



**UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA**

Trabajo de investigación presentado como requisito
parcial para optar al título de:

Licenciado en Lenguas Extranjeras

Autor

Andrés Mauricio Vanegas Londoño

Universidad de Antioquia

Escuela de Idiomas

Medellín, Colombia

2022



Exploring the Effects of Using Authentic Materials to Foster the Comprehension of Writing Skills among EFL Students at a Public School

Andrés Mauricio Vanegas Londoño

Thesis and Research Advisor

Juan David Castaño Roldan

Magister in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

Practicum Advisor

Natalia Arias Patiño

Magister in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

Medellín

June 2022

Abstract

This article reports on a case study carried out in a public school located in Medellín, Colombia. Its main purpose was to explore the effects of using authentic materials to foster the comprehension of writing skills among EFL students in a fifth-grade classroom. Data were collected through memos, two work samples, and a reflection task. The findings suggested that fables are adequate resources to foster the comprehension of writing skills, specifically sentence structure, and punctuation marks, as long as students are provided with proper scaffolding activities. Furthermore, the use of fables equally promoted in-class participation, vocabulary acquisition, and a reflective attitude toward values, characters, and situations depicted in the stories.

Keywords: Authentic materials, fables, writing skills, sentence structure, punctuation marks.

Degree Requirement

This case study is submitted as a requirement to obtain the Bachelor of Education Degree in Teaching Foreign Languages at Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellín, Colombia.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my parents for their unconditional love and relentlessly support throughout my entire life. Mom, Dad, this is for you; we made it.

I want to acknowledge all my professors who made part of this amazing journey of self-realization, especially Jorge Enrique Hernández whose great vocation and passion for education inspired me to finally become a teacher. I will be forever grateful for that, Jorge.

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to my research advisor, Juan David Castaño, and my practicum advisor, Natalia Arias, for their constant insight, guidance, and patience over the last year. Despite the difficult moments, we pulled this off as a team.

I want to express my gratitude to Danniela for her valuable friendship. During the last few months, her uplifting words meant a stream of fresh air to keep stepping forward.

Also, I want to make a special mention to my cooperating teachers and students who allowed me to live such an enriching experience. Their voices were crucial for this project.

Last but not least, I want to thank each and every one of my closest friends, classmates, and future colleagues for the memories of a lifetime; it was a hell of a ride.

Table of Contents

Preface	6
Context Description	7
Problem Statement	9
Research Question	11
Theoretical Framework	11
Instructional Materials	11
Authentic Materials	11
Writing Skills	12
Research Methodology	12
Data Collection	13
Memos	13
Work Samples	13
Reflection Task	13
Data Analysis	13
Ethical Considerations	14
Action Development	14
Findings	15
Sentence Structure	16
Illustrations As Understanding Support	16
Punctuation Marks	17
Awareness of their Importance and Use	17
Other Effects	18
Fables as Sources of Vocabulary	18
Fables as Means to Reflect Upon Values	19
Students' Participation in the Activities Supported by Fables	20
Students' Limitations to Carry Out the Activities	20
Discussions and Conclusions	21
Reflection	24
References	26
Appendix A	27
Appendix B	28
Appendix C	30

Preface

As a pre-service teacher in the practicum of the Foreign Language Teaching program of The University of Antioquia, I was assigned to develop a case study in a fifth-grade English class at INEM José Félix de Restrepo. This research project took place from March 11th to June 3rd, 2022, and it included as well an observation pre-stage in late 2021. This report begins with a context description. Then, it elaborates on the problem statement. Later, it details the teaching actions that were established and planned for the first semester of 2022. Finally, it presents findings, conclusions, and recommendations derived from this experience.

Context Description

INEM José Félix de Restrepo is a public educational institution located in Medellín, Colombia. The school offers formal education services across elementary, middle, and secondary levels. Additionally, it provides vocational and occupational training based on diverse disciplines; namely plastic arts, accounting, informatics, electronics, and human resources, among others. As a mission, it strives to educate students in terms of respect, responsibility, environmental preservation, collaborative work, and democratic participation. Furthermore, as a vision, it aspires to be recognized as a high-quality school where critical, autonomous, creative, and democratic citizens are integrally formed.

The fifth-grade class is composed of twelve boys and sixteen girls whose average age is ten years old. According to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), their language proficiency level could be classified within A1, since their in-class performance reflects the capacity of introducing themselves, understanding some everyday expressions, and conveying meaning through the use of basic vocabulary. However, they still evidence some difficulties when doing tasks that entail basic speaking and writing skills (journal #1). Concerning the facility, the English classroom is endowed with a whiteboard, desks, chairs, some didactic resources such as board games and books, a big Smart TV, and a computer with a wireless internet connection.

The students' experience with English goes beyond the classroom: a portion of the surveyed students report they interact with the target language when playing video games or listening to music (survey #1). Concerning their attitudes and perceptions, various of them show interest in learning English as they actively participate during the lessons and ask for feedback on their performance (journal #3). Also, multiple students state they would like to learn English with the intention of traveling abroad and improving their future academic and job prospects; nonetheless, some others learn it because it is a mandatory subject (survey #1).

The English syllabus for fifth graders is aligned with the Basic Learning Rights proposed by the Ministry of National Education. Therefore, the students are expected to accomplish specific objectives in accordance with their grade, such as producing a short written or spoken narrative text. The syllabus does not suggest the implementation of any particular methodologies or approaches, but it includes three main components to consider: discourse-function, semantic-syntactic and sociocultural. In addition, it recommends the use of authentic material to foster the development of students' linguistic skills as it exposes them to language in real-life contexts.

