraph from the board with all the ideas given by the students to summarize the beginning of the story. Below the paragraph students draw a representative picture about this part of the story.	To i*dentify* which *story events* occur at the beginning of the story.	• Identifying • Checking understanding • Summarizing	1 hour and 30 minutes
		Reading the middle The teacher reads aloud the second part of the story. Students answer some oral questions related to the sequence of events (what the wife wants: a cottage, a big home, a castle and a palace). Then students write in the notebook a paragraph from the board with the ideas given by them to summarize the middle of the story. Below the paragraph students draw a representative picture about this part of the story.	To i*dentify* which *story events* occur in the middle of the story.	• Identifying • Checking understanding • Sequencing • Summarizing	1 hour and 30 minutes
		Reading the end The teacher reads aloud the last part of the story. Students answer some oral questions related to the final events then they write in the notebook a paragraph from the board with the ideas given by them to summarize the end of the story. Below the paragraph students draw a representative picture about the end of the story.	To i*dentify* which *story events* occur at the end of the story.	• Identifying • Checking understanding • Summarizing	1 hour and 30 minutes

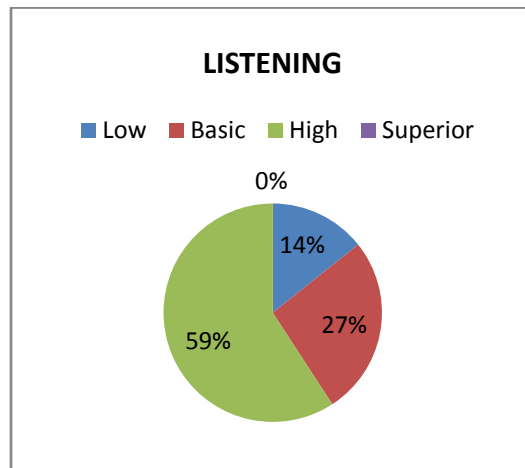|		**Reading aloud:** After listening to the teacher's reading students take turns to read aloud each part the story.	To practice pronunciation and intonation.	Storytelling	20 minutes
		Characters' Description: Students describe the Town Mouse and The Country Mouse using a given a list of words (adjectives and nouns) and useful expressions given by the teacher in order to help them to describe in a more complete way each character. Students follow the previous models from other stories, this time they have to include negative sentences with the verb to be. Finally students draw a picture of each character.	To describe the characters of the story.	• Identifying • Checking understanding • Summarizing	2 hours
	Review	**Individual Reading:** Students read individually the whole story (silent reading).	To review the whole story.	Reviewing	20 minutes
		Comparative chart: Students write a comparative chart about the country and the town, the sentences to compare the two places include affirmative and negative sentences with the verb to be. For doing this activity the teacher provide students with a list of key words that she writes on the board. Students have to check and read the whole story again in order to have more elements for writing. At the end of the chart students draw a picture of each place.	To compare two places using affirmative and negative sentences.	Comparing or contrasting things	2 hours
		Confirmation of hypothesis: Students re-read the initial predictions of the story they wrote in the notebook in the plan stage. Then they re-write the sentences in the notebook classifying what is true and what is false.	To check the initial predictions of the story.	Confirming Predictions	30 minutes

		Puppets Presentation: Students make some puppets and decoration for a presentation using the materials given by the teacher (construction paper, markers, and sticks). The presentation is divided in 8 parts, each group has three characters: The narrator, the town mouse and the country mouse. Students practice in groups before the performance. Finally students prepare the setting and perform the puppets presentation.	To increase English oral communication skills.	• Storytelling • Assessing pronunciation and intonation	5 hours

