TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE BENEFITS OF SHORT STORIES IN ORAL COMMUNICATION COURSES
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Abstract: *This article explores the relation between reading short stories and learners' centeredness, self-confidence, and positive attitudes towards reading in EFL oral communication courses. To this end, twenty two students from INA's (Spanish for Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje) Center for Vocational Training in Cuidad Quesada, Costa Rica, participated in a reading project where the communicative activities were set up around the content of short stories and their connection to the participants' own experiences. The study undertook a quantitative approach to research where various instruments were combined to record, report, and analyze the data collected. Findings show the progress attained by the participants in terms of their views, attitudes and habits towards reading in general and the reading of short stories as a result participating in the project. The authors conclude that student centeredness, self-confidence, and positive attitudes towards reading increase by using short stories for oral communication in EFL; all this while a step is taken towards attaining the cultural competences that today's multicultural and multilingual world demands.*

Key words: *STUDENT CENTEREDNESS, SELF-CONFIDENCE, ORAL COMMUNICATION, SHORT STORIES, ATTITUDES, COSTA RICA*

Resumen: *El presente artículo explora la relación existente entre la lectura de historias cortas y el impulso de la enseñanza centrada en el estudiante, la autoconfianza y las actitudes positivas hacia la lectura, en los cursos de comunicación oral dentro del contexto de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). Para ello, participaron veintidós estudiantes del Centro de Formación Profesional de Ciudad Quesada, Costa Rica, del Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje (INA) en un proyecto de lectura, en el cual las actividades comunicativas se realizaron alrededor del contenido de las historias y su conexión con las experiencias de vida de los participantes. El estudio adoptó un paradigma de investigación cuantitativa donde se combinaron varios instrumentos para la recolección, el reporte y el análisis de los resultados. Los hallazgos muestran el progreso logrado por los participantes, en términos de sus opiniones, actitudes y hábitos con respecto a la lectura en general y a la lectura de historias cortas, luego de participar en el proyecto. Los autores concluyen que existe una relación entre la lectura de historias cortas en EFL y el desarrollo de los tres componentes estudiados. Todo ello ocurre mientras se da un paso hacia el logro de las competencias culturales que la sociedad multicultural y multilingüe demanda.*

Palabras clave: *ENSEÑANZA CENTRADA EN EL ESTUDIANTE, AUTOCONFIANZA, COMUNICACIÓN ORAL, HISTORIAS CORTAS, ACTITUDES, COSTA RICA*

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1.   Introduction

One of the most significant current discussions in the universe of language teaching is the need for multicultural communication. Curricular authorities and researchers agree that geographical, political, and ideological distances need to be shortened between cultures so that "the various issues of our diversified society [are solved]" (Youngdal, 2011, p. 1). Arguably, a great volume of literature in the past decades has outlined the need for consensus as to how this goal can be reached. One of the greatest obstacles, however, may be the uncertainty in regards to the best methods to accomplish this important yet dilemmatic objective, as well as the fact that multiculturalism as a pedagogical policy is a relatively new philosophy in the field of applied linguistics. In fact, an increasing number of academics and researchers are today discussing the challenges it poses in education (e.g., King, 2011; Safia, 2011; Stambach, 2011; Youngdal, 2011). Carter and Nunan (2001), for example, asserted that the many questions emerging in this direction are only starting to be answered, and that much remains to be done before research can unveil the ways to make multiculturalism become a success in education.

Besides these already-dramatic challenges, education and research also need to direct efforts towards the development of cultural and linguistic proficiency of learners. In the particular field of applied linguistics, researchers have started to show great interest in the role of literature at both linguistic and cultural levels in second and foreign language teaching-learning. For instance, literature has been said to play a central role as a compensatory device for promoting engagement in the classroom, and as a tool to "extend [students] language use", encourage of tolerance, and to promote creativity (McKay, 1982, pp. 192-193). Despite its many benefits, though, a common dilemma faced by teachers is selecting the right literary genre for the right learner. To make things more complicated, teachers often lack the methodological preparation to make the most out of literature in the teaching-learning experience.

In recent years, nonetheless, there has been an increasing interest in the use of short stories for oral communication. As Parkinson and Thomas explained, "short stories require less contextualization than other types of fiction and are usually less complex linguistically than poetry and some forms of drama" (2000, p. 60), which make them a powerful resource in EFL and ESL teaching-learning. Additionally, short stories present language in a contextualized form, which, according to recent research, can be comprehended effectively through the use of interactive classroom dynamics (Bhuvaneswari & Jacob 2011, p. 156).

This paper explores the extent to which reading short stories can promote learners' centeredness, self-confidence, and positive attitudes towards reading in oral communication courses. Taken together, findings suggest that these variables increase significantly by using short stories within a communicative-based teaching-learning methodology. They also indicate that cooperation, vocabulary, reading rate, and social skills can be enhanced through a teaching model like the one proposed herein. The results of this study assists our understanding of how to use short stories for effective oral communication, as it also sheds light on ways to fortify learners' cultural literacy, a central requirement within the scope of every multicultural communication setting.

