



Storytelling through Picture Description to Enhance Very Young EFL Learners

Oral Production: An Action Research Innovation

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## Abstract

This study aimed at improving the oral development in the primary school Ecuadorian context where teaching English at early ages focuses mainly on expanding reading and writing as productive skills. Therefore, the purpose of this action research was to specifically examine how the use of storytelling through picture description as a visual support can benefit communicative skills among a group of second grade students from a private school in Guayaquil. Using quantitative and qualitative instruments, the study considered vocabulary, organization, and fluency as the basis of oral development. A pre and post A1 level speaking assessment measured the improvement of vocabulary and fluency. Results evidenced that the impact of this intervention was a Cohen's  $d = 3.48$  which is interpreted as a large impact. The paired T-samples test revealed the study is highly reliable with a score of  $p = 0.000$ . There are few studies related to teaching English as a foreign language in very early education worldwide and South America. In Ecuador, no studies were found, therefore, implications of this study are addressed to school authorities and other EFL teachers in order to upgrade the proficiency of their students from early grades.

*Keywords:* young learners, storytelling, picture description, oral development.

## Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio fue abordar el desarrollo oral en el contexto ecuatoriano de la escuela primaria. La enseñanza del idioma inglés a edades tempranas se enfoca principalmente en la expansión de la lectura y la escritura como habilidades productivas. Por lo tanto, esta investigación examinó específicamente cómo el uso de la narración de historias a través de la descripción de imágenes como un apoyo visual puede beneficiar las habilidades comunicativas entre un grupo de estudiantes de segundo grado de una escuela privada en Guayaquil. Aplicando instrumentos cuantitativos y cualitativos, el estudio consideró el vocabulario, la organización y la fluidez como la base del desarrollo oral. Se aplicó una evaluación oral previa con un formato correspondiente al nivel A1 para medir si el vocabulario y la fluidez se incrementaron. Los resultados muestran que el impacto de la intervención fue Cohen's  $d = 3,48$  que indica un gran impacto. Una prueba de los resultados de las pruebas inicial y final reflejan  $p = 0,000$ , esto quiere decir que la investigación es altamente confiable. Existen pocos estudios relacionados a la enseñanza de inglés como lengua extranjera en educación temprana a nivel internacional y local. Por lo tanto, las implicaciones de este estudio están dirigidas a las autoridades de las instituciones educativas y otros docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera que deseen mejorar el nivel de inglés de sus alumnos en grados iniciales.

*Palabras clave:* niños, narración de cuentos, descripción de imágenes, desarrollo oral.

## Storytelling through Picture Description to Enhance Very Young EFL Learners Oral

### Production: An Action Research Innovation

Teaching English to very young learners is increasing around the world as schools are introducing English from early ages (Ghosn, 2002). In Ecuador, the English Language Standards (ELLS) were designed and developed based on the Common European Framework of Languages (CEFR) as a way to identify and establish specific language descriptors (Ministerio de Educación, 2012).

In 2012, based on the ELLS standards, the Ecuadorian government decided to implement the English Teacher and Learning Standards as a way to organize and define language domains and skills in order to improve teaching methodologies and language learning processes (Ministerio de Educación, 2012). In 2016 the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education updated its primary and secondary subject curricula including English as a subject into the primary school section (Ministerio de Educación, 2016).

Teaching English to young learners (TEYL) is a challenging task for educators. There is an increasing number of children learning English as a foreign or second language (Pinter, 2017). This early exposure for children learning a foreign language demands more prepared professionals (Cameron, 2001). Building a variety of language learning experiences allow children to develop early literacy skills as the basis to support their oral language competence. As a result, teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) requires educators to plan and design activities bearing in mind that students do not have enough opportunities to interact in the target language outside the classroom (Nunan, 2011).

Therefore, the designing and planning of EFL primary classroom activities implies adapting different resources as a way of producing authentic communicative tasks towards specific objectives. Most studies have focused on researching how storytelling activities can improve language skills at secondary and college level EFL learners (Chou, 2014; Marzuki,

Prayogo, & Wahyudi, 2016). In Marzuki, Prayogo, and Wahyudi (2016) interactive storytelling was used as a strategy to enhance speaking skills in Junior High Indonesian EFL learners, while in Chou (2014) games, songs, and stories were applied to increase vocabulary in middle school Taiwanese learners. This has created a gap where research needs to be conducted in younger primary school contexts. The present study has explored how storytelling through picture description can build the basis for oral production in very young learners.