The cooperating teacher graduated from the Pontifical Javeriana University, where she obtained a Basic Primary Education degree. Subsequently, she achieved a Master's degree in Pedagogy. She conceives teaching and learning as an exchanging process in which teachers and students help each other enrich their knowledge and life experiences. Regarding her methodology, the cooperating teacher does not implement only one method or approach because she considers each group of students has its own needs and particularities. In this sense, she explains she molds her teaching practice depending on the context, so she could use both traditional and modern methods which can even overlap sometimes. Finally, the cooperating teacher has over two decades of experience, a period in which she has taught other subjects, for instance, arts, Spanish, and social sciences (interview #1).

The teacher-researcher is a foreign language student at the University of Antioquia. During the last few years, his experience has been mainly focused on private English classes with children and adults. He considers education a powerful tool that can enable people to reach their potential and transform the reality in which they are immersed. Regarding the methodology, he inclines to implement the Task-Based Learning approach coupled with other enriching micro strategies, such as Contextualizing Linguistic Input and Integrating Language Skills. In addition, he usually opts to teach English through authentic materials.

Problem Statement

Within the Colombian public educational context, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching and learning processes tend to focus on developing the comprehension of writing skills through the use of materials specifically designed for educational purposes. However, despite the overall prioritization of the written language production and the implementation of textbooks within the classroom, students commonly struggle to understand basic yet necessary aspects that belong to writing; namely sentence structure and punctuation marks. Therefore, this type of linguistic input proves to fall short, at least to a certain extent, when it comes to obtaining the expected comprehension results, which may vary depending on the school grade and the educational institution.

The importance of addressing this situation lies in the fact that writing is currently deemed one of the most fundamental English abilities since it is significantly required for worldwide communication, job opportunities, and international study. Additionally, understanding writing skills serve to underpin better school grades and higher academic achievements. (Chamba, Reinoso, & Rengifo, 2019; Kamariah, 2018). Thus, teachers' endeavors should revolve around selecting suitable materials that allow students to improve their comprehension in this regard and, as a result, be at the forefront of modern global dynamics. Conversely, educators who choose inappropriate materials may prevent students from obtaining satisfactory comprehension outcomes that may lead them to struggle when exchanging ideas in a written form (Chamba, Reinoso, & Rengifo, 2019; Sundana, 2017).

Based on the above considerations, the use of authentic materials can shed light on the aforementioned issue as these resources can promote the comprehension of language skills, increase motivation and confidence when using English in real-life settings, and improve language production to any extent. (Harmer, 1994, as cited in Castillo, Insuasty, & Jaime, 2017). Moreover, authentic materials provide a wide variety of language contexts, registers,

vocabulary, genres, and styles of both written and spoken discourses that can work as input to augment students' understanding of language skills and, eventually, increase their output when speaking or writing (Rao, 2019).

After reviewing pedagogical experiences published during the last fifteen years in Colombian EFL journals (*Ikala*, *How*, *Profile*, among others) and international ones (*International Journal of Humanities and Innovation*, and *English Language Teaching*), it was found that multiple research studies have explored the use of authentic materials to support language skills, including writing. Nevertheless, the activities designed had different purposes other than fostering the comprehension of sentence structure and punctuation marks.

For example, Beltran, and Morales (2006) learned that authentic materials, like songs and cartoons, are helpful to enhance listening comprehension skills when students are given gist-selective and prediction strategies to approach these resources. Castillo, Insuasty, and Jaime (2017) concluded that using brochures, newspapers, photographs, and interviews has a positive impact on students' linguistic domain as it helps them improve their communicative skills when writing. Rivera (2011) found that students work better in terms of organization when they are provided with an instructional framework based on pre-writing, writing, and post-writing activities, allowing students to follow a structured plan.

Internationally speaking, Kamariah (2018) realized that using videos helps students develop their writing skills in terms of content and vocabulary as students, in this particular case, were able to produce a short narrative text. Finally, Chamba, Reinoso, and Rengifo (2019) evidenced that, by using poems, songs, magazines, and TV commercials through pre-writing activities, such as brainstorming, students were able to improve their writing skills in terms of coherence and cohesion. Given the gaps above, this case study intends to explore the effects of using authentic materials to foster the comprehension of writing skills among EFL students at a public school in Medellín, Colombia.

Research Question

What are the effects of using authentic materials to foster the comprehension of writing skills among EFL students in a public school in Medellín, Colombia?

Theoretical Framework

The following section introduces the concepts used to support this study. First of all, it explains what instructional materials are, including pros and cons. Second, it explores the definition of authentic materials coupled with their advantages and disadvantages. Finally, it describes writing skills in terms of mechanics and organization.

Instructional Materials

Instructional Materials, such as textbooks, are designed to help teachers support instructional goals as well as meet the English requirements from a homogeneous point of view. Among their roles, they provide instructional standards and are usually considered the central axis in the course syllabus. These materials often provide a wide range of activities based on reading, listening, and vocabulary aspects. Concerning their disadvantages, they tend to be linguistically artificial and monotonous, disregard students' needs and prevent teachers from creating their own materials (Rao, 2019; Richards, 2001, as cited in Setyowaty & Sukmawan, 2019).

