Fostering narrative writing practices through the use of ICT tools and Genre Based Instruction

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Abstract

This paper is an action research report that describes the effects of the implementation of genre based instruction and the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) such as *Storybird* with the purpose of fostering the narrative writing practices of eight graders in a public educational institution of Medellin. A teacher journal, two surveys and two students' writing tasks were the data collection methods applied during the project in order to determine the effectiveness of using genre based instruction and ICT in this EFL scenario. This study also shows how some actions were implemented to achieve the goal of promoting narrative writing practices. Finally, it presents the analysis of the data gathered to build up the findings, the conclusions and some reflections on them.

Key words: Genre Based Instruction, Narrative Writing Practices, ICT, *Storybird*.

Degree Requirement

This action research project is submitted as a requirement of the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English-French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellin, Colombia.

Acknowledgements

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Context Description

The high school "EL SALVADOR" is a public institution located in the East side of Medellín, in El Salvador neighborhood. Its students belong to socio-economic strata one, two and three. The institution offers education in kindergarten, elementary school, and high school with some emphases such as technology and development, and design of information systems. The high school has two shifts. The first one is from 6:00 a. m. to 12:00 p. m. and the second one from 12:15 to 6:15 p. m. There are 1200 students that are organized by grades, from kindergarten to 11th.The institution facilities include the food service, the school library, the chemistry laboratory and the computers room. The mission of the institution states that the students receive an integral education that allows them to be adept in both personal and academic field. Moreover, its mission states that family values are the main aspects students must take into account to get a proper education. In its vision, the school aims at being an integral educational center where love, respect and responsibility are its founded values. Likewise, the institution has as a pedagogical model based on the active, ludic and constructivist approaches. It proposes that the students develop the ability of interact with the teachers and their classmates by practicing in the classroom. Also, it states that the students should get knowledge that allow them develop thinking skills while investigating and reflecting on their own learning.

Concerning the English syllabus, it was designed between 2011 and 2013 by the English and Spanish teachers that have worked in the institution. It contains the topics to be taught for over one term of the year. The syllabus is a combination of a Notional-functional type because it is related to asking questions, expressing opinions, expressing wishes, making suggestions and complaining and apologizing. Within the grammatical contents, the *malla curricular* is designed with a logical sequence; that is to say, each period has 1 unit that contains topics like: verb to be,

present simple, and future with be going to. Regarding the resources and bibliography, it is suggested the use of dictionary, textbooks, copies, workshops, some extra books, and web pages.

The eighth grade I work with has 42 students who speak Spanish as their native language. The group has 19 boys and 23 girls whose ages range from 12 to 14. The students have three English classes of 45-minutes weekly in the middle school and only two in the high school. This is the only contact they have with English. The classroom has four windows and 4 lamps that do not give good ventilation and illumination to the space. The room is not big enough for 38 students. Even so, it counts with a TV set, a video Beam, a computer and a tape recorder.

Concerning students' interests, 74.3 % of them expressed in a Survey that English is an important subject not only for their present but also for their future life (Survey about students' interests and needs, March 16, 2016). Likewise, there are some students who do not like English and study this subject because they have to. The students who consider English as an important subject participate actively and have a good performance in class. On the contrary, the students who do not show any interest in the subject almost always talk to each other about different topics that are not connected with the class. Besides, these students are usually distracted during classes, especially the ones that sit at the back of the classroom. According to the students' performance, on one hand there are a few students who have an acceptable English level because they are able to understand most of the words that are said in English, they know a fair amount of vocabulary, and they are able to understand some simple readings. However, they have difficulties in oral production skills. On the other hand, there are other students who have a very low English level. They cannot express simple ideas in English. These students are only able to understand few words in readings and audios.

The cooperating teacher is graduated in 2003 from the English and Spanish Teaching Program at *Universidad Tecnológica del Chocó*. He does not have either master degree or specialization. He has been teaching English for 10 years at the high school level and has worked in Institución Educativa El Salvador since 2009. He teaches English and Spanish from 8th to 11th grade. In an unstructured interview he stated that his main goal in the institution is to help, interact, and advise to people to learn English (Unstructured interview in Journal 4, March 17, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

After I observed the eighth grade classes for over three months, I realized that many students in the course don't use English a lot when they speak or write. Likewise, I noticed that when they participated in class, they only spoke in Spanish because they had not enough knowledge and vocabulary to express some basic ideas in English. This sort of behavior showed the students' lack of English language abilities towards the class that was evident in the following journal excerpt:

> The teacher explains the topic in English. After doing this, the teacher asked students for paying attention and writing in English what he was explaining. Suddenly, a girl told him: "Como se le ocurre eso, a duras penas hacemos el milagro de traducir a español, como vamos entonces a escribir lo que usted dice en inglés si no sabemos cómo escribir en ese idioma". (Journal 5, April 6, 2016)

> According to a survey I implemented on March 16, 40% of the students affirmed that they would like to learn to write in English simple paragraphs in order to express some ideas. Besides, most of them expressed that they would use the English to write texts about different and interesting topics (Survey about students' interests and needs, March 16, 2016). Apart from

this, 68% of the students told that they would like to work in groups because this would facilitate the interaction, motivation and productivity in what refers to accomplish complex tasks.

