


Chapter 3

Socio–Critical Storytelling: Challenges, Teacher Views, and Impact on Students' Linguistic Competence

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the linguistic development experienced by a group of Year 6 EFL Primary Education students when taught with a socio-critical storytelling session. It also tapped into the challenges experienced by a Primary Education trainee while designing and implementing the storytelling session. The regular class teacher's views on the storytelling session were also explored. Data were gathered through a series of instruments including tests, interviews, and reflective journals. The results revealed that students improved their linguistic competence after the storytelling session. The challenges experienced by the trainee included time management, students' limited level of English, and students' resistance to some of the activities. Finally, while the class teacher highlighted the relevance of some of the innovations introduced (active participation and use of authentic materials), she failed to notice the social justice and critical thinking agendas.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite the acknowledged advantages of storytelling in the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL), empirical research in the field is still underdeveloped (Férez Mora & Coyle, 2023). Available studies have focused mainly on learners' skill development, including reading comprehension (Hà & Bellot, 2020), oral production (Abdolmanafi-Rokni, 2014), and general performance in all four skills, as well as vocabulary and grammar (El-Sayed Ramadan, 2022). Other research has described the effects of storytelling on young learners' motivation to learn a foreign language (e.g., León-Garzón & Castañeda-Peña, 2018). In all these studies, teachers have told or read stories to attract students' interest and enhance their knowledge of a particular topic while improving their understanding and production of language. Therefore, little is known about the potential of storytelling to activate learners' critical thinking and elicit awareness of issues of social justice—this approach to storytelling has been termed “socio-critical” (Férez Mora & Coyle, 2023). Similarly, there is a lack of information about whether children's active and performative participation in the narrative might support language learning outcomes. Against this background, this study sets out to meet three objectives: (i) to explore the challenges faced by a student teacher while designing and implementing a socio-critical EFL teaching sequence based on the picture book *The Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch & Martchenko, 1981); (ii) to examine the short-term effects of socio-critical EFL storytelling on the linguistic knowledge of primary school EFL students; and (iii) to investigate a teacher's views regarding the pedagogical potential of socio-critical storytelling.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The Benefits of Storytelling in EFL Primary School Settings

Storytelling is directly related to the development of multiple competences and, thus, EFL primary education curricula worldwide highlight this practice as an excellent instrument by which to orchestrate EFL instruction. The Spanish Educational Law (Ley Orgánica de Modificación de la Ley Orgánica de Educación, 2020), which is the framework within which the present study was conducted, is no exception. In fact, it presents storytelling as a tool with which to promote linguistic communication by consciously mobilizing the knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable children to understand, interpret, and critically evaluate oral messages. At the same time, storytelling is considered to promote plurilingual competence by helping children recognize and respect individual language profiles and so take advantage of their own experiences in order to develop strategies for mediating and transferring

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