Authentic Materials

Authentic Materials are resources created for non-teaching purposes that emerge from the producer's native language, culture, and needs for communication (Castillo, Insuasty, & Jaime, 2017). Additionally, they are produced for a real audience and convey a genuine message (Kamariah, 2018), both spoken or written (Adam, Stan, Moanga, Oroian, Mihai, & Ciubancan, 2010). Authentic materials can be classified into different categories depending on how they transmit information. Examples of these categories include visual materials (pictures, photographs, children's drawings, illustrations, etc.), written materials (newspaper

articles, novels, books, fables, etc.), and audio-visual materials (TV commercials, video clips, cartoons, movies, songs, etc.) (Gebhard, 1996, as cited in Belet Boyacı & Güner, 2018).

Regarding their advantages, authentic materials can provide students with texts rich in collocations, vocabulary, and idioms (Rao, 2019). Moreover, students experience motivation as they are exposed to language while exploring resources they enjoy, such as songs, novels, movies, or video games. In addition, this type of input brings the real world into the classroom to which students can relate whilst learning English (Setyowaty & Sukmawan, 2019). Nevertheless, low-level students can end up frustrated and unmotivated since they still lack the required skills to successfully deal with authentic materials (Kilickayaas, 2004, as cited in Al Azri & Al-Rashdi, 2014). Accordingly, beginner students may not experience meaningful differences when learning with authentic materials instead of instructional materials if proper scaffolding is not provided beforehand (Kienbaum et al., 1986, as cited in Al Azri & Al-Rashdi, 2014).

Writing Skills

In a broad sense, Writing Skills refer to the different abilities required to properly express thoughts by means of signs and symbols, taking into consideration some conventions that enable readers to grasp meaning from the written message (Hampton, 1999, as cited in Rivera, 2011; Masood, 2013). These writing skills encompass diverse elements that mainly deal with mechanical and organization skills. The former is related to grammar knowledge and the rules that govern language usage, including spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, capitalization, contractions, etc. The latter has to do with content selection, purpose, paragraph composition, etc (Masood, 2013).

Research Methodology

The present research was conducted following a case study methodology, which permitted the examination of the current phenomenon in its natural context through multiple data sources in order to learn about its particularities rather than rebuilding theory (Yin, 2011).

In this specific case, the interest was to explore the effects of using authentic materials to foster the comprehension of writing skills, taking into consideration the original setting: a fifth-grade English class in a public school in Medellín, Colombia. To achieve this, it drew on different data collection instruments (e.g., memos, work samples, and a reflection task) as the main analytical process to study this phenomenon. (Yin, 2011).

Data Collection

Three data collection instruments were used during a time frame of six weeks to analyze the effects of using authentic materials to promote the understanding of writing skills.

Memos

Memos were written at the end of each English class with the intention of registering students' reactions and performances concerning the activities supported by authentic materials.

Work Samples

Two students' work samples were collected throughout the study: The first one in the middle of the process, and the other one at the end. These samples allowed the evaluation of their progress in terms of understanding writing skills (sentence structure and punctuation).

Reflection Task

This reflection task, which took place in the last class, was intended to go deeper into the students' perceptions of the general process.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process was accomplished after following the stages proposed by Burns (2009). First, all the raw data were gathered through the collection instruments detailed above (Collection). Subsequently, after further examination and for validity purposes, data were coded and triangulated to establish connections, patterns, and categories (Codification & Triangulation). Finally, the information was interpreted in the light of the research question so findings could be drawn (Interpretation).

Ethical Considerations

In order to ensure the participants' safety, several measures were taken. First, all students were informed about the nature of the study and the possible samples to gather. In the same way, these participants had the chance to ask questions in order to make sure all the information was clear. Then, they were asked to sign a consent form together with their parents. Finally, the data collected was stored safely, and only the researcher and the thesis advisor had access to them. Students' identities were hidden through pseudonyms.

Action Development

The activities designed were applied across six classes within a time span of thirteen weeks, from March 11th to June 3rd, 2022, and were taught at a rate of one-hour session per week. Multiple issues that dealt with extracurricular matters, school problems, and even a vacation period led to the cancellation of seven classes approximately. These situations affected the process as the teaching actions that were initially planned had to be simplified.

The activities designed drew mainly on two fables as the authentic material selected to foster the comprehension of the sentence structure and punctuation mark skills. These texts were the following: (a) "The Hare and The Tortoise", and (b) "The Fisherman and The Little Fish", both retrieved from The Aesop for Children webpage. Furthermore, some additional illustrations were retrieved from the internet to complement the stories.

To organize the activities intended to prepare students to cope with the written input, each fable was addressed in different sessions following three stages: (a) Preparation, (b) Exposition, and (c) Workshop. During the first class, students explored the key vocabulary and expressions of "The Hare and The Tortoise" through matching pictures and words, a multiple-choice game and scrambling (Preparation). Then, during the second class, the fifth graders were exposed to the fable as it was read together while showing the respective illustrations. Once the story was completely covered, students shared their thoughts and experiences concerning the moral that was portrayed. Subsequently, they were guided through

an analysis in which they inspected some excerpts (taken from the story) in order to understand the sentence structure skill (subject, verb, and complement) (Exposition). Finally, during the third class, students did a workshop to put into practice what they had learned after further review, examples, and feedback. In this regard, they organized words related to the fable to create sentences coherently and wrote brief descriptions of the main characters (Workshop).