2.   Literature Review

As the world struggles for multiculturalism, a number of challenges need to be met, particularly in the direction of international communication. In Costa Rica, for instance, the government recently launched a plan called Costa Rica Multilingüe, in which concern on the need for better linguistic competences in English is strongly emphasized. However, the government has assured that the efforts made during the last two decades have proven "insufficient" and that more efforts are therefore needed in this direction (Presidencia de la República, 2007, p. 2). Ever since the program came into action back in 2008, a great deal of investments have been made, many of them in teacher-training programs aimed at improving Ministry of Public Education (henceforth, MEP) teachers' linguistic competences so better teaching can be guaranteed. Unfortunately, the running of the plan not always reflects a change in teaching practices that can meet its objectives (Gamboa and Sevilla, 2012). Overall, Costa Rica Multilingüe's goal is to:

> Dotar al país de una población con las competencias comunicativas que le permitan un mayor desarrollo personal y profesional, aumentando sus posibilidades de acceso al conocimiento universal y a empleos de mayor remuneración (Costa Rica, Ministerio de Educación Pública (MEP), 2007, p. 3)

This big and somewhat ambitious goal requires that significant changes at the levels of both policy and practice be introduced if these linguistic competencies are to be attained, and that renewed and innovative learning experiences in the classroom shift from a teacher centered to a more learner centered experience.

Communicative Language Teaching (henceforth, CLT), the new and by far most widely accepted teaching paradigm of contemporary pedagogies, stresses the need for a type of learning where language is used as meaningfully and authentically as possible (Brown, 2000; Carter and Nunan, 2001; Nunan, 1989; Richards, 2001); and it often advocates for the need for student centeredness and student's self-confidence, arguably because they play a central role in developing the competencies required for the communicative purposes of today's globalized societies. In essence, student centeredness has to do with ways to make students become the core of learning through communication opportunities that allow them to exploit their linguistic competencies (Sevilla and Méndez, 2012); self-confidence, on the other hand, and for the purposes of this paper, is seen as the state of "being able to communicate in the L2 in an adaptive and efficient manner" (Macintyre, Dornyei, Cloment and Noels, 1998, p.551). These two constructs will be at the core of the teaching paradigm under investigation in this paper.

Along with the theoretical principles of CLT, an element that has recently been granted great importance in second and foreign language teaching-learning is literature. Sandra McKay assured that literature may "extend [students'] language use, along with a number of related benefits such as the encouragement of tolerance, the promotion of creativity, and the increase in reading proficiency" (1982, pp. 192-193). However, there is also a vast body of literature pointing out weaknesses in its correct implementation in the language curriculum. For the most part, traditional methods, especially those dealing with the literal comprehension of the text (i.e., efferent reading, in McKay's words) have long proven ineffective. Therefore and as already suggested above in this paper, a shift in teaching practices must be devised so that language teaching can cater to the multiple and complex learning demands of today.

In the specific case of short stories, they have proven effective in second and foreign language teaching because, besides being less complex than other literary genres, they can be used to expand on other competencies such as the cultural skill or critical thinking, not to mention the fact that they "provide opportunities for focused attention" of learners and they offer an opportunity for language use in a contextualized fashion, which the teacher may take advantage of if s/he comes across the right classroom dynamics (Bhuvaneswari & Jacob, 2011, p. 156). Conclusively, it makes sense to think that if short stories are used with the right methods, they may be used as a platform for language learning through which the gap between the world's multicultural demands and the Costa Rica's government plan on better communicative practices can be shortened.

In an attempt to attend to this gap, this study inquires on the relation between reading short stories and promoting learners' centeredness, self-confidence, and positive attitudes towards reading in oral communication courses. In so doing, the theoretical principles of Schema Theory and the Interactive-compensatory Model of Reading Fluency have been combined, along with empirical experience of the researchers.

Schema Theory is based on the assumption that reading is an interactive process, where the reader transacts with the text by connecting it to his/her personal experiences (Nunan, 1989). The Interactive-compensatory Model, on the other hand is based on the assumption that "incoming textual data is processed (bottom-up)" during the reading process, which activates existing knowledge (top-down) that the reader will use to give the text a "coherent interpretation". This is interactive in that the reader makes sense of the text by "decoding" its linguistic features; then, she/he will relate it to his/her background experience. It is compensatory in that a reader's weak linguistic knowledge will be "compensate[d]" through his/her background knowledge and vice versa. In this sense, what the reader discovers in the text is "as important as what he finds there" (Bock 1989, p. 154). Both Schema Theory and the Interactive-compensatory Model provided important insight into the completion of the paradigm proposed in this paper.

3.   Methodology

This study explores the link between the use of short stories in oral communication courses and the enhancement of student centeredness, self-confidence, and positive attitudes towards reading in EFL contexts. This quantitative study was conducted during the first semester of 2012