Considering participants are Spanish speaking primary school learners who have been studying English as a school subject for the past two years. Educators have addressed their teaching efforts to improve EFL learning mostly on literacy skills (reading and writing) rather than oral competence. Even though they are pre A1 level learners, they struggle when understanding and trying to communicate using simple vocabulary in English due to limited exposure inside and outside the classroom. Thus, this study reports the effect of storytelling through describing pictures to improve vocabulary, organization and fluency as the basis of oral production in very young primary school students.

### **Literature Review**

This study focuses on the use of storytelling through picture description to improve very young learners' oral production. The independent variable is observed as using storytelling through picture description, whereas the dependent variable is oral production development. These variables are explored as well as the terms and concepts involved with participant's age, teaching approaches and study focus in order to evaluate pedagogical knowledge to implement the use of storytelling in the young EFL class.

### **Teaching English to Young Learners**

“Young learners” are defined as children within the chronological age period from birth to puberty years (Nunan, 2018). For educators, it is important to be aware of planning and designing activities based on the physical, emotional, and cognitive stages children undergo throughout this process (Duckworth, 1964). Pursuant to findings, children's logical reasoning is still not fully developed at seven years old, but as they grow, their brains start to rearrange thoughts in order to classify and build operational mental structures. As a result, stories can therefore, improve children's literacy skills in early educational stages (Yazici & Bolay, 2017). This allows learners to imagine and understand story sequencing stages, making connections to their personal environment.

Seven year old learners present particular characteristics such as short attention span, a need for attention and approval from their teacher, an inner motivation, curiosity, and eagerness to talk about themselves. These peculiar aspects represent important components that should be carefully considered for educators in order to improve classroom methodologies aimed at engaging children in either individual or group activities (Harmer, 2003). Storytelling, vocabulary games and picture description activities enhance their creativity as they develop vocabulary, reading, and speaking skills. As Tomlinson (2013) affirmed, children learn from what surrounds them, what they can see, hear and touch, as well as from experiences. These age developmental limitations define and delimit the appropriate tasks within the instructional learning process (Nunan, 2011).

### **Storytelling in Young Learners Oral Production**

Storytelling is defined as “A process, where a person (the teller), using vocalization, narrative structure and mental imagery communicate with other humans (the audience), who also use mental imagery, and in turn, communicate back to the teller” (Craig, 1996, p. 2). Therefore, stories can promote a natural interaction by exchanging real information between the teller and the audience. As Richards (2006) described in the Communicative Language

Teaching (CLT) core assumptions, learners need to be engaged in interaction and meaningful communication for language competency to be increased. In another discussion in a study conducted in China, storytelling demonstrated an increased in the ability to self-evaluate student's oral performance (Kim, 2014).

On the other hand, according to Cameron (2001), oral production tasks for young learners rely on classroom language because of EFL learners' limited foreign language practice outside the classroom. Individual or pair work speaking activities must be prompted by the teacher's repetition and modeling, resulting in a scaffolding process, conducting learners to their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and therefore, achieving an autonomous role in their learning process (Vygotsky, 2012).

As reported by Lisenbee and Ford (2017), storytelling is considered a tool to create a reliable connection between academic content and real world experiences. This analysis supports the evidence that designing speaking tasks for small children involves a careful application of teaching and learning principles, learners' characteristics, needs, and objectives outcomes (Lindahl, 2018). These researchers support storytelling as a guided activity not only challenge learners to talk about themselves, but they require learners to express ideas by using words to convey meaning (Gower, Phillips, & Walters, 1995). In order to achieve best results, stories have to be carefully selected according to the teacher's objectives (Thornbury, 2005). Finally, in a study conducted in Colombia, other factors are also mentioned when applying storytelling as a resource to increase oral production goals, where storytelling class activities can foster speaking development, leading learners towards learning process awareness (Bocanegra & Ramirez, 2018).

### **Storytelling Narrative Elements**

The review of the literature shows that in order to achieve better results in young learners' language development, it is important to mention story narrative elements as a way

small learners organize their ideas and sequence events when orally producing a story. As stated by Morrow (1985), story structures include a setting (time, place, and characters), as well as a plot: beginning, middle, and the end or resolution of the events. By making children aware of the narrative elements, telling stories can increase language, ensuring learners' engagement, and comprehension by making sense of the world around (Fog, 2010). Other findings concluded that storytelling also enables and increases critical thinking, cognitive engagement, and visualization as a way to understand written texts (Agosto, 2016).

### **Picture Description in Young Learners Oral Production**

“Picture” is defined as “A design or representation made by various means such as painting, drawing, or photography” (Merriam-Webster, 2019). Images can allow young learners to breakdown a short story sequence, process ideas, and use simple familiar words to convey meaning. Moreover, the potential of visuals aids was explored as a most common and effective strategy to help students associate meaning to words while keeping engagement and motivation (Macwan, 2015).

