STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE USE OF STORIES TO LEARN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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INTRODUCTION

- Pre-service teachers have a weak reading profile and usually express disaffection for reading (Aguilar Ródenas, 2020).

However, they should have a solid training in literature didactics to help their students appreciate literature (Mendoza, 2004).

- They are usually considered expert readers (Colomer, 2013).

But, their reading habits (Chartier, 2004; Yubero & Larrañaga, 2015; Vélez &Rapetti, 2008) and their knowledge and capacity for interpreting literary texts (Duszynski, 2006; Diaz Armas, 2008) show they are not.

- Direct relationship between the teacher's reading profile and the reading education practices they provide to their students.

Teachers bring their own reading practices into the classroom, which influence their teaching practice (McKool & Gespass, 2009; Morrison et al., 1999; Ruddell, 1995; Trotman & Kerr, 2001).

- Pre-service teachers usually believe that the only books that have great educational potential are those with a pedagogical criteria, forgetting the artistic and literary ones (Aguilar, 2020).

- If the previous literary education received by future teachers is insufficient, the training in the didactics of children's and youth literature during their undergraduate studies will also not be effective (Colomer, 2013).

　　However, if we want to break this vicious circle, we need to start training future teachers in literary education so that they can make good use of literature in the classroom.

- It is essential that pre-service teachers are aware of the importance of experienced readers to mediate learners' learning, organize activities, select books, and systematize knowledge (Munita & Manresa, 2012; Munita, 2014).

- Linguistic and literary training is undeniably needed (Aguilar Ródenas, 2020).

AIMS AND PARTICIPANTS

- **Objective**

The aim of the present study is to examine future teachers' perceptions on being trained to improve their communicative and storytelling skills in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom.

- **Participants**

- 23 students from the Primary Education (PE) degree attending the *Learning English Using Stories* subject.

- Fourth-year students (last year of the university degree).

METHODOLOGY

1.
- Students attended different lectures where they were taught different strategies to select good storybooks to work on EFL in the primary classroom as well as strategies and techniques to become a good storyteller.

2.
- Students were asked to select a storybook of their taste considering what they had been taught in class.

3.
- Stage 1: students had to tell the story in small groups (4-5 students).
- Stage 2: students had to deliver the story in front of the whole class.

4.
- Students answered a questionnaire enquiring about the usefulness of the lectures as a tool to improve their storytelling skills as well as about their insights about the intervention.

5.
- Students wrote a reflection on whether the feedback provided by their classmates had been useful and whether they had the feeling they had learned how to deliver stories.

Stage 1

In small groups (4/5 students)
Each student explains their picture book

Self- assessment

- 3 things they thought they had done well
- 3 things they thought they hadn't done so well
- What they were going to do to improve their storytelling (course of action)

Peer- assessment

- 3 things the presenter did well
- 3 things the presenter didn't do so well
- Suggestions to improve the storytelling + how to do so

Stage 2 - competition

Individually
Each student explains their picture book in front of the whole class

Peer- assessment

In pairs, students wrote a short text on their classmate's Google Site giving him/her some feedback on his/her final performance.

Give points

Students were given a guide to punctuate each performance. They could give 1 to 4 points to each of their classmates' performances.

Student with the highest punctuation was awarded an extra 0.5 in the final mark

Questionnaire

Please select the extent to which you disagree or agree (1 to 4) with the following statements:

	1	2	3	4
I've acquired criteria to select storybooks to be told in the classroom.				
I've acquired different strategies (pauses, repetitions, rhythm, etc.) to deliver a story.				
I feel more confident when telling a story.				
Self-assessment and peer-assessment activities have helped me in my learning process.				
The competition has motivated me to prepare myself better.				
Stories have an important role in Early Years and Primary Education.				
Being trained on how to deliver stories is important in pre-service teachers.				

** We also asked students to assess their learning process throughout the experience.

Written reflection

At the end of the intervention, students wrote a reflection on their Google Sites about the activity answering the following questions:

- Have I learned how to deliver stories? If so, what have I learned?

- Has my classmates' feedback been useful to me? Why (not)? How?

- What did I do between the first stage (storytelling in small groups) and the final stage (competition) to improve my storytelling?