Afterward, students followed the same path to deal with the second fable during the remaining classes. On this occasion, the purpose was to work on the punctuation mark skill. During the fourth class, students went through the scaffolding activities to help them deal with the vocabulary presented in "The Fisherman and The Little Fish" (Preparation). Later, during the fifth class, they were exposed to the fable in a group reading exercise, in which they had the opportunity to reflect on the fable and provide their version of the moral. Later, they were guided through an analysis in which they observed and identified how commas and periods were presented within the text. Likewise, students received further reinforcement on how these punctuation marks work depending on the case, taking as a reference some excerpts from the fable and other additional examples to elicit better understanding (Exposition). Finally, during the sixth class, students carried out the final workshop, in which they had to place commas and periods accurately within a short paragraph and write concise descriptions of the main characters taking into consideration both the sentence structure and the punctuation mark skills (Workshop).

Findings

Data analysis suggests that the activities supported by fables not only helped to foster the comprehension of the sentence structure and punctuation mark skills, but also promoted in-class participation, the reflection of values, and vocabulary acquisition. However, this analysis also suggests that some students experienced certain limitations to carry out the

activities successfully. Based on these considerations, the following paragraphs elaborate on each of these categories and presents the respective pieces of evidence.

Sentence Structure

Regarding this first category, students experienced effects related to one important feature connected to fables, the illustrations. Consequently, the fifth-graders could better understand the story and the sentence structure skill, given that image-word connection.

Illustrations As Understanding Support

The visual input within the fables was an important factor that significantly contributed to the students' comprehension of the story. These illustrations helped students to keep track of the plot and, eventually, enabled them to better understand the sentence structure skill exemplified in the text as they were able to make meaningful connections between words and images. In this sense, at least seven students experienced this effect. For example, Jennifer wrote this in her reflection task,

Algo que me facilitó mucho aprender la estructura de las oraciones por medio de las fábulas fue cuando narraban la historia y mostraban una imagen, porque si en el escrito había una palabra que no entendía, miraba las imágenes y entendía mejor su significado al igual que la historia. (Jennifer, Reflexión, 03/06/2022)

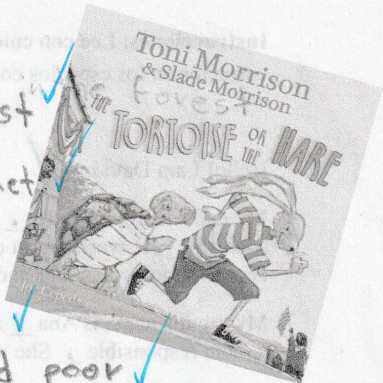
Something that helped me learn about sentence structure was the narration of the fable and the illustrations since, if I didn't understand a word, I would take a look at the illustrations and understand better its meaning and the story in general. (Jennifer, Reflection Task, 03/06/2022)



Furthermore, the work samples collected showed that Jennifer was, in fact, able to comprehend the sentence structure skill by properly organizing subjects, verbs, and complements in such order that these sentences can convey ideas accurately in English.

Instrucciones: Teniendo en cuenta lo estudiado y las fábulas leídas en clase, ordena los diferentes elementos (sujeto, verbo y complemento) de manera que puedas formar correctamente las oraciones. (15 Puntos)

- the fisherman / a fry / caught
The fisherman caught a fry ✓
- the fox, the hare and the tortoise / live / in the forest
The fox, the hare and tortoise live in the forest ✓
- was / the little fish / in the basket
The little fish was in the basket ✓
- friends / the hare and the tortoise / are
The hare and the tortoise are friends ✓
- sad / the fisherman / and / poor / was
The fisherman was sad and poor ✓



Punctuation Marks

Concerning this category, students were able to understand the importance of using punctuation marks when writing their own sentences, either to use commas to separate adjectives in descriptions or periods to conclude ideas.

Awareness of their Importance and Use

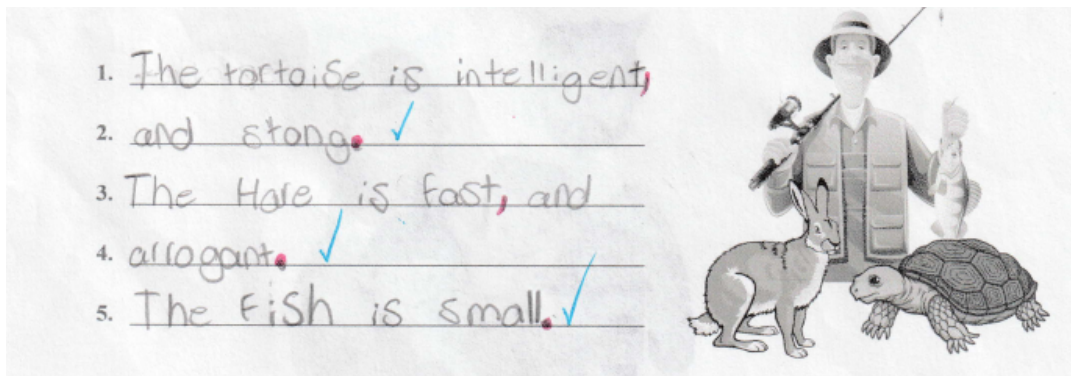
The use of fables and the respective explanations on how to use punctuation marks allowed students to see the importance of this skill. At least six students reported that they learned when and how to use commas and periods throughout the activities supported by fables. For instance, Miguel, in his reflection task, stated,

Aprendí que al construir una oración en inglés se cierra con un punto. Ya sé también que por eso la siguiente oración empieza por mayúscula o que si voy a separar diferentes palabras uso la coma. (Miguel, Reflexión, 03/06/2022)

When constructing a sentence in English, I learned that it has to finish with a period. It also indicates that the following sentence starts with a capital letter. I know that commas are used to separate different words. (Miguel, Reflection Task, 03/06/2022)

Likewise, the evidence obtained from his work samples suggested that Miguel actually understood the practical part regarding punctuation marks. For instance, he used commas to

separate different qualities when describing the tortoise or the hare. Also, this student finished all his sentences with a period.