Szpotowicz (2012) stated that speech elicitation tasks for very young learners require authentic and meaningful language where visual aids such as pictures serve as a useful resource in order to structure the activity, set objectives, and analyze outcomes. In an article published by the Sage Journals related to Language Teaching Research (Boers, 2018), a summary of three research studies focused on the use of pictures description related task activities as a way to elicit language input for data collection such as: grammar feature samples, oral proficiency samples, and a picture story as a prompt for a writing task. For educators and classroom researchers, picture description facilitates assessing children language skills acquisition progress.

For instructional speaking practice, storytelling is used as a way to elicit personal anecdotes by asking learners to produce orally using pictures as visual aids (Thornbury,

2005). For Afraz, Taghizade, and Taghinezhad (2018), the use of pictorial aids in developing speaking proficiency can facilitate the interaction while enhancing speech and motivation, while in Lavallo and Briesmaster's research (2017), picture descriptions were analyzed to determine a positive effect on communicative skills.

### **Vocabulary in Young Learners Oral Production**

Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines the word "Vocabulary" as "All the words known and used by a particular person; and all the words that exist in a particular language or subject" (2019). Understanding these "words" involves knowing its form and meaning, as they allow learners to recognize its grammatical functions and word associations in context (Thornbury, 2005). In this line, storytelling has been explored as a technique to increase young EFL students' motivation and vocabulary, showing positive effects in language production performance. As Chou (2014) affirmed in his study, the relationship between young learners and their cognitive processes were shown to be positively influenced by games, stories, and songs. They encouraged and increased vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, explicit vocabulary instruction during storytelling sessions encourages children to actively participate, while providing opportunities to relate word meaning to their own lives.

### **Fluency in Young Learners Oral Production**

According to Nunan (2018) in young learners speaking instruction, fluency should be understood as "the ability to maintain a stream of speech without lengthy pauses or hesitation" (p. 3). Then fluency refers to the ability to speak without interruptions. At beginner levels, fluency can be achieved by engaging students in fun learning by doing activities that involve interaction, and the use of recycled or new vocabulary (Nunan, 2018). The use of storytelling through picture description empowers primary school learners with a boost in oral production by stimulating authentic real communication with their peers and teachers.

Being aware of different challenges students face when speaking, this section explored the benefits of storytelling in young learners' oral production. Therefore, improving students' fluency in spoken production through storytelling, the following research questions were posited:

- To what extent does storytelling through picture description increase young learners' fluency in their oral language production?
- To what extent can picture description increase vocabulary in second grade students?

### **Innovation**

Addressing the study objectives, activities were aimed at telling a short story by describing pictures in order to increase vocabulary and fluency as the main components for oral development in young EFL learners. This innovation started at the end of the school academic year, at a private school, with 26 second basic students as participants for the study. In line with the student's pre-A1 spoken production level, they should be able to retell a simple short story using basic sentences to provide a description in order to adapt it to their personal environment (Council of Europe, 2018).

Using picture description to elicit vocabulary in second grade EFL learners was applied as the innovation for this research study. The activities were conducted three hours per week for a length period of six weeks in order to build up confidence when making simple sentences to create and report a short story orally.

By providing a description about a picture, the researcher measured the effects of storytelling through picture description to increase oral language competency. A six week lesson plan based on the Backwards' design model was used to implement this strategy (Appendix 1). At the beginning of the innovation process, the teacher-researcher used a speaking pre-test (Appendix 2). Subsequently, the researcher used songs, audio stories, videos, jigsaw storytelling sequencing, role plays and a picture book class project as a

strategy to develop oral proficiency thorough picture description. A final oral speaking task activity was carried out as a Show and Tell where students created a short story about their beach vacations using a picture book as a visual support to produce a narrative.

Field notes were documented by the researcher and two other teachers as a way to observe and evidence participants progress throughout the innovation process (Appendix 3). An adapted oral performance rubric was applied to measure if the innovation objectives were achieved as expected (Appendix 4).

## **Methodology**

### **Design**

The present study is based on an action research with qualitative and quantitative analysis. The concept of action research in the educational field, refers to a classroom intervention performed by teachers to improve and reflect on their practice (Anwar, 2016). The researcher-teacher administers an original strategy to improve their teaching approach, thus promoting students learning objectives.

Two research questions were answered:

- To what extent does storytelling through picture description increase young learners' fluency in their oral language production?
- To what extent can picture description increase vocabulary in second grade students?

### **Description of Participants**

A group of 26 seven-year-old students represented the participant sample group for this action research study. Thirteen (13) boys and thirteen (13) second grade girls. They came from a private primary section school located in the north of the city of Guayaquil. The majority came from a medium socioeconomic status, where both parents worked or managed their own businesses.