Written reflection: Examples

Throughout my journey in the Storytelling course, I have learned many valuable lessons. Firstly, I have learned the importance of selecting the right story and adapting it to the audience. Not every story is suitable for every audience, and as a storyteller, it is essential to understand your audience and cater to their needs and different ages of children in primary school.

Secondly, I have learned the art of effective communication. Storytelling is not just about reciting words, but it's also about connecting with your audience and conveying a message. This involves using tone, body language, and expression to engage and captivate your listeners because it is very important, but also a correct pronunciation and different pauses in the story too.

Thirdly, I have learned the significance of practice and preparation. Storytelling is not something that can be mastered overnight. It requires time, effort, and dedication to become a great storyteller. This involves practicing your delivery, refining your story, and preparing for unexpected situations. That's why in my future as a teacher I want to learn day by day and increase in this aspect.

Finally, the most important lesson I have learned from this course is the value of storytelling in bringing people together. Whether it's sharing personal experiences or cultural stories, storytelling has the power to create a sense of community and belonging.

In conclusion, the Storytelling course has been a valuable learning experience. It has taught me the importance of selecting the right story, effective communication, practice and preparation, and the significance of storytelling in bringing people together. I believe that these skills and lessons will serve me well in both my personal and professional life, and I look forward to continuing my journey as a storyteller.

Final reflection

After finishing this course, I would like to make a brief reflection on everything I have learned during this semester:

Throughout this course, I have discovered the importance of using stories in the English language learning process, particularly in a primary classroom. As someone who has always enjoyed reading and literature, I am surprised to find that stories can have such a positive impact on language acquisition and development.

One of the main benefits of using stories in a second language learning process is that they provide a natural context for language acquisition. By listening to and reading stories, students are exposed to new vocabulary and grammatical structures in a meaningful way. Also, stories can be used to teach important values and social skills such as empathy, kindness, and cooperation.

Finally, another positive point of using stories in class is that these are highly engaging and motivating for young learners, which may help to engage children in our lessons.

On the other hand, regarding the peer evaluation process, I want to remark that it has been so useful in my growth and development as a student. By receiving feedback from Carla, I have been able to identify areas where I need to improve. She has provided me with constructive criticism and helpful suggestions for improving my skills. This has allowed me to focus my efforts on improving my weaker areas and has provided me with valuable advice for doing so.

In conclusion, cecause of all the advantages of storytelling previously mentioned, I am sure that in my near future as a teacher I will use stories as a recurrent tool in my sessions. In addition, the peer evaluation process and feedback from my classmate have been essential in this learning process and to improve my skills as a future teacher.