Also, there were many students that expressed they would like to work on computers using internet and games. 51. 4 % expressed that using internet they could get access to interesting technological tools in order to learn English. In the same way, 25. 7 % mentioned that games are also a motivational strategy to improve their English knowledge. (Survey about students' interests and needs, March 16, 2016). In the same questionnaire, to the question: Why would you like the English class to be taught in the computer room? Students expressed that they would like to see the English class in the computers room because they could use Internet as a tool for interacting with different and fun web sites that would help them to improve their English proficiency through practice and vocabulary acquisition. Furthermore, the facilities the institution has such us: two computers room, an English classroom with PC, video Beam, tape recorder and Internet connection would facilitate the English learning process through the use of this technological tools.

After analyzing the information I collected in my journal and the questionnaire, I consider that the implementation of a genre based instruction model combined with the use of some technological tools could develop the students' writing narrative practices because students can learn how to structure and write a narrative text through the use of graphic organizers and interactive platforms for writing. In addition, they could work together the learning cycle that makes genre based instruction possible. In the same way, this model can help students to improve the narrative writing practices by means of meaningful tasks that lead learners become directors and managers of their learning process. Also, this model facilitates the learning of English through collaborative work among students (Burns, 2001). Moreover, it has been a

challenge for language teachers to engage students in their classes. That is why many institutions

have implemented different learning strategies like the use of ICT as an attempt to improve this

situation. Actually, ICT tools could develop and promote the students' writing practices with the

aid of blogs and virtual platforms that contain many strategies to support the learning of a foreign

language (Robert, 2008).

<div align="center">**Theoretical Framework**</div>

This section will include a definition of genre based instruction, ICT tools and a

correlation between different academic studies. The information covered is mainly related to the

benefits of implementing a genre based instruction theory and ICT to foster narrative writing

practices.

Information and Communication Technology, ICT

At this time, learning a foreign language is completely different to what it used to be

some years ago. Today, people have access to the ICT tools in order to teach and learn any

language. In the educational context, these ICT's are known as a set of knowledge, methods and

tools designed and used to produce, store, organize, retrieve and read written, audio and visual

materials. In the current trend, the ICT's also include all computer, multimedia and software uses

for the data processing (Robert, 2008). In the same way, the use of ICT tools is a main factor for

boosting English language learning through ludic interaction and competition, fact that enhances

student's motivation. Also, it provides significant assistance to the development of students'

autonomy with a differentiated support that allows them to develop their own narrative writing

practices (Bertin, 2001). In other words, students can access to graphic organizers to structure

their ideas before writing a text. Also, on the Internet, they can find information and vocabulary

related to the topic they want to develop. Those tools can support the structure of their written

products (Bertin, 2001).

In regard the different ICT tools, there are some platforms like *Storybird* web site that

allows students to write a story based on beautiful, suggestive and interesting images. At the

same time, they can plan, draft, edit, publish and share their written projects. This shows that the

writing steps are facilitated through the use of an ICT tool (Durán, 2013). Some other benefits of

using *Storybird* were reported by Zakaria, Yunus, Nazri, & Shah (2016) in a study conducted in

the National University of Malaysia. They found that *Storybird* platform is suitable to help

students with their writing skills development due to the platform let them to be more confident

and engaged through the use of beautiful and interesting images. This helped students to get

ideas and choose suitable vocabulary to write narrative stories. In addition, the research revealed

that students were motivated to use variety of images with lengthy texts due to the collaborative

work that arose among the students. This aspect improved in a meaningful way the students'

narrative writing skills. This is evidence that students could endeavor to do complex projects

helped by some technological tools which would provide them with web sites, videos and online

books where they could get information related with their narrative writing practices.

In ICT language learning, the computers and software have a potential high place to

represent the cognitive human functions. That is to say, they can interact with students in a very

sophisticated way in order to promote learning. In the same way, there is a great variety of

hardware and software devices through which students and teachers can seek and access to

personal information, learning contents and dynamic strategies for teaching and learning

different writing, reading, listening and speaking skills (Blake, 2011). Similarly, the use in

conjunction of computers, software, multimedia programs and the Internet and after conducting

an evaluation of such language skills, the findings can reveal that these activities help students; especially the weaker or unwilling students, feel comfortable in using computers and the Internet for developing writing and reading skills. As expressed by other experts, ICT tools may keep students actively engaged with the course and encourage them to express themselves in better ways (Joulia, 2006).