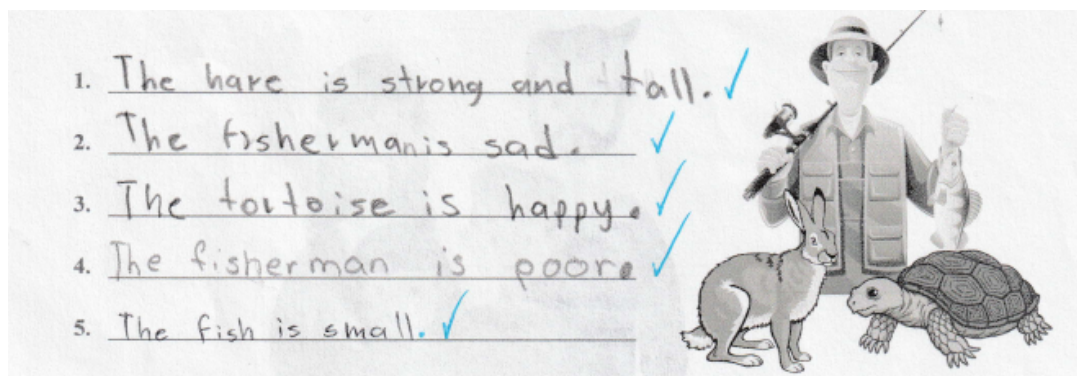


Other Effects

The development of this study equally promoted other effects that went beyond understanding sentence structure and punctuation mark skills. These effects had to do with vocabulary acquisition, adoption of a reflective attitude toward values, in-class participation, and resistance toward the language.

Fables as Sources of Vocabulary

The implementation of a wide range of activities meant to prepare students beforehand entailed the exploration of relevant vocabulary and expressions presented within the stories. As a result, students were not only able to grasp general meaning once they addressed the fables but also learned specific words that allowed them to understand in detail some excerpts. At least five students were able to write short descriptions using the vocabulary learned in class. For example, James described the main characters of the fables as follows,



As can be observed in this evidence, James recycled the vocabulary he learned while reading the fable in order to complete a writing activity that consisted of describing these main characters. Later on, in the reflection task, he confirmed this,

Las fábulas y las actividades en clase me ayudaron a entender muchas palabras que no entendía antes, lo que me permitió aprender más sobre el inglés (James, Reflexión, 03/06/2022)

Fables and the in-class activities helped me understand many words that I did not know before, which allowed me to learn more about English (James, Reflection Task, 03/06/2022)

Fables as Means to Reflect Upon Values

The short yet enriching stories presented were quite meaningful for students as they were able to demonstrate a reflective attitude toward the values, emotions, characters, and situations that these narrative texts tried to depict and, at the same time, share their perspectives on what the moral may be. This was possible given that, instead of providing students at the end with the commonly accepted moral, they were first encouraged to determine it based on their point of view. Concerning this, it was observed how students were able to comprehend “The Hare & The Tortoise” by expressing what they elicited from it as the moral. Indeed, at least six students highlighted this feature in the reflection task or in class. For example, Alan expressed,

Aprendí de la fábula “La liebre y la tortuga” que nunca debemos confiarnos ni subestimar a nadie y que el respeto es muy importante. (Alan, Reflexión, 03/06/2022)

From “The Tortoise and The Hare”, I learned that we should never overtrust nor underestimate anyone. I also learned that respect is very important. (Alan, Reflection Task, 03/06/2022)

By the same token, it was registered in the memos how some students were able to identify themselves with the values, situations, and characters portrayed. This opened the space to reflect upon all these elements involved in the fable,

It is quite beautiful to see how students speak their minds concerning what they learned from the fable and connected it with their life experiences.

For instance, David added today that we all deserve to be respected regardless of our physical characteristics and mentioned an anecdote about a friend who was bullied in school just because he had orthodontic treatment. He finished by saying that it was sad. (Memo, 12/03/2022)

Students' Participation in the Activities Supported by Fables

Although, in general terms, students' participation was considered good since the beginning of this process as many fifth-graders usually volunteered or asked for feedback, the activities that revolved around fables still found room to keep improving this aspect among other students. At least three students explicitly stated how much they enjoyed participating in the activities proposed and the impact they had on their learning. An example of this is Stephanie, who expressed this in her reflection task,

Me gustó mucho el juego de preguntas porque puedo saber las palabras, y si no sé alguna pues aprendo cómo se dice cuando se revela la respuesta correcta. También me gustó participar del juego que es organizando las palabras. (Stephanie, Reflexión, 03/06/2022)