5. RESULTS

The following results correspond to "Phase 3: Comparison of the situations pre- and post-application of the story-based methodology".
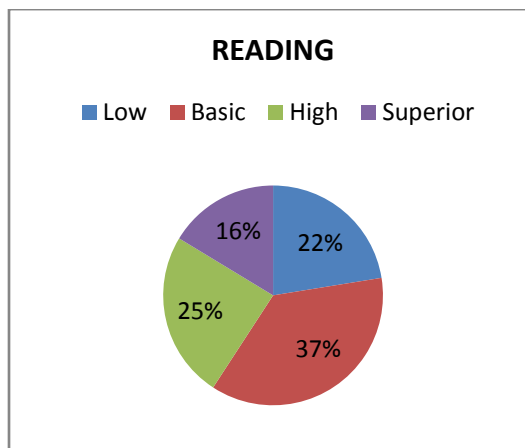
These results were obtained by students in their final grades after the implementation of the didactic sequence in the four skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing. As the previous graphs showed in the stage of identification of students difficulties before the implementation of the didactic sequence, each graph describes the percentage of students located in one of the four academic levels proposed by the educational institution students belonged to. In a scale of 5.0 as maximum grade, the low level goes from 1.0 to 2.9, the basic level from 3.0 to 4.0, the high level from 4.1 to 4.6 and the superior level from 4.7 to 5.0. Also included is the graph related to the final grade that shows the weighting of all the

grades obtained in each skill. After these statistics, there will be a comparative chart in which it is showed the results before and after the implementation.
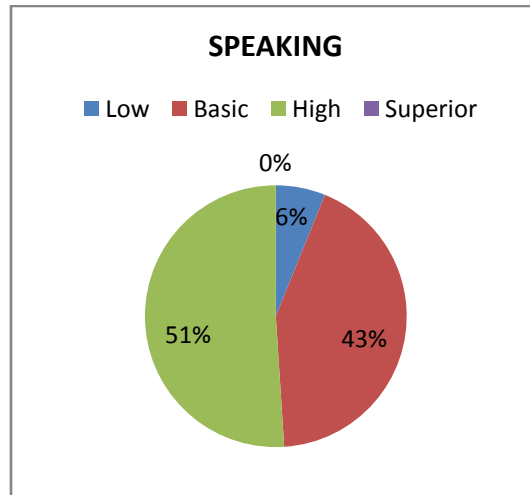
LISTENING

■ Low ■ Basic ■ High ■ Superior

0%
14%
27%
59%

Graph 6. Listening after implementation

In the final grades of the listening skill after the implementation, 59% of students were located in a high level, 27% in basic, 14% in a low level while 0% of students were located in a superior level.

READING

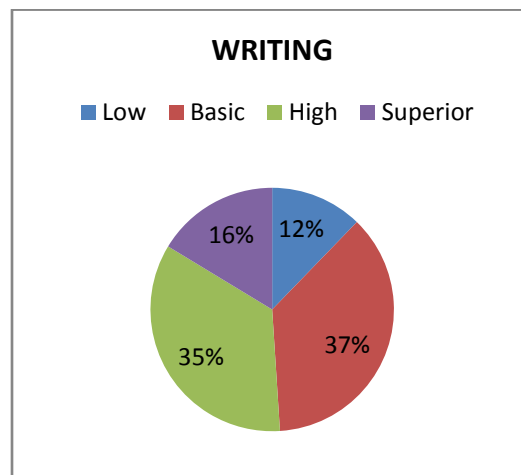■ Low ■ Basic ■ High ■ Superior

16% 22%
25%
37%

Graph 7. Reading after implementation

According to the final grades of the Reading skill after the implementation, 37% of students were at a basic level, 25% in high, 22% in low and the rest 16% was located in a superior level**.**

Graph 8. Speaking after implementation

In the speaking skill, it is possible to observe that more than half of the students were located in a high level with a 51%; followed by 43% of students located in a basic level and 6% in a low level, finally none of the students was located in a superior level.

Graph 9. Writing after implementation

According to the graph above related to the writing skill after the implementation, 37% of students were located in a basic level, 35% in high, 16% in superior and 12% of students were located in a low level.

Graph 10. Final grade after implementation

In the final grades after the implementation it is possible to observe that 51% of students were located in a high level, 43% in basic, 4% in low and 2% in a superior level.