Some insiders like Joulia, 2006 have openly argued that the use of computers, software, multimedia programs and the Internet reveal that students tend to feel more engaged and comfortable and in such way their performance also tends to be more appropriate mainly in the writing skill. Such use of computers and other ICT tools may help learners including the weaker and less motivated ones. Other authors emphasize the importance of ICT tools to develop specific skill strategies. That is how an expert like Selwyn has defined the importance of computers and similar tools in the learning process improvement. Similarly, Selwyn (2007) reported that 'there are many ways that teachers could use a computer device and resource to assist teaching and learning'. For example, a teacher could use word processing programs to support students to develop their writing skills such as drafting and editing.

Genre Based Instruction

According to Hyland, 2007, it is possible to define genre as the written or spoken social and abstract way to use the language with the purpose of constructing meaningful activities that contain grammatical forms, stages and aimed orientation to create texts for communicating personal ideas (messages). The narrative genre has as purpose the recount of a story mainly to entertain and engage the reader in an imaginary experience in which he or she aims to get attention and maintain interest in the events presented in the story (Byram, 2004). Likewise,

genre based instruction can be defined as a holistic perspective that allows working all the resources of the language from different points of view such as functional, notional, grammatical and pragmatic with the purpose of emphasizing the linguistic aspect that is adapted to the learning situation without losing the overall perspective of its use in context (Hammond, 1987). Besides, the textual treatment from the point of view of the genre to which this belongs facilitates that students perceive in a global way, and in its different components, the communicative function they fulfill in the social context for which they were created (Burns, 2001).

According to Martin & Rose (2012), the main characteristics of the narrative short story are: Orientation, Complication and Resolution. The orientation consisted in the description of the characters and places in which the story was developed, that is to say, it is necessary to answer to the questions: when?, where?, who or what? The complication refers to events, problems and details of the story. In other words, in this part it is essential to introduce the main problem when things go wrong, involving the main character and need to be fixed. Finally, resolution is when everything is solved and the story finishes up.

Another feature of genre based instruction is the teaching-learning cycle that is a systematic approach to the process of teaching students to engage with and create texts. It is based primarily in four stages linked to different classroom activities with the purpose of supporting students with the strategies and materials required to achieve a meaningful comprehension of genre and narrative texts (Hyland, 2007).The four stages of the cycle ruled by Martin (2009) can be summarized as follows:

Deconstruction of the text: this stage refers to the division of the text in its main genre and linguistic features. The teacher explains each part of the story with the purpose to show students how a story is structured.

Modeling: The teacher provides a model of a story in which students can observe and analyze the main parts of the text in a real and original teacher's written product. After that, students are aimed to imitate the example showed in class.

The third stage is joint construction: In this step the teacher provides students with materials and tools to write a story together. The teacher guides the students in the process of writing a story with its main features correcting and giving language support to structure the text.

The fourth stage is about independent construction. In this step students are encouraged to write a text in an independent way. The function of the teacher is giving feedback to improve the students written products.

In a qualitative and ethnographic case study, carried out in Thailand, was found that genre based instruction is an effective approach to foster narrative writing in undergraduate English teachers in the faculty of education. The study revealed that this approach can promote positive results in what concerns the students' thinking, planning and working development of whole text writing. Furthermore, the study showed that students improved their ability to write and structure a narrative text with their main characteristics due to the use of the teaching-learning cycle and genre based approach (Kongpetch, 2006).

Research Question

How can the use of ICT tools support the implementation of genre based instruction and foster

narrative writings of eighth graders at *Institución Educativa El Salvador*?

General Objective:

To determine how the use of ICT tools support the implementation of genre based

instruction and foster narrative writings of eighth graders at *Institución Educativa* El Salvador.

Specific Objectives:

1. To explore how the activities proposed in genre based instruction facilitate students'

   narrative writings.

2. To identify how the use of *Storybird*, graphic organizers and Internet facilitate the

   students' narrative writings.

Action Plan

In the first part of the cycle I will explain to students about genre based instruction, its

characteristics and its stages. Besides, I will show to students some examples of short stories in

order to illustrate about what they will write. I will base the stories in the students' interests and

likes but following a clear plan of actions and stages to develop them in a proper way. At this

time, I will conduct a survey about the students' perceptions, feelings, strengths and difficulties

about their narrative writing practices before they begin to lead with the project. This survey will

let me know the students' knowledge of narrative features and genre based instruction. With the

results of the survey I will provide to the students with tools and strategies for carrying out the

project while learn how to write narrative texts. Next, students are going to carry out a pre

writing task in which they will have to write a short story without any instruction. Then, students will work on their projects and they will receive the teaching-learning cycle and some *Storybird* platform tutorials in order to structure the different parts of their short stories.