Most learners were Catholics and a minority belonged to other religious groups. They have been attending English classes since Pre-K. At the moment of this study, they were attending English classes four times a week for a period of seven months (May - November).

## **Variables of the Study**

### **Independent.**

Storytelling through picture description to improve oral development

- Vocabulary
- Organization
- Fluency

### **Dependent.**

Young learners' oral production

## **Sampling Procedures**

A sample of 26 students who represented one second grade class was randomly selected among six other second grade classrooms from the school primary section. Classes were held at the school and by the researcher as the main teacher using the textbook provided by the institution.

## **Instruments**

For the study, the researcher applied a speaking test at the beginning and at the end, field notes and a rubric to explore how these data could answer the action research questions:

To address the first research question: *To what extent does storytelling through picture description increase young learners' fluency in oral language production?* The instrument applied was an A1 Cambridge Starters speaking pre-test (Appendix 2) to measure the participants performance regarding vocabulary, organization, and fluency as the oral components considered to enhance language speaking achievement.

The test was adapted from “Super Minds 1” which is a Cambridge University Press Book series used by the institution throughout the primary school section. Nevertheless, two other English teachers were asked to collaborate in the test adaptation, observation, and rubric designing. The pre and posttest consisted in a three-section speaking evaluation. In the first section, personal questions were asked to demonstrate understanding and facilitate interaction. In the second part, the examiner demonstrated the activity: First using a game, then the researcher asked some questions about a picture to elicit learners’ description abilities. In the third part, participants were shown sequence cards to promote storytelling ideas organization in order to create a short story from the picture shown using basic story narrative elements.

After the six week intervention period, the same evaluation was applied as a post-test, following the same pattern as the pre-test. This provided a clear perspective about the effect generated in the students’ oral production components addressed after the intervention sessions.

To answer the second research question: *To what extent can picture description increase vocabulary in second grade students?* The instrument used was an oral performance rubric (Appendix 4). It measured if there was an increase in the number of words used by children when describing a picture. The vocabulary grading criteria was organized according to the number of words: 0 – 1 (needs improvement), 3 - 4 (fair), 5 - 7 (good), and 8 - 10 (excellent).

The rubric also included speaking criteria components such as organization, vocabulary, and fluency. They were used to assess overall speaking achievements in oral production. The researcher contemplated that each component would be graded from one to four, being 1 the lowest score and 4 being the highest score on the speaking test. A total of 16 points was considered as the highest score on the whole speaking assessment. This procedure

was applied to every participant during the speaking evaluation, in order to estimate an overall oral production increase if participants improve in any or all the components included in the rubric.

Additionally, teacher field notes (Appendix 3) were weekly recorded to analyze students' oral development progress throughout the intervention period. Field notes were used to observe the oral components for storytelling descriptions: vocabulary, fluency, and sequence of ideas. According to Orellana, Johnson, Rodriguez-Minkoff, Rodriguez, and Franco (2017), field notes integrate theory and practice as they allow teachers to observe children interactions and student-teacher interactions in diverse situations and contexts.

Therefore, field notes were taken by the researcher as a qualitative instrument to record young learners' progress. They were observed during class activities where storytelling through picture description was applied as the method to increase EFL spoken production. Comments from learners' reactions, perceptions, behavior, and feelings contributed to monitor their progress throughout the research process. Keeping records on a weekly basis allowed the teacher-researcher to analyze to what extent the innovation managed to accomplish the goal. Field notes served as a supplement for the other two instruments analysis. It was also used as a self-reflection for the researcher to understand the studied phenomena.

### **Data Analysis**

The results obtained from the pre and posttest, along with the oral performance rubric final results, established the quantitative data collected from the first and last evaluation during the innovation process. The teacher field notes complemented the qualitative data on participants' oral interactions, narrative sequence, vocabulary, and fluency advancement on oral development using picture description.

The contribution of the Statistical Package for the Social Science program (SPSS) in academic research has become an essential tool as it enables investigators to store, analyze, and

interpret descriptive and inferential statistics (Bala, 2016). Thus, pre and posttest results were recorded into an Excel spreadsheet document, then the file was exported to the (SPSS) program to get descriptive statistics, like mean, minimum, maximum, frequency, and standard deviation. Grades were obtained from rubric components observed from each participant speaking evaluation. These statistics were entered in an online calculator to obtain the Cohen *d* to determine the impact of the innovation. Results from the quantitative and qualitative instruments were triangulated for a more in-depth analysis.

### **Ethical Standards**

In order to carry out the present study, school principal and academic coordinators were informed. Therefore, researcher sent a letter explaining the research study purpose. Since participants identities are not mentioned in the document, parent consent letters were not addressed.