I liked to play the multiple-choice game a lot because I could reinforce words that I already know or learn new ones when the right answer is revealed. Also, I enjoyed playing the game in which I had to organize words (scramble). (Stephanie, Reflection Task, 03/06/2022)

This situation was detailed in the memos, where it was registered how difficult it was sometimes to assign turns owing to most students wanting to participate at once,

Students volunteered more often to solve sentence-scramble exercises, answer questions in the multiple-choice game, match vocabulary with images, or simply provide examples on the board or share their own version of the moral. They are more confident now when interacting with the language and want to participate as much as possible. Sometimes it is even complicated to distribute turns fairly across students since most of them raise their hands at the same time. (Memo, 20/05/2022)

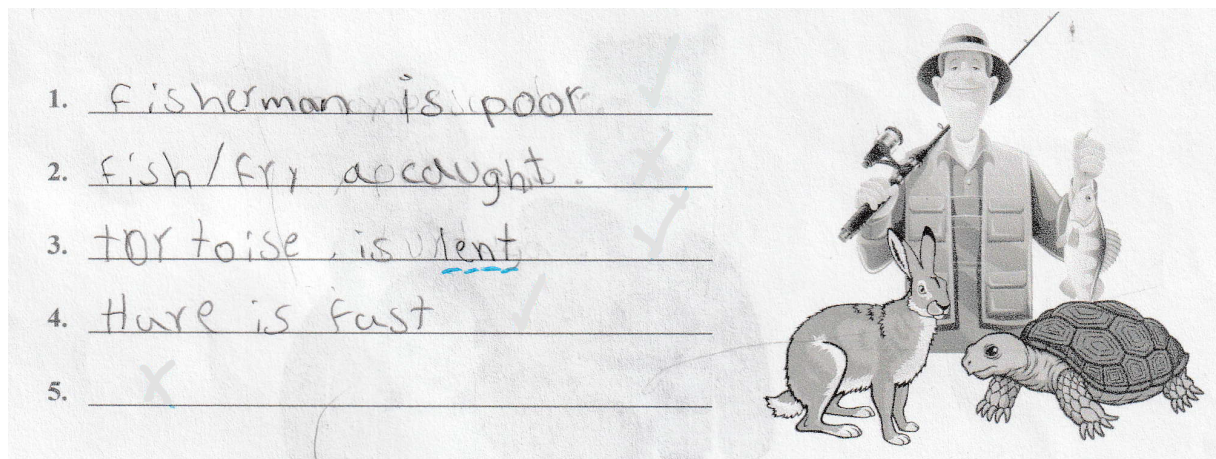
Students' Limitations to Carry Out the Activities

In spite of the myriad benefits that most students experienced, there were some of them, at least two, who struggled to process and remember all the new vocabulary to be used in the activities supported by fables. Therefore, it was difficult for them to carry out the activities successfully. Concerning this situation, Valery commented on the following,

Se me dificultan las fábulas al igual que las oraciones en inglés, trataré de aprenderlas ya que son algo difíciles. A veces no recordaba el vocabulario para describir a los personajes (Valery, Reflexión, 03/06/2022)

Dealing with fables and writing sentences in English was difficult for me. I will try to learn about it since it was kind of complicated. Sometimes I was not able to remember the vocabulary to describe the characters. (Valery, Reflection Task, 03/06/2022)

These difficulties were noticeable in some sentences when developing the second workshop, in which students had to bear in mind the previously explored vocabulary to create descriptions. Here, Valery's work sample displayed mistakes in terms of spelling, punctuation marks omission, or the attempt to use Spanish to compensate for the vocabulary she did not recall.



Discussions and Conclusions

As described before, this study explored the effects of using authentic materials to foster the comprehension of writing skills among EFL students at a public school in Medellín, Colombia. Specifically, this study aimed to explore the effects of carrying out activities supported by fables to help a group of fifth-graders understand the following skills: (a) sentence structure and (b) punctuation marks.

Data analysis shows that (a) the illustrations presented in the fables helped students to keep track of the plot and understand the sentence structure skill, (b) the activities related to these narrative texts also contributed to gaining awareness of the importance of punctuation

marks and their use, and (c) fables served as a rich source of vocabulary for students. Furthermore, students went beyond the linguistic skills that fables tried to support by (d) reflecting upon values; and (e) eliciting their participation in class. Nonetheless, the data analysis also indicates that (f) some students experienced limitations to carry out the activities successfully owing to language learning issues, such as remembering new vocabulary.

These findings are paramount for the following four reasons. First, authentic materials prove to be suitable and effective resources to foster the comprehension of writing skills as long as students, especially those whose English proficiency is low, are provided with appropriate scaffolding to cope with the linguistic demands that any authentic materials entail. Consequently, this aspect should always be contemplated as it substantially determines the success of the learning process when working with authentic texts; otherwise, students may experience frustration and demotivation in the form of negative results or reluctance (Kilickayaas, 2004, as cited in Al Azri & Al-Rashdi, 2014).

Second, students were able to experience a motivating learning process as the activities supported by fables equally promoted their active participation and evoked a reflective attitude upon the values derived from the stories covered in class. This allowed students to connect their lives and personal experiences with the characters, emotions, and situations depicted, which at the same time permitted them to bring the real world into the classroom; one of the non-linguistic benefits that using authentic materials makes feasible (Setyowaty & Sukmawan, 2019).