After that, I will begin with the implementation of the genre based instruction using some technological tools as a *Storybird*, graphic organizers and Internet in order to foster step by step the students' performance in the narrative writing practices. Those actions will be carried out during the stages of the project and these will allow students to develop the planning, drafting, editing, publishing, and sharing writing steps. Additionally, I will provide students with language features such as adjectives, adverbs and action verbs; types of narrative writing practices; *Storybird* platform to write their texts.

For gathering other data, I will conduct direct observations that will be compiled in a pre-service teacher's journal, and analysis of the students' pre and post writing artifacts of their narrative writing practices. The corpus of observations of the study will be composed by observations in every English class during the two scholar periods. Therefore, I will use the journals as an effective tool to follow the facts that take place while the project is implemented. In those journal entries, I will analyze information that will help me to identify the possible influence of genre based instruction and the use of ICT for developing the students' writing abilities in the English class. At the end of the cycle, I will implement another survey with the purpose of knowing the students' thoughts and perceptions about the use of *Storybird* and the usefulness of the teaching actions carried out during the project.

Development of Actions

In this Action Research study were carried out some teaching and research actions as part of the strategies to promote the students' narrative writings through the use of ICT. The implementation of these actions was held during the third and fourth school terms from July to mid-October, 2016. The teaching actions were based on the teaching-learning cycle which included: deconstruction of a text, modeling, joint construction, and independent construction. Besides, I carried out a students' pre-writing and post-writing task. In the same way, an initial survey 1 and ending survey 2 were implemented as research actions.

Teaching Actions

Teaching-learning cycle. Deconstruction of a text was the first step of the teaching-learning cycle. In this step I did a presentation about narrative genre and its different characteristics as a way of introducing the general topic of the project. Then, students were provided with deconstruction in which the purpose was to learn to read beyond short story straightforward content, characteristics, main parts, and uncover new meaning. Hence, students analyzed and found in a text adapted for me, the main components of a short story (Orientation, Complication and Resolution). This teaching action was done twice during the month of August. Later, the modeling and joint construction steps were carried out at the beginning of September. I presented some common images in a logical sequence in a Power Point presentation. This showed, in a very clear way, some images that enabled students to create a short story with their own ideas and perceptions. I guided them in the process of writing the short story structuring some ideas and opinions and reminded them the main components and features of a short story. Also, I assisted the students with the vocabulary and grammar they demanded. At the end of this

joint construction stage, students and I created the story with characters, places, events and other components that made sense among the content and images provided.

The last teaching action implemented was the independent construction stage. This step aimed to get the students' final short stories. They wrote their short stories by the middle of October. For doing that, students worked in groups of three members using the computers' room during two classes. Furthermore, I provided them with two feedback sessions in which I reported students the recommendations, corrections and suggestions about their short stories. Finally, students wrote these in the *Storybird* platform which provided them the necessary images to structure their stories.

Writing Tasks

Pre-writing task. The first writing task I implemented as teaching action was conducted during the month of August .The purpose of this writing task was to get a diagnosis on the students' performance writing a short story in *Storybird* platform since that was the topic we were going to work during the project. In this task, students wrote a short story based on images provided by *Storybird* platform. At the moment of writing the stories, they had not received any instruction or explanation about narrative genre, short story characteristics or teaching-learning cycle.

Post-writing task. By the middle of October, this action was developed with the students' final short stories. First, they structured a narrative plan using a graphic organizer I provided. I explained this tool in a class and assisted them with ideas and opinions in a story draft. Second, students went to the computers room in order to write the final version of their stories. Third, they wrote these using *Storybird* platform. As a result of this, I could compare the

students' content, textual organization, language features and genre knowledge performance

between initial and final written products with the purpose of identifying the improvements in

their narrative writing practices.

Research Actions

       Surveys. In order to collect all needed data for the project two online surveys were given

to the students. The first survey was implemented by mid-August and the second one at the end

of October. The purpose of the first survey was to know the initial students' opinions,

impressions and knowledge about the use of *Storybird* platform, narrative genre and the

performance they got in the previous narrative writing practices. The survey 2 allowed knowing

a closer look about what students expressed in some opened questions related with the use of

Storybird, and the thoughts and perceptions about the usefulness of the teaching actions carried

out during the project.

<h2 style="text-align:center">Findings and Interpretations</h2>

       This study intended to improve eighth grade students English writing skills through the

implementation of a narrative genre based instruction mediated through the use of *Storybird*

platform. For collecting data to the objectives of this action research project, the following

instruments were used: two surveys about students' opinions, impressions and knowledge about

the use of *Storybird* platform, narrative genre and writing instructions; a journal with reflections

and class report lessons; and two writing tasks, one at the beginning and another at the end of the

project, of stories designed with the platform *Storybird*. To analyze the data I followed the next

steps: first, journal entries were written and reflected upon; second, surveys were applied,

analyzed and compared with the journal entries; third, writing tasks were compared and analyzed with a rubric designed to evaluate learners' written performance after following narrative genre steps to write a short story. To triangulate data, I designed a recurrent chart to organize categories and subcategories that emerged and were repeated along the process. Subsequently, I established connections among them, in the different sources of information. Finally, after the triangulation and analysis of the data collected through the different instruments, the following findings were derived: Students' gains on the comprehension of narrative genre; Students' performance towards short story writing; *Storybird* platform positive effects; and Effectiveness of teacher's writing instructions.