RESULTS *(N=23)*
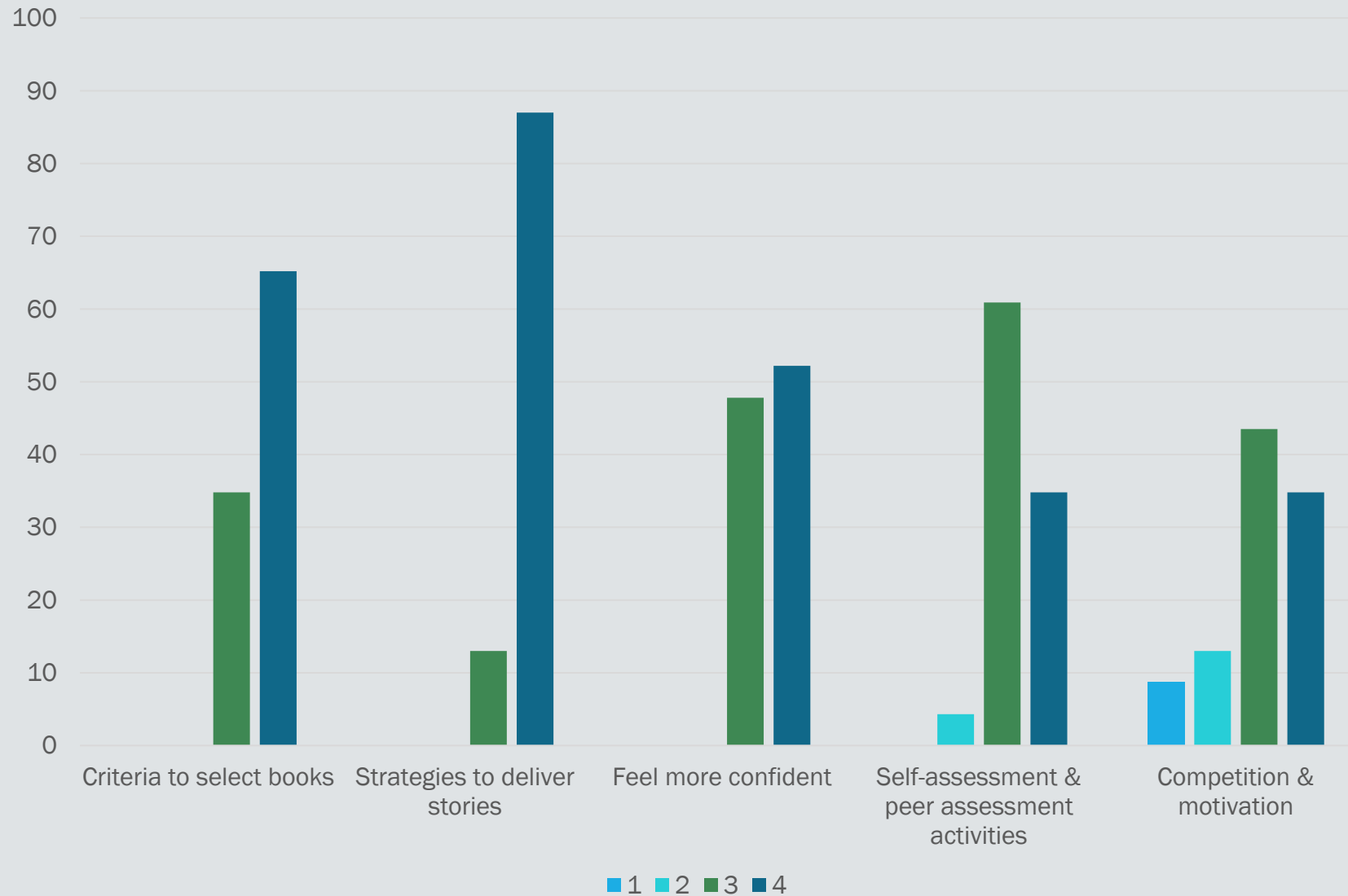
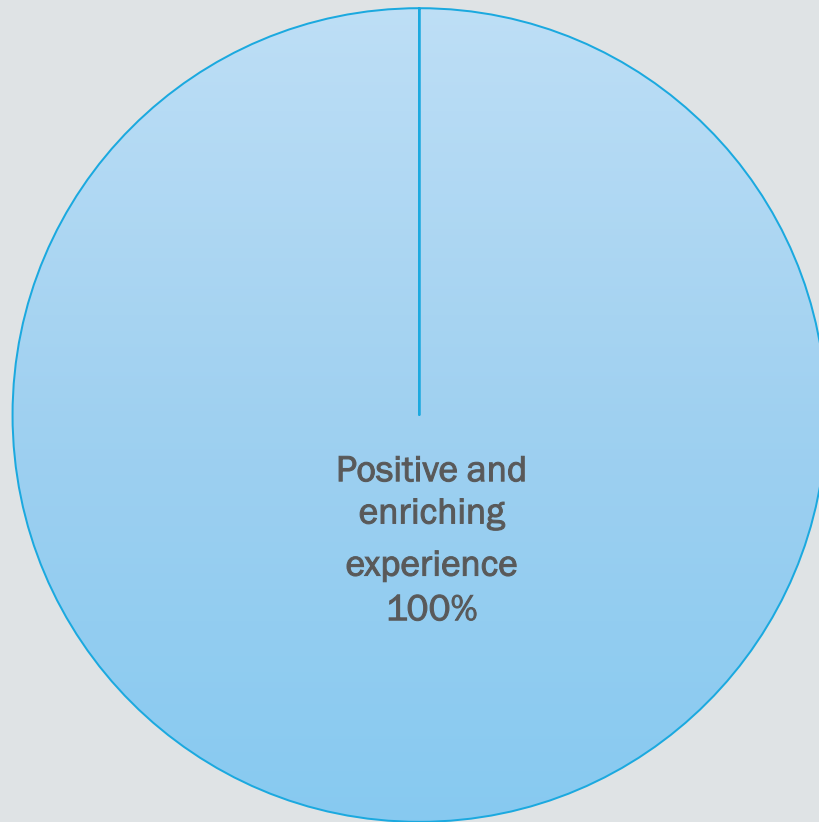1 = strongly disagree/ 4 = strongly agree
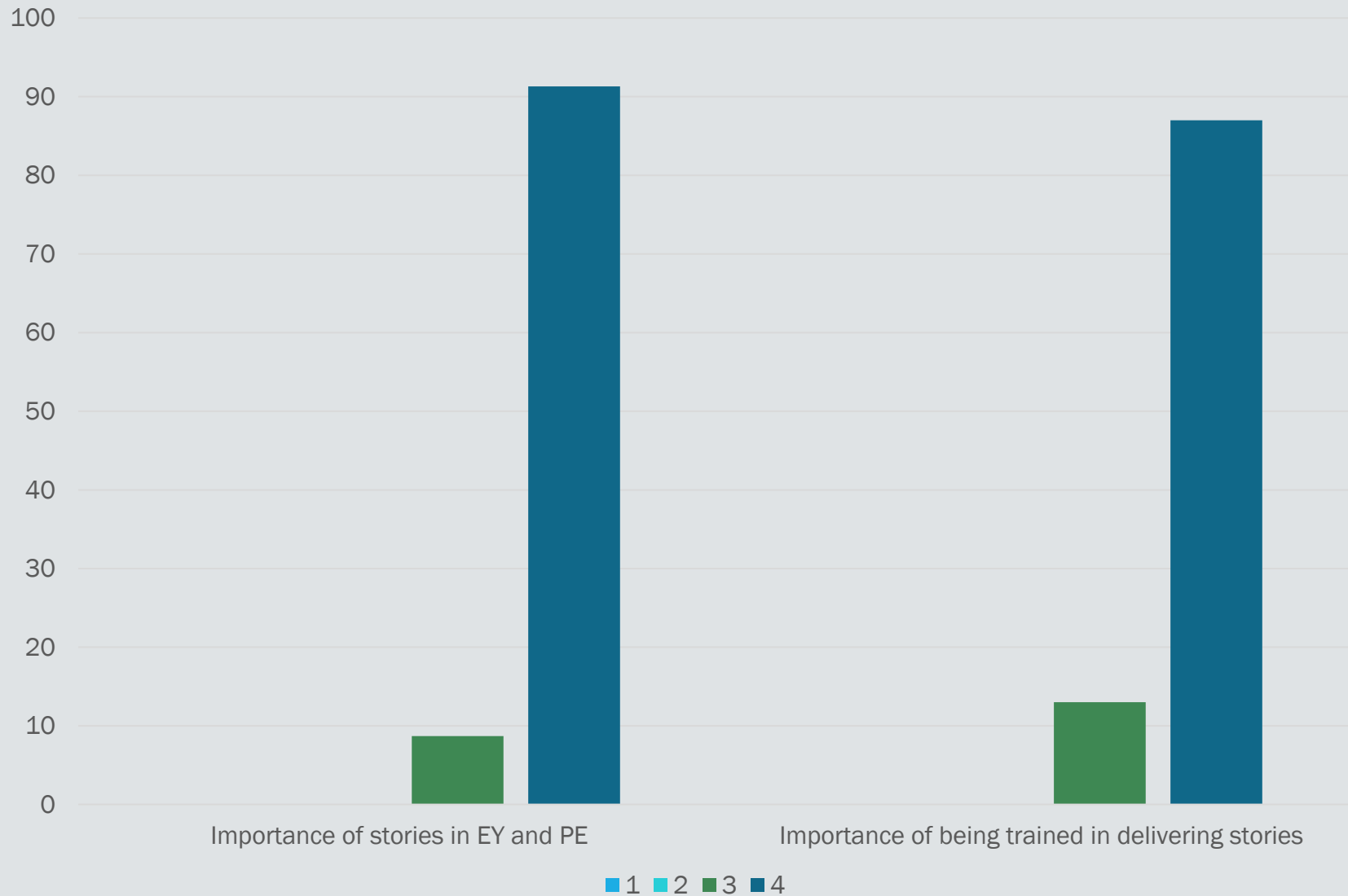
RESULTS *(N=23)*