Third, as a future professional in education, appealing to fables to carry out this study represented an opportunity for self-improvement in terms of creativity, considering that, as opposed to instructional materials, authentic materials do not prevent teachers from designing and creating their own resources to back scaffolding activities (Rao, 2019; Richards, 2001, as cited in Setyowaty & Sukmawan, 2019). Indeed, using fables or any other form of authentic

materials can encourage an innovative spirit which is essentially needed to continue to explore new ways of integrating these resources into our teaching practices.

Fourth, despite the overall success, this study faced certain limitations that had to do with students' difficulties in learning the vocabulary available within the fables. It is then vital to foresee this challenge and look for alternatives to overcome it so that students can get the most out of this experience. For instance, assigning additional homework to students can be an option to keep strengthening vocabulary acquisition outside the classroom. This would require precise instructions, guidance, and the promotion of autonomy strategies. Also, it would be opportune to inquire about what learning styles (visual, kinesthetic, and auditory) work best for them and apply that information to the scaffolding activities. In that sense, students may obtain better results when learning new words as their particular learning preferences are more considered by the educator in charge of the course.

All in all, these findings contributed to expanding what has been previously done by national and international scholars. On the one hand, Colombian authors like Rivera (2011) found that, after using an instructional framework based on writing stages, intermediate-level college students were able to improve their syntax, paragraph structure, and grammar. Separately, Castillo, Insuasty, and Osorio (2017) concluded that the use of touristic maps, posters, and brochures, among other authentic materials, aided intermediate-level college students to enhance their communicative skills. However, none of these studies implemented fables nor dealt with children whose English level was basic, as this particular study did.

On the other hand, from an international perspective, scholars such as Chamba, Reinoso, and Rengifo (2019) showed that pre-intermediate level students improved their coherence, and reduced grammar mistakes as a result of using newspapers, magazine articles, songs, and TV commercials by means of pre-writing and post-writing activities (prediction, brainstorming, recognizing specific vocabulary patterns, etc.). Separately, Masood (2013)

claimed that the use of authentic materials helped students improve their writing skills and enabled them to score higher results in multiple tests. Nevertheless, these studies did not specifically focus on fostering the comprehension of writing skills, such as sentence structure and punctuation marks, and did not use narrative texts like fables to try to achieve the objectives posed.

To keep on building a broader understanding of these topics, it is suggested further research studies that try to prompt different outcomes by changing or including new elements into the equation. First, selecting movie reviews instead of fables to tackle the comprehension of writing skills would be an interesting option. Movie reviews are appealing to students and can offer texts rich in vocabulary, expressions, and registers in which writing skills can be identified and analyzed. Second, it is recommended to explore how the implementation of this same methodology would unfold in a heterogeneous context where students' age and language proficiency differ, given that both aspects may play an important role in developing the project. Finally, it is propounded to investigate what type of results may be obtained if students counted on complementary resources, such as printed copies of the fable and the corresponding voice recordings, to reinforce their linguistic input in and outside the classroom. Accordingly, students may be able to establish a closer relationship between themselves and all the visual and written content.

Reflection

This practicum was a wonderful stage of the major that allowed me to feel for the first time the gratitude, affection, and commitment of numerous young students and, parallel, to observe all the difficult realities that converge within a public school classroom. Certainly, teaching is one of the most rewarding but complex occupations in life. In my case, although I had to deal with some drawbacks, I prefer to weigh the worthwhile side of being an educator. First, having the possibility to help students learn meaningful knowledge and lessons that can

empower them to transform their lives, and, as a result, have a positive impact on their communities, was a beautiful gift that I really appreciated. As possible role models, we need to understand how every little action can have different repercussions, so everything must be done with sensitiveness and responsibility. Second, witnessing reciprocal expressions of kindness, respect, empathy, tolerance, and patience, among other values of utmost importance, was another remarkable highlight of this teaching experience. As professionals who believe in education as a way of social change, we should reinforce these values, especially when working with children, since this will help students grow up as good people before anything else. Finally, allowing students to interact with English in a different way, enjoy the classes, and be able to make significant advances in their learning process was also very gratifying. Indeed, it worked both ways as they also taught me a lot of important stuff that will help me shape my professional and personal life. All in all, after going through this one-year experience, I just can reaffirm that I love what I do.

Concerning research, I encourage pre-service teachers to keep on exploring all the affordances that using authentic materials can bring into education, not only to help students improve their language proficiency but also to keep broadening our own teaching practices. In this sense, be creative, design your own resources, integrate different types of authentic materials that can offer varied input, and use additional strategies, approaches, or methods for further results. The possibilities are countless. Also, take into consideration students' needs and interests, as well as their learning styles. Do not leave out technology, which is another outstanding factor. Moreover, try to include any degree of critical and reflective thinking in your classes since this is a fundamental skill that any student should develop nowadays. Just keep in mind that there is always room for learning, improvement, and innovation in this incredible profession we have chosen.