Comparative chart before and after the implementation of the didactic sequence

Skill / Aspect	Level *	Percentage of students before implementation	Percentage of students after implementation
Listening	Low	8%	14%
	Basic	49%	27%
	High	23%	59%
	Superior	20%	0%
Reading	Low	29%	22%
	Basic	61%	37%
	High	0%	25%
	Superior	10%	16%
Speaking	Low	8%	6%
	Basic	65%	43%
	High	27%	51%
	Superior	0%	0%
Writing	Low	12%	12%

	Basic	20%	37%
	High	41%	35%
	Superior	27%	16%
Final grade	Low	10%	4%
	Basic	43%	43%
	High	45%	51%
	Superior	2%	2%

* Low: 1.0 to 2.9; Basic: 3.0 to 3.9; High 4.0 to 4.6; Superior: 4.7 to 5.0

According to the statistics related to the final grades of each skill, it is possible to see in the comparative chart the results before and after the implementation of the didactic sequence. In the ***listening skill*** it is not reflected a remarkable improvement being that the results after the implementation do not show a big difference, there is only a positive change since 23% of the group was in a high level before the implementation compared to a 59% after the implementation. On the other hand**,** 49% of the students were in a basic level before the implementation, compared to a 27% after the implementation. Finally in the superior level, 20% of the students were in a superior level, compared to a 0% after the implementation, showing a decrease of superior grades. These results showed that only a small part of the group improved the listening skill, others remain the same and the rest did not improve in this part, getting lower results in the final grade.

As a second skill, the statistics showed that the ***reading skill*** had a remarkable positive result after the implementation of the didactic sequence. Before the implementation, students were located as follows: 29% low, 61% basic, 0% high and 10% superior. In contrast to the results after the implementation which showed that 22% of the students were in a lower level, 37% in basic, 25% in high and 16% in a superior level. These results showed that most of the students improved this skill going from basic to high and superior levels.

As a third skill, it is possible to observe that speaking also showed improvement in its final grade. The most remarkable fact is that students passed from 27% in high level to a 51% after the implementation. Other part of the group

passed from being in a lower level to a basic one showing a decrease in the first one (8% before and 6% after).

The writing skill did not have a great impact after the implementation. The statistics showed stability thus 12% of the students remain in a lower level before and after the implementation. On the other hand, a small part of the group did not improve in this skill showing that 41% of the students were in a high level before the implementation compared to a 35% after. The following was the only issue that showed improvement in this skill, according to the results 20% of the students were in a basic level in contrast to a 37% after the implementation.

Finally, in the final grade, it is possible to see a general improvement being that the percentage of students located in high level increased from 45% to 51%. This 6% of difference was reduced from the low level in the results before the implementation in which there were located 10% of students.

As a conclusion, it is possible to observe in the statistics that most of the skills were affected positively after the implementation of the didactic sequence. In general terms, the reading skill is the most outstanding one, followed by the speaking skill. The listening skill did not have such a positive change and the writing skill showed stability.

6. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter corresponds to "Phase 4: Analysis and conclusions from the application of the story-based methodology". According to the results, one of the skills that showed high improvement was the speaking skill. This result is linked to the activities developed in the plan stage of the didactic sequence in which students learnt some key words and expressions that were used later in the do and review stages. Activities such as reading aloud and individual reading, that were developed during the do stage, also supported this improvement.

Even though the listening skill did not have such great improvement in the final results after the implementation, this kind of activities were relevant to give students the necessary elements for improving the speaking skill, thus the listening activities provided students with vocabulary, expressions and a model of pronunciation.

Listening and speaking work together in the language learning process, they are associated to the skills that promote the production of the target language; in this sense, listening as a receptive skill is the input learners need to interiorize the knowledge and speaking is the product of this input needed for communicating.

According to Fleta (2014, p 38), one way to increase the amount and intensity of input necessary for implicit and subconscious EFL learning in instructed contexts is to provide enough exposure for implicit language learning, to increase the reception and the production skills and to provide young learners with effective practices that give them clues of meaning. This last concept was applied in this project through the reading of short stories which served as a tool to expose students to the target language and to create activities related to language production.

Based on this idea, Cameron (2003) exposes that when foreign language learners are exposed to the reading of stories in class, they get the meaning of the words from the book illustrations and through the context. In this case, the input students received from the reading of short stories was a springboard to oral production.

Another aspect that supported the improvement of the speaking skill has to do with the three final projects students developed at the end of each book in which they performed a role-play or a puppets presentation. This last activity helped students to increase their confidence when speaking because it reduces anxiety in children when doing oral presentations. "Using puppets in the young learners' classroom is a way to lower the affective filter, allowing students to produce in a more relaxed way. When a child speaks through the puppet, it is not the child who is perceived as making errors but the puppet, and children find this liberating" Ozdeniz (2001, Para, 9).