Students' Gains on the Comprehension of Narrative Genre

The positive thoughts and perceptions that students obtained during the genre based instruction played a very important role to help them gain comprehension of narrative genre; to improve their language ability to write stories; and also to raise awareness of the purpose and main characteristics of short stories. The following excerpt illustrates the students' opinions about writing short stories. When being asked: "How did you feel about writing a short story" most students answered that it was good for them to write a short story while only some of them had a different point of view concerning the same question. This proves learners have a general positive opinion concerning short stories writing.

Before beginning the project, I asked students about what they knew of narrative genre. Many of them did not answer the question. Some of them answered that they had seen that topic in a Spanish class but they did not remember clearly what it referred about. After the project began, I used a Power Point presentation in the deconstruction step of the teaching-learning cycle

to provide a complete overview of the meaning, uses and characteristics of narrative genre and

short stories components. I realized students were very attentive to this class. This is why, I

asked at random the following questions in order to know if they had understood the information

related with narrative genre and short story characteristics: "Do you know what narrative genre

is?"

> One of the students said that it was a genre used to narrate or tell stories (Student 1).
> Another of them mentioned that it was a literary genre used to write and tell stories in the
> past that served to entertain people (Student 2). Finally, other learners agreed that this
> genre was used to write fictional stories with imaginary characters to narrate what
> happened in the past (Students 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8).

> (Journal entry 5, September 22, p.6)

> After that, I did another question: "Do you know what the short story characteristics are?
> The student 1 answered that a short story had three parts: Orientation, Complication and
> Resolution. Likewise, another learner said that the Orientation consisted in the
> description of the characters and places in which the story was developed, the
> Complication referred to events, problems and details of the story and resolution was
> when everything was solved and the story was concluded (Student 2).

> (Journal entry 5, September 22, p.6)

I noticed that many students answered these questions with the information explained and

practiced during the instruction. I think this was possible thanks to my often reviews about this

genre and its characteristics. I implemented the teaching-learning cycle in which I included

examples, models and presentations with simple and clear information related to this genre.

Thus, I carried out deconstruction of a text, modeling of the story, joint construction and

independent construction. I could state that these steps helped students to raise awareness about

the characteristics and purpose of this narrative genre.

Students' Performance Towards Short Story Writing

However, claiming to know the narrative genre and parts of a story is not enough for proving it. Hence, in this project it was evidenced that students showed a meaningful comprehension and use of these elements in writing their stories and demonstrated that they could use most of the characteristics explained in the teaching-learning cycle. I analyzed both pre writing and post writing tasks using a rubric that had the following aspects: content, textual organization, language and vocabulary and genre of the short story. (See Appendix A). Based on this analysis, these results were obtained: it was seen that students' gains through the implementation of genre based instruction and *Storybird* platform refer to five different aspects that will be explained as follows.

Content. According to the analysis of students' second writing task concerning the story content, the majority of the students gave a suitable title to their stories. They were able to name the stories according to the content they wrote such us the events, the characters and the images they chose from *Storybird* platform. It can be evidenced in this excerpt of a story:

In the same way, most of the students had a considerable improvement concerning the connections among the clear description of the events and the well-chosen images of the *Storybird*. For example, in the first story they only wrote some isolated sentences that did not have a clear grammatical structure and that did not reflect the characteristics of a story. Also, they chose a few images that were not connected with the content of the written sentences. On

the contrary, for the second story many of the students included an Orientation, Complication

and Resolution. It means that students established a complete and clear structure of their stories

with a logical sequence of characters, images, ideas and events that showed a significance

promotion of their narrative writing practices. As evidence of these students 'improvement, see

Appendix B (Estrella's kidnapping) to observe how students applied the teacher's writing

instructions, knowledge about short stories characteristics and narrative genre.

Textual organization. In the textual organization, most of the students were able to write

some paragraphs for each part of the story with a logical organization of ideas. Eight groups out

of thirteen improved the way they structured the story using different paragraphs for the

Orientation, Complication and Resolution of the story. The appropriate textual organization can

be observed in the following second short story:

ESTRELLA'S KIDNAPPING

Once upon a time, a girl who liked the nature. Once visiting the forest, she met a boy. It was love at first sight. The two had a lot in common, so they traveled to many places together. After a long time of knowing each other, they decided to get married in Paris. After some time, they had a baby whom they called Estrella.