References

- Adam, S. L., Stan, R. S., Moanga, A. S., Oroian, E., Mihai, M., & Ciubancan, M. (2010). The Role of Authentic Materials in Foreign Language Teaching. *Bulletin UASVM Horticulture*, 67(2), 431-435.
- Al Azri, R. H., & Al-Rashdi, M. H. (2014). The effect of Using Authentic Materials in Teaching. *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research*, 3(10), 249-254.
- Belet Boyacı, Ş. D., & Güner, M. (2018). The Impact of Authentic Material Use on Development of the Reading Comprehension, Writing Skills, and Motivation in Language Course. *International Journal of Instruction*, 11(2), 351-368.
- Beltran, A. & Morales, A. (2006). Developing Listening Through Authentic Material. *HOW 13*, 2006. Bogotá, Colombia. Pages: 101-124
- Burns, A. (2009). Action Research in Second Language Teacher Education. In A. Burns & J.C.
- Castillo Losada, C. A., Insuasty, E. A., & Jaime Osorio, M. F. (2017). The Impact of Authentic Materials and Tasks on Students' Communicative Competence at a Colombian Language School. *PROFILE Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 19 (1), 89-104.
- Chamba, M., Reinoso, M., & Rengifo, E. (2019). Authentic Materials to Foster Writing Skills in College EFL Learners. *Canadian Center of Science and Education: English Language Teaching*; Vol. 12, No. 6; 2019.
- Elsulukiyyah, A. & Aisyah, R. (2019). Teaching Essay Writing Using Authentic Materials to Improve Students' Writing Performance. *J. Eng. Educ. Society*. 4:2.
- Kamariah, A. (2018). Using Video as an Authentic Material in Improving Students' Writing Ability. *International Journal of Humanities and Innovation (IJHI)* Vol. 1 No. 3, 2018 pp. 184-199.
- Masood, A. (2013). Exploiting Authentic Materials for Developing Writing Skills at Secondary Level. *Journal for the Study of English Linguistics*. Vol 1, No. 1.
- Rao, P. (2019). The Effective Use of Authentic Materials in the English Language Classrooms. *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science, and Humanities*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2019, pp. 1-8.
- Rivera, A. (2011). Improving Writing through Stages. *HOW 18*, December 2011, ISSN 0120-5927. Bogotá, Colombia. Pages: 11-23
- Yin, L. (2003). Case study research: Design and Methods.

Appendix A**Universidad de Antioquia**
Formato de consentimiento de los participantes**Investigador principal:**

Andrés Mauricio Vanegas Londoño

Título del proyecto:







Explorando los efectos del uso de materiales auténticos para comprender las habilidades de escritura

1. Mi nombre es Andrés Mauricio Vanegas Londoño y soy estudiante del programa Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras de la Universidad de Antioquia. Actualmente, estoy desarrollando mis prácticas profesionales en tu colegio, y como parte de esta experiencia, debo realizar un proyecto de investigación durante las próximas 10 semanas.
2. Dicho proyecto está enfocado a explorar cómo la implementación de materiales auténticos, tales como las fábulas en inglés, pueden contribuir a mejorar tu comprensión de las habilidades de escritura. Por lo tanto, me gustaría contar con tu participación, la cual es completamente voluntaria y no implica ningún tipo de riesgo físico o psicológico.
3. Al aceptar, se espera de ti únicamente la realización de las actividades propuestas en clase. Adicionalmente, estás autorizando la recolección de datos a través de muestras de trabajo en clase y reflexiones escritas. Toda esta información se mantendrá de manera privada, respetando así el principio de confidencialidad. Si cambias de opinión en medio del proceso, no hay problema, puedes retirarte en cualquier momento sin que esto signifique algún tipo de consecuencia para ti.
4. Si quieres conocer más sobre este proyecto de investigación, o tienes sugerencias o dudas que desees resolver, puedes contactarme a través de mi correo electrónico andresm.vanegas@udea.edu.co. Igualmente, puedes comunicarte con mi profesor y asesor de investigación, Juan David Castaño, al correo david.castano@udea.edu.co.
5. Al firmar, estás confirmando que has leído y entendido el documento, al igual que estás expresando tu consentimiento para participar del proyecto de investigación previamente explicado. Por favor, tómate tu tiempo para revisar cada uno de los puntos en casa en compañía de tus padres o acudientes responsables.

Firma del estudiante

Firma del padre o acudiente responsable

Instrucciones: Describe los personajes principales de la fábula “The Hare y The Tortoise” teniendo en cuenta lo repasado sobre el verbo “To be”. Puedes utilizar el vocabulario sugerido a continuación.

<p>Strong</p> 	<p>Intelligent</p> 	<p>Fast</p> 
<p>Respectful</p> 	<p>Tall</p> 	<p>Egocentric</p> 

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____



Appendix C

Instrucciones: Teniendo en cuenta lo estudiado y las fábulas leídas en clase, ordena los diferentes elementos (sujeto, verbo y complemento) de manera que puedas formar correctamente las oraciones. (15 Puntos)

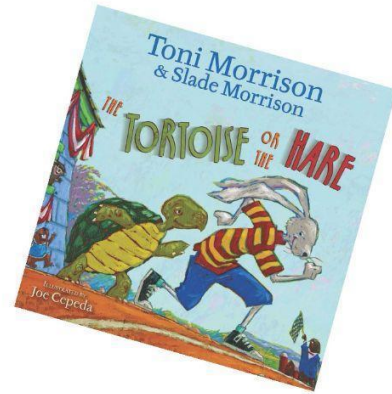
1. the fisherman / a fry / caught

2. the fox, the hare and the tortoise / live / in the forest

3. was / the little fish / in the basket

4. friends / the hare and the tortoise / are

5. sad / the fisherman / and / poor / was



Instrucciones: Describe los personajes principales de las fábulas leídas en clase, teniendo en cuenta la estructura de la oración y el correcto uso de los signos de puntuación. (20 puntos)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