## **Results**

### **Quantitative Data from Pre and Posttests Using Oral Performance Rubric**

This section summarizes how using storytelling through picture description benefited EFL young learners oral performance. The research findings are based on the study research questions. The innovation focused on to what extent implementing storytelling through picture description increased very young EFL learners speaking production, contemplating three main components: organization, vocabulary, and fluency. Differences between prior knowledge (pre-test) and outcome oral performance (post-test) in a randomly selected experimental second grade class were calculated. Evidence validates that by describing a picture, participants were able to tell a short story demonstrating an advance in their language speaking skills.

**RQ#1. To what extent does storytelling through picture description increase young learners' fluency in their oral language production?**

Results are shown on table 1. From a group of 26 participants, the pre and post variables illustrate a minimum score of one as the lowest score and a maximum of three in the pretest, while a minimum of two and a maximum of four in the post scores. The grading average in the pre-test shows 1.92 while in the in the post speaking test, an average of 2.73 which means students enhanced their fluency when orally creating a short story. A standard deviation of 0.74 in the pretest, shows students' individual achievements were more spread from the mean average score than 0.67 in the posttest average scores which indicates that after the intervention most learners reached grades closer to the average of 2.73.

Table 1.

*Results of pre and posttest: Fluency.*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-test	26	1.00	3.00	1.92	0.74
Post-test	26	2.00	4.00	2.73	0.67

**RQ#2: To what extent can picture description increase vocabulary in second grade students?**

In accordance to what extent storytelling through picture description can expand vocabulary knowledge, the study concluded that students acquired new words by providing details about the story. A standard deviation of 0.69 in the pre-test compared to 0.75 in the post test shows participants scores were closer to the average total grades when assessed on using new vocabulary to create a story from a picture description about their last holiday vacations. Table 2 displays descriptive statistics of the pre and posttest for vocabulary.

Table 2.

*Results of pre and posttest: Vocabulary.*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre test	26	1.00	3.00	2.077	0.69
Post test	26	2.00	4.00	3.35	0.75

In line with the total scores from the pre and post-tests, a minimum total score of 7 was considered as the lowest total score from the test administered to the 26 students, and a maximum of 11 was observed as the overall highest score. This explains that students enhanced their oral production performance as a result of applying storytelling activities in their English classes, after a variety of formative assessments where storytelling was used as the mechanism to engage and produce authentic and meaningful interactions inside the classroom.

Table 3.

*Pre and Post total overall results*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-Test	26	3.00	7.00	5.23	1.11
Post-test	26	7.00	11.00	9.15	1.15

The paired T-samples test revealed the study is highly reliable with a score of  $p = 0.000$ . This implies that the application of a speaking assessment test where children had the opportunity to describe a picture and tell a short story with simple words can be remarkably useful. Thus, this supports that storytelling through picture description can boost students' speaking production at an early age and consequently their overall oral development performance.

A Cohens  $d$  of 3.48 shows that applying storytelling through describing a picture in a sample of 26 young learners has a significant impact in learning and that the study proved to positively improve their oral skills.

### **Qualitative Data from Field Notes on Picture Description**

Data were gathered in field notes by the researcher and two other teacher participants' before, during, and after the intervention. At the beginning, the researcher realized most of the students struggled with oral interactions, as they showed insecurity and anxiety when trying to use vocabulary words in order to organize ideas to describe a picture.

During the intervention, as they explored storytelling activities using songs, audio stories, role plays and a picture book, they progressively displayed oral production advancement which was ultimately demonstrated through a show and tell storytelling performance. The teacher-researcher contrasted how the innovation positively influenced participants' ability to communicate orally in the foreign language.

After the intervention, notes recorded how participants acquired confidence by interacting and using vocabulary words. The different activities planned like songs, games, jigsaw, role playing, and creating a picture book; assisted learners in demonstrating positive results towards their capability to organize ideas into a simple story sequence on their own, guided by a picture book.

## **Discussion**

### **Findings from Pre and Post- test**

In regards to the findings, this action research revealed that the impact of storytelling through picture description can boost oral production in young children. The utilization of images or drawings to provide details and construct a short story facilitates speaking production, considering students' characteristics and limitations. Similar positive results were reported by previous studies such as Lindahl (2018) and Gower et al (1995). Their studies

agreed that planning for small children speaking activities involves careful consideration of learners and teaching objectives in order to help students organize, connect, and eventually transfer language into their real lives.

### **Findings from the Oral Performance Rubric**

As for the importance of organizing ideas from using story narrative components, Morrow (1985) affirmed it was useful for kids when understanding and structuring spoken language. As children practice through guided oral performance tasks, they were able to enhance their creativity and imagination which in turn helped improve their emerging critical and reasoning (Agosto, 2016). In agreement with the study results, using pictures as a visual resource to support participants' word-meaning association can enhance language competency. (Macwan, 2015). This was also affirmed by Afraz, Taghizade, and Taghinezhad (2018) who declared visual description could enhance learners' interaction facilitating meaning communication.

Study results certainly support those research projects as the innovation aimed to promote real interactions between participants while generating curiosity, engagement and discovering ways to simplify speaking opportunities. Characters and story familiar topics proved to be an effective strategy to benefit not only language oral development but language competence in all the skills.

### **Findings from Field Notes**

Finally, in a study conducted in Colombia, other factors are also mentioned when applying storytelling as a resource to increase oral production goals, where storytelling class activities can foster speaking development, leading learners towards learning process awareness (Bocanegra & Ramirez, 2018). During the intervention process, learners increased their confidence level by showing an ability to make sense of the words needed to create a

story providing details about what they saw and connecting ideas to develop a story beginning, middle and ending.

On the other hand, according to Cameron (2001), oral production tasks for young learners rely on classroom language because of EFL learners' limited foreign language practice outside the classroom. Individual or pair work speaking activities must be prompted by the teacher's repetition and modelling, resulting in a scaffolding process, conducting learners to their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and therefore, achieving an autonomous role in their learning process (Vygostsky, 2012).

### **Conclusion**

This study presents some critical contributions in terms of unveiling different ways of improving learners' foreign language skills. Storytelling is just one way to promote authentic student's communication inside and outside the classroom. There are endless opportunities to facilitate young learners' language acquisition.

Due to a limited EFL learners interaction outside the school setting, it was clearly evidenced, students showed anxiety and lack of confidence when trying to express themselves. This situation decreased as they were able to express and transfer meaning of their ideas into a coherent anecdote.

Seven year old learners present particular characteristics such as short attention span, a need for attention and approval from their teacher, an inner motivation, curiosity and eagerness to talk about themselves. These peculiar aspects represent important components that should be considered for educators in order to improve classroom methodologies aimed at engaging children in either individual or group activities (Harmer, 2003).

Results from the statistical tests acknowledge a compelling increase within the pre and post speaking tests. Referring to the first research question on to what extent can storytelling through picture description can improve young learners oral development. In line with results,

using the strategy of picture description allowed participants to use images as a visual support to connect ideas in order to create a story from a real life experience. Besides using visual resources, collaborative playful activities involving other senses and movement promoted a nurturing learning environment.

Pursuant to the second research question about to what extent vocabulary enhances young learners' oral development through storytelling and picture description, results showed a significant increase in the number of words participants used in order to provide simple details about an image. This enabled students to construct a meaningful short story related to their personal background.

The outcomes from the study certainly illustrates stories can be used as an effective approach to improve young learners language competence, filling the gap in research studies about how storytelling can actively support language development in earlier CEFR levels. It is then highly recommended to examine other language skills as reading or writing skills to enhance overall performance.

### **Limitations**

Among some of the limitations encountered in this action research study, participants' age (7 years old), Pre- A1 Spoken Language overall production level, class size, short attention span, mixed ability group, long class schedules, a very limited access to technology due to the high amount of students, and other school curricular activities which affected the time allowed to develop class activities required for the study. The innovation was carried out at the end of the school year when students were not as much motivated and eager to perform as the first months of the school year.

### **Recommendations**

Even though, the present study proposes mostly traditional storytelling approaches, it is recommended that digital storytelling practices be explored to measure if results can

overcome actual findings. A longer intervention period is also suggested in order to provide more formative assessment towards results. It is also advised to apply this research to older students with a higher levels either in primary or high school levels so that a more complex vocabulary and methods could be investigated. Other language skills and subskills could also be examined as a way to test if storytelling has the same results if applied to listening, reading or writing skills.

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**Appendix 1**

**Lesson Plan of One Unit**

**Design from Your Goals<sup>1</sup>**

Instructional design of units for transfer of learning to real life contexts

Institution: Year of study: Student description: (include English Level) Professor:	Unidad Educativa XYZ Second Basic A group of 26, seven year old students (Pre A-1 CEFR level 2018 update) Diana Arguello
Unit title: Weeks: Hours:	At the beach (Vacation time activities) 6 weeks ( 3 hours per week) Approximately 18 hours in total.

**I. Transfer Goal (Stage 1)**

Standards the unit will work with: Pre- A 1 CEFR Young learners 2018 updated version

Overall Speaking Production:

**SUSTAINED MONOLOGUE: Describing Experience**

Can describe simple aspects of his/her everyday life in a series of simple sentences, using simple words and basic phrases, provided he/she can prepare in advance.

Accredited / registered ELP can-do statements ages 7-10

I can describe myself in simple, short sentences.

I can use simple sentences to describe my house

I can describe clothing using simple short sentences.

Transfer:

I want my students to learn vacation activities vocabulary so that, in the long run and on their own, they can be able to orally tell a short story about their last holiday vacations.

Breakdown of transfer goal

A. If we see and hear them do this, they CAN transfer this learning.	B. If we see and hear them do this, then they CANNOT (yet) transfer:	C. What I will commit to doing differently in my classroom to ensure my results look like Column A.
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<sup>1</sup> This unit design process was adapted from the Guillot Design Process worksheet (2017) *Design from Your Goals* based on Wiggins-McTighe Backward Design.

<p>Students know the basic story stages and picture descriptors to elaborate a short story.                  Student can use previous learned vocabulary words to provide a description.                  Students can answer questions related to the story.</p>	<p>Students need constant repetition and drilling vocabulary.                  Students can not use recycled vocabulary words to make a description.                  Students can not use vocabulary in context to retell a story.</p>	<p>Teacher will encourage participation through visuals, videos, songs, games and interactions to enhance oral production.                  Teacher will use storytelling to describe pictures using recycled vocabulary.</p>
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**II. Summative Performance Assessment Task (Stage 2)**

Goal	To improve second grade learners English language oral production.
Role	Storyteller
Audience	Classmates and teacher
Situation	Students will tell a short story about their last holiday vacations through a picture description.
Performance	A Show and tell Oral Class Performance. (My last holiday vacations)
Standards	Speaking production and interaction based on a CEFR Pre- A1 Young Learners level. Updated version 2018.

**III. Knowledge and skills the students need to succeed in the assessment. (Stage 1)**

What students will need to know	The skills students will need to be able to do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Free time activities</li> <li>● Clothing vocabulary.</li> <li>● Leisure time activities.</li> <li>● Sentence structures.</li> <li>● Story basic elements.</li> <li>● Recycled vocabulary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Tell a short story about their favourite leisure time activities..</li> <li>● Name and describe food, clothes, places.</li> <li>● Name and describe what they like to do in their free time.</li> </ul>

**IV. Essential Questions (Stage 1)**

<p>Essential questions support the transfer goal, signal inquiry, guide instruction, and can be asked over and over throughout the unit without reaching a final answer.</p>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) How telling stories can improve my oral production in English?</li> <li>2) How telling stories can increase my vocabulary in English?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3) Why telling stories is helpful for developing oral skills?</li> </ol>

V. Learning Activities

Transfer goal: I want my students to learn vacation activities vocabulary so that, in the long run and on their own, they can be able to orally tell a short story about their last holiday vacations.

Abbreviated Performance Task:

Learning Activities (from student’s perspective)	Intention	A	M	T
<p>Pre - Test Starters: Pre A1 Level - (Cambridge Starters speaking section)</p> <p><b>Week 1</b> Day 1 Warm up: Teacher elicit students knowledge from the book characters. Students are shown a video about a story from the textbook. Teacher introduces basic story narrative elements from the story seen: the beginning, middle and the end. Students identify story sequences, characters superpowers, the message from the story. Students role play the story.</p> <p>Day 2 Warm up: students sing a song about the topic. Vocabulary introduction through picture flashcards. Play the description game using new vocabulary. Draw a story map to identify new words.</p> <p>Day 3 Warm up: Spelling game Students play hangman to practice words spelling. Storytime: class sit in a circle and listen to a story. Then they are asked to identify characters, setting and story sequence orally. Students retell the story to the class. Teacher field notes are taken to assess innovation process.</p> <p><b>Week 2:</b> Day 1 Warm up: Mime game. Students review use of there is or there are to describe an image using singular and plural forms. Guess the action. Review question words. Students recall on vacationing activities. (At the Beach). Students describe about a poster by answering to questions words.</p> <p>Day 2 Warm up: Students play the description game by choosing a random picture card. Students find the five differences between two pictures using there is/there are to describe.</p>				



<p>Listen to the Unit song. Read lyrics and sing along. Recall vocabulary words.                  Provide an oral performance rubric: explain aspects to be assessed.                  Teacher ask students to make groups of 5 to make a class storytelling project.                  Day 2:                  In groups students orally create a short story. Then students create a storybook where they write the story sequence. Students order the story sequence words to tell a story.                  Students draw the parts of the story. Color and decorate.                  Day 3:                  Storytelling group project.                  Group tell the story to classmates. . Feedback is received from (happy or sad faces).</p> <p><b>Week 6:</b>                  Teacher explains final assessment: My beach vacations                  Day 1:                  Warm up: Teacher tells a story about her last holiday vacations.                  Using real photos. Elicit answers from students about their last beach vacations.                  Teacher explains activity to the class.                  Students orally provide answers about their favourite activities when going to the beach for vacations.                  Day 2:                  Warm up: At the Beach song                  Students create a story about their last vacations at the beach.                  Using real pictures, they create a picture book.                  Day 3:                  Warm up:                  End of the Unit project: Show and Tell Oral performance</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Take a picture of yourself on your last vacations.</li> <li>2. Bring your picture to the class.</li> <li>3. Tell a story short story describing your picture.</li> <li>4. Provide as many details as you can, be creative.</li> </ol> <p>After the intervention period.                  Post - Test (Cambridge Starters Pre A1 Level Speaking section)</p>				
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**Appendix 2**