They became close friends with a neighbor of them, but it seemed the neighbor had bad intentions with Estrella. So, he took her in a train. It was long missing with the neighbor, and she believed that he was his real father. True parents were looking for their daughter. They thought it might be in the woods, because the neighbor also liked very much the nature.

One day, Estrella went to the forest, running through. His father also walked out there shouting suddenly the name of her daughter, and she answered. This way he recognized, and took her to his small house to meet his mother. They arrived at his home and his mother broke into tears upon seeing her again, and were happy the three. The end.

(Students' post writing task, October 6)

However, some groups did not achieve a significance advance in this aspect. This can be

evidenced in an excerpt of a short story written by one group:

And while it was walking sadly one stumbled over a very handsome vampire, To she to see it I inspire love of and he thought to speak to him but it rejected it, she I annoy and penso in doing an evilness to him.

(Students' post writing task, October 6)

It is evidenced that some students might still need more time to improve their textual organization. Perhaps, other factors like interests, exposure to language and abilities to work effectively in teams can be reasons for their not improving in this specific aspect.

Language and vocabulary. Before the genre writing instructions, seven groups had difficulties to organize sentences that would include subject and predicate within the story. After writing instructions, there was a slight improvement in this aspect. Students included in their stories more complete sentences with subjects and predicates. The following evidence was taken from a student second short story:

He lived in a black castle in a island little with his pet.

The ghost killed a boy on saturday night and He was very happy.

(Students' post writing task, October 6)

However the use of punctuation, capitalization and spelling had not a significant advance in the stories. That was a recurrent problem in the written products of the students because in the project there were no specific teaching actions focused on the use and development of these linguistic components. Most of the groups did not achieve a satisfactory level in these criteria. Therefore, some parts of the stories were difficult to understand because the lack of punctuation,

capitalization and spelling created misunderstandings in content and language. Shown below, an

evidence of the students' pre writing and post writing tasks that show the problematic mentioned:

He had a friend imagined the always he was lonely played with he and forgeted their bad times the imagined the he was impressive his family addressed for help

(Students' pre writing task, October 6)

Junko was too smart, spent two years looking for a way to communicate with his friends alien of the planet Kasei, for that help to her and her sisters to get out of the towers where they were locked. also his friends owed him a favor and it was time to pay it

(Students' post writing task, October 6)

The use of vocabulary and linguistic structures improved as follows: in the pre writing

task, students showed difficulties using past tense to describe events and using adjectives to

describe their characters. In the post writing task, it was noted a considerable progress in the

conjugation of the past tense to describe those events. Furthermore, it was observed that students

used more adjectives when describing their characters. For example, adjectives like *legendary,*

great, little were used in the story to describe the main characters. Besides, verbs in past tense

like *was, had, and discovered* were used to narrate and describe events in past.

She had a great friend
named Pacheco , he was a
little gluttonous
The investigator
discovered the castle and
he fought with help
the witch magicians
A long time ago,
There was a legend a
legendary sword called
excalibur

(Students' post writing task, October 6)

Genre. Genre based instruction was the core theory and conceptual framework that was

used in order to enhance learners writing skills through the development of this project. In

regards this criteria, more than 60% of the students improved in recognizing the characteristics

of a short story such as the audience, the context, and the purpose. Moreover, the majority of the

students reflected their creativity through the well-chosen images. They let their imagination run

free and gave to their short stories a sense of interest and originality. An evidence of this can be

observed in the appendix C.

Storybird Platform Positive Effects

The positive effects that emerged from the sustained and positive attitude of exploring

and using *Storybird* in the process of writing a short story was a significant impact. Moreover,

the way students were able to support their short stories writing process by using *Storybird*

platform was also a relevant achievement. As a matter of fact, it was found that a big part of the

students were really happy and comfortable using the platform. They expressed their personal

opinions and experiences about how they felt writing a story in a new and innovative online

platform. Students expressed that they felt comfortable and engaged due to the clearness and

usefulness of *Storybird.* This was a great advantage for engaging them to have a better attitude

toward the language learning. As a result of this, the students' English confidence and

engagement improved by reason of using *Storybird* platform. It can be proved in the students'

answers when they were asked about how they felt writing a short story through *Storybird*:

> Twenty two learners answered that they felt very well because *Storybird* was very useful
> due to its simplicity for writing the story. Also, five students said that they were
> comfortable because *Storybird* extended their creativity and imagination. Moreover,
> seven students did not express a clear opinion about how they felt writing the story using
> *Storybird* and only four respondents said that writing a story on the platform was boring.
> (Survey 2 analysis, October 26, p.2)

Likewise, the analysis of the data collected showed that the students were interested in the platform because in some classes it was noticed that many of them were engaged with the project. It was observed in their faces and expressions in which many of them looked interested in what was being explained. Also, they were focused in my explanation. This is a proof of the students' involvement in the project because it was a different perspective of teaching and learning English with the use of an ICT tool. Also, students did nice classes because they had a good behavior and a remarkable participation. An excerpt taken from the journal exemplifies what the students mentioned about using this platform:

> I listened that some students said that the project was cool because they were going to have images and Internet and at the same time, they also expressed that English would be easier for them in this way. Other students mentioned that it was good writing stories using the platform.