In relation to role plays, students from these ages associate this activity to the games they normally play in their daily routine. Children are used to role play trying to simulate real life situations. When role-plays are included in the EFL classroom, children see this activity as a pleasant activity in which they can play and enjoy language. As Liu and Ding (2009) point out, role-play is an effective

technique to create a proper learning environment; it promotes the interest of learners and makes the language acquisition impressive.

In relation to the reading skill, the results showed that this one obtained the highest improvement after the implementation of the didactic sequence. As it was showed in the description of the difficulties before the implementation of the story-based methodology, students had reading comprehension problems related to the understanding of specific details, the description of characters and settings of the story and answering to open questions.

After the implementation of the activities proposed from the reading of short stories, students had a better understanding of narrative texts and they were in the capacity of answering easily to different kind of questions (close and open questions). This final result is linked to the reading comprehension activities students did during the do stage of the story-based methodology in which the participants identified the sequence of short stories, worked on the description of the characters and the different elements of the narrative texts. Another aspect that helped in the improvement of this skill was the previous knowledge students learnt in the plan stage in which they identified key words and expressions that were the base to better comprehension.

These learners also had a positive attitude towards the comprehension activities related to the three stories read during the implementation of the didactic sequence. The inclusion of this kind of narrative texts gave a different dynamic in the classroom and students were committed to participate in class.

As a final aspect, even though the writing skill did not show a remarkable change, students from the participant groups participated in writing activities related to the creation of new elements such as the description of their own pair of shoes using previous vocabulary and the elements learnt from the second story, in this activity students made use of their artistic skills and imagination. To support this idea, Oster (1989, p 85) states that the use of literature in the classroom helps students to write in a more creative way.

 Another writing activity that raised motivation among students was the one related to the comparative chart between the town and the country

because they could compare what they had read in the story with their personal experiences. This connection students established between reality and fantasy, was an important element to raise interest towards the English class, especially towards the writing activities even though this kind of activities required a lot of effort by the their part. Young learners need to have the interest to learn, and that interest is the key to succeed in learning a language. As Gardner (1985, p 10) says "the extent to which an individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity". Good results are achieved as long as students are provided with the right and proper conditions for language learning and this is possible through the use of short stories as a pedagogical tool in the EFL classroom.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are also part of the "Phase 4: Analysis and conclusions from the application of the story-based methodology". Here it is possible to state that the implementation of the didactic sequence, based on the use of short stories in a young learners' classroom, resulted in useful strategy to help students from the participant groups to improve most of their language skills in English.

When young learners are provided with a rich input, then they will use the elements gathered from the activities done in class to communicate. In this case the reading of short stories, the repetition of expressions and words and the input they received in the pre-stage activities were the elements students used in the do stage and the final projects in which they had to use language in oral and written activities.

The inclusion of the three short stories also helped in the creation of a proper learning environment in which young learners worked motivated towards the target language. The magic of words and the pleasant experience of storytelling were a departing point for young learners to be engaged in the learning of English as a foreign language.

It was possible to see in most of the language skills, an improvement over the final grades. According to this, the inclusion of short stories gave students a new horizon in which the learning of a foreign language was more dynamic and enjoyable.

On the other hand, the stages proposed by the story-based methodology were an effective way to propose activities in a logical, sequential and organized way, taking into account children's preferences and interests and giving the teacher the opportunity to create activities related to the story with the clear purpose of improving the language skills from comprehension activities to productive activities.

In conclusion, the use of short stories in the EFL classroom provides students with opportunities to use language in a meaningful way, departing from their interests and appealing to the oldest of arts, storytelling.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- In relation to the selection of short stories for teaching English as a foreign language in the young learners' classroom, it is necessary to take into account students interests and opinions.

- The vocabulary, expressions and structures provided by short stories must be aligned with the students' proficiency level; on the contrary the reading of a short story with a high level of difficulty could be a demotivating factor.

- It could be beneficial to create interconnection between the topics studied by students in the different areas of knowledge with the ones presented in the short story, in this way the reading of the short story could be meaningful and students could connect their previous experiences to improve their English skills.

- To support the story-based methodology it is also necessary to provide a proper learning environment in which students have at their reach other children's books in a special reading corner.

- To make more effective the use of short stories in the young learners' classroom it is also necessary to support the teaching of the target language by applying the different methodologies, approaches and techniques that fix with children's characteristics.

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