Speaking Test:

Part 1: Personal information questions

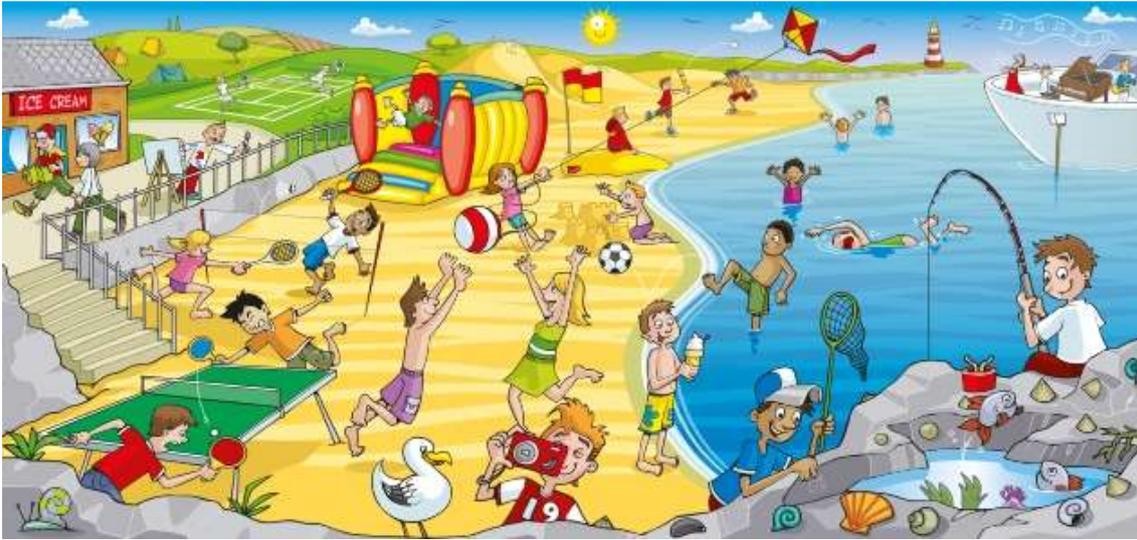
What's your name?

What's your favorite color?

How old are you?

What's this?

Part 2: Look at the picture and answer the questions: (Pointing at the pictures)



1. Where are they?
2. What is the boy doing?
3. What colour is the kite?
4. What are they doing?
5. What's the girl doing?

Part 3: Tell me a story about the picture. (Showing story sequence cards)

First....

Then...

Finally...

Source: Adapted from Starters Cambridge Speaking Test 2018 updated version.

### Appendix 3

Research study: Storytelling through picture description to increase Very Young EFL Learners  
(2nd grade) Oral production

### FIELD NOTES

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

WEEK: \_\_\_\_\_

# STORYTELLING THROUGH PICTURE DESCRIPTION

<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<b>Students apply new vocabulary</b>	<b>Students talk during activity</b>	<b>Students identify story elements</b>	<b>Students can orally describe a picture</b>
Comments:				
Comments:				
Comments:				

STRENGTHS:

SUGGESTIONS:

**Appendix 4**

Show and Tell Oral performance rubric

Level: Pre A 1

Grade: Second basic

<b>Criteria What do I expect?</b>	<b>1 Needs improvement</b>	<b>2 Fair</b>	<b>3 Good</b>	<b>4 Excellent work!</b>
<u>Organization</u>	Unable to follow a sequence. Unclear.	Some structure was provided. Vague ideas.	Clear structure (beginning, middle, end).	Accurately expressed story sequence of events.
<u>Vocabulary</u>	(0-1) No vocabulary words used.	(3-4) Very few vocabulary words used	(5-7) Some vocabulary words used.	(8-10) Appropriately used vocabulary words.
<u>Fluency</u>	Too many pauses. Hesitated and lacked confidence when speaking.	Some confidence, made few pauses when speaking.	Enough confidence. Very few pauses.	Clearly demonstrated confidence when speaking by making almost no pauses.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

OBSERVATIONS:

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