(Journal entry 2, August 4, p.3)

With regard to the *Storybird* opportunities, I realized that a very interesting and unexpected finding emerged from the information gathered. While students began to write their short stories in *Storybird* platform, I observed they were working collaboratively asking for opinions and suggestions among them. An example of this can be read below:

> One student asked to his teammates if they had to put one specific image or other. He asked Maria and Rosa about what they thought in order to decide among all the selection of the correct image. Another group wondered if some images were more appropriated for the orientation or the conclusion. They expressed their points of view in a convincing way. Finally, one group spoke aloud and I listened clearly: "Guys, I think we should think of the most suitable name for the character and choose the one we like the most"

(Journal entry 5, September 22, p.8)

The expressions and questions students stated in the above excerpt exemplify collaboration among them to write the stories. Initially, this collaborative work was not taken into account as a specific objective of the research so, this means that this project helped to

engage students to work among them. For that, it is possible to point out that this is a very

intriguing finding that rise from this action research study and can be highlighted as collaborative

writing that was done through an online writing platform.

Effectiveness of Teacher's Writing Instructions

The different actions, class activities, teaching-learning cycle and genre based

instructions carried out during the entire project were essential to accomplish the main objectives

of this action research study in what concerns the promotion of the students' narrative practices.

In some classes, I observed almost all the groups were writing the appropriate information in

each part of a graphic organizer I had provided them to classify and organize a short story

example. In this activity, I realized students were working collaboratively because they asked to

each other if the information was correct or not. They were discussing if they were doing well

the exercise. An example of this can be read in the following journal excerpt:

> I noticed that students were discussing if the resolution (of the story) was when the frog
> became a prince and he and the princess got married. They were asking to each other
> about it with the purpose of confirming the hypothesis they had. Other students agreed
> that the complication began when the princess dropped out the ball into the lake and
> started to cry. In this moment, one student expressed that the exercise that we had done
> the last class (join construction) had helped them a lot. Due to it they had better
> understood this exercise since they already knew about the story of The Princess and The
> Frog when they had written it with all those images that I had shown to them.

(Journal entry 5, September 14, p.4)

They expressed that the exercise was not so difficult due to the previous explanations of a

short story components in the Joint construction stage in which we worked based on images of

The Princess and The Frog story. Moreover, students expressed that they got accomplished the

graphic organizer task due to the teacher instructions story.

Similarly, in the survey 2 students expressed their opinions and impressions towards the class activities implemented during the project. This can be seen in the following evidence: "Do you consider that the activities developed in class were useful to teach you about the characteristics of the story and guide you on how to write it? Yes, No, Why?"

Yes: 35 No: 3
-15 respondents expressed that the class activities were very useful for guiding them in the correct way of writing the story.
-18 students said that they learned how a story should be written and that these activities were news and different to learn English.
-2 learners mentioned that these activities helped them to learn how to use *Storybird*.
-3 students said that they actually had not understood anything from the activities.
(Survey 2 analysis, October 26, p.2)

It is noticed that students took advantage of the activities carried out in the class in order to better understand how they had to write a story. Thus, the majority of them, for instance, expressed that the activities proposed by the pre-service teacher were appropriated for leading them in the written process. This could be understood as a positive gain: when learners are exposed to genre based instruction, they may gain lifelong strategies that help them improve their writing skills.

To sum up, the use of narrative genre based instruction is not only useful to improve writing skills but also fosters a more meaningful learning in which peer collaboration and individual responsibility are the main gains learners and teachers get.

Conclusions and Suggestions

It is possible to conclude that genre based instruction and the use of Storybird platform are very useful tools not only to foster students' motivation to write short stories, but also to improve students' narrative writing practices through the use of ICT tools. Through them, students can choose everything related to their story-projects and work collaboratively. These

advantages cause on the students the positive results described above. Additionally, I consider

that the teacher's role has an important contribution to make this happen. My performance in the

implementation of the teacher-learning cycle and the continuous reviews of the genre theory

helped most of the students to think and to structure their projects and consequently raise their

interest and carry out their short stories writing on an innovative platform. Moreover, the

platform was a great appealing tool that provided students with many beautiful and interesting

images that activated the students' imagination and creativity to write narrative products.

However, when implementing this genre based approach, it is important to take into

account the time and the constant process that it requires. To illustrate, I have to mention that the

excessive extracurricular activities in the high school had a negative impact in the

implementation of the project due to the lack of classes for teaching all the elements required for

getting a better process to write a story. Besides, this situation affected significantly the data

collection and the normal development of the actions proposed in the AR project. Actually, the

group in which I worked was in a *Mega Aula* project that *Secretaría de Educación de Medellín*

promoted with the purpose of improving students' Spanish reading-writing abilities. They had to

go to *ITM* institution every two or three weeks during the days of the English class. Therefore, I

tried to do everything I could in order to carry out my project. However, these situations had a

big influence in the normal teaching-learning process.