1 = strongly disagree/ 4 = strongly agree

RESULTS *(N=23)*

When we asked students to assess their learning process throughout the experience:

Positive and enriching experience
100%

Students emphasised:

- They had acquired techniques they hadn't considered before.
- Their peers' feedback had allowed them to improve.
- They had learnt strategies they were not familiar with.
- They had learnt to value stories as a powerful tool to teach EFL.
- They felt more prepared and self-confident.

REFLECTIONS

- First of all, I liked the course very much, it was varied and I was never bored. **I got a lot of ideas and knowledge about books and of course about reading books**. In my future classes I will use stories to improve the process of teaching and learning English. In my opinion, children already spend too much time in front of screens, so it is even more important to get them excited about books again. Reading books is so important. Not only is reading fun, it also helps with concentration, imagination, and logical thinking. And as I learned in this class, working with books is a great way to teach them English. **I've been introduced to so many great children's books and learned so much about the different ways to work with books.** [P5_JG]

- (...) Moreover, I've learnt **the importance of using storytelling techniques** throughout the whole story, such as using different voices for different characters, changing up the rhythm, pointing at words or pictures that are relevant to the story and using props related to the story (stuffed animals for instance). Finally, I've learned that, as I've briefly mentioned above, **engaging the students has to be one of the main focus** if you want your storytelling to succeed. It need to be dynamic, fun and with a bit of hush every now and then to maintain the story appealing and the children captivated all along.- [P2 PG]

- Without a doubt, **I now give much more importance to encouraging reading in the classroom, as it contributes to learning in a captivating and dynamic way**. [P7 AL]

REFLECTIONS

- When the activity of storytelling was suggested, I **felt overwhelmed**. I consider myself a bit shy, but in front of my peers, my classmates, this situation becomes even worse. **Nevertheless, the outcome was different from what I thought.** In my opinion, **through peer assessment,** I have developed **new strategies to make storytelling about books more dynamic and enjoyable.** Also, I sometimes feel that it is difficult to see the positive aspects of one's own performance, and this feedback has helped me to become aware of this. [P1 AA]

- **My classmate's feedback has been very useful**. I think that a pair of **somebody else's eyes can** always **give you insight and objective feedback** that you wouldn't get otherwise. Constructive feedback is always positive, as it helps you be aware of any possible mistakes that you hadn't realised and it gives you the opportunity to improve for future experiences. [P2 PG]

- Without a doubt, **being able to test your storytelling with a few colleagues has been a great help** for me to improve the weak points I had and thus be able to do it better on the day of the presentation. **My colleagues commented on aspects of my storytelling that they liked a lot**, such as my expressiveness. However, apart from having good feedback, **I also had to pay attention to those things I had to improve**. In addition, they added a section on what guidelines I should follow in order to improve it so that, on the day of the presentation, I could make it perfect in front of the rest of my classmates. [P7 AL]

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- Students acknowledge the usefulness of the subject in several direction: more presence of / emphasis on storytelling in the university degrees needed.

- All positive aspects mentioned in the literature present in the students' reflections: stories are not just an entertainment tool.

- Mostly positive impact of peer-assessment and self-assessment: metacognitive awareness.

- Gamification only as an accessory: not high-stakes, true interest in the subject, not a novelty.

- Positive experience overall: awareness raising for external and internal professional purposes.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

- Results based on students' perceptions and questionnaire; **no factual data collected and small sample size**.

- Good teaching innovation approach, but more research on the actual learning potential of this practice in terms of story delivery.

- Students' perceptions and results may be **biased**: thin-layer gamification project (0.5 extra points in the final mark), reflections were also a compulsory activity which was part of the assessment.

More research is needed to:

- Identify which **activities and to what extent they have been key** in improving students' communicative and storytelling skills.
- Check if this "**interest in books**" students mention **is for real.**
- See if there is indeed a correspondence between **one's own interest in reading and its implementation in the classroom** as an in-service teacher.

THANK YOU!

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