Reflection

Implementing an action research cycle did help me to extend my knowledge on language

teaching. Having in mind a research question allowed me to approach a class problem by

focusing on particular difficulties and possibilities. I could identify that such difficulties and possibilities are not always attributable to students' ignorance or lack of skills, but rather to the way in which content is presented to them, or the way in which the syllabus is structured. This means that an approach such as genre based instruction and the use of an ICT tool are not always beneficial by themselves; their success will depend on the way they were implemented by the teacher, the students' interests and the technological resources of the high school.

With respect to my knowledge on research, carrying out an Action Research cycle is, in fact, a demanding task. Aspects such as the complexity of its procedures, the time available for accomplishing the steps, the amount of information required to analyze, and my inexperience in the research field constitute some of the main hindrances of the research cycle. Nevertheless, my experience in this practicum and AR project was satisfying because getting to know by first-hand the sequence of AR in language teaching demanded me to be more thoughtful about the implications of putting into practice a precise and detailed study. Moreover, the use of data collection methods and the analysis of the data really helped me to give a satisfying answer to the research question. The fact of finding an answer or, at least, identifying the factors that affect a real educational problem makes me extend my insights into language education and teaching practices along with the factors affected by it.

Also, I felt gratified because of the attitudes of the high school principal and the cooperating teacher who largely supported this innovative and ambitious project. Finally, I have to mention that this personal journey strengthen my convictions and beliefs about the issues I have to develop in my personal and professional life. It has been difficult due to the many obstacles that I have had to overcome, but in the end, I have been able to come up with a final

paper I feel proud of and confirm such beliefs and concerns I have about this wonderful

adventure of becoming an English and French teacher.

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Appendixes

Appendix A

STUDENTS' ARTIFACTS RUBRIC

5: Excellent
4: Well done
3: Satisfactory
2: Needs improvement
1: Poor

Criteria	5	4	3	2	1
The student is able to …					
Content					
Give a suitable title for the story					
The story has: orientation, complication and resolution with its characteristics					
Describe the events of the story					
Connects the story with the images of *Storybird*					
Textual Organization					
Build a different paragraph to structure the story (orientation, complication and resolution)					
Establish a logical organization of ideas					
Language and Vocabulary					
Use past tense to recount or describe events of the story					
Use a variety of adverbs (time/place) to describe activities					
Use suitable adjectives to describe characters					
Make clear sentences that include a subject and predicate					
Use punctuation, capitalization and spelling in an appropriate way					
Genre					
Show awareness of the purpose of the story					
Take into account the audience and context					
Shows creativity with the story					

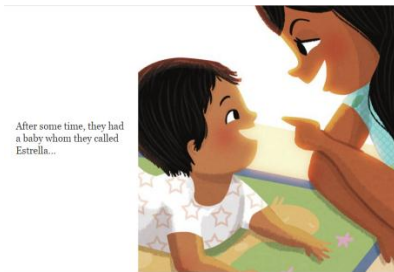Final grade: /70

Appendix B: Students' short story

Once visiting the forest, she met a boy. It was love at first sight...
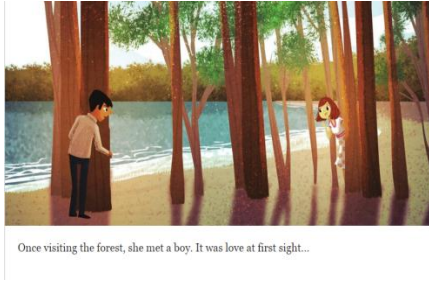
The two had a lot in common, so they traveled to many places together...

After a long time of knowing each other, they decided to get married in Paris..

After some time, they had a baby whom they called Estrella...

They became close friends with a neighbor of them, but it seemed the neighbor had bad intentions with Estrella...

It was long missing with the neighbour, and she believed that he was his real father...

So, he took her in a train...

True Parents were looking for their daughter. They thought it might be in the woods, because the neighbor also liked very much the nature...

One day, Estrella went to the forest, runnig through..

His father also walked out there shouting suddenly the name of her daughter, and she answered. This way he recognized, and took her to his small house to meet his mother...

They arrived at his home, and his mother broke into tears upon seeing her again, and were happy the three.
The End.

Appendix C: Students' creativity and originality

Tom agreed to be one of those soldiers in the army of Sara to defeat this evil.
They started Conveza mutants to be members of his army to defeat the wicked.

the strange world of young tom

the strange world of young tom

Tom returned with his family, happy because everything looked very interesting and I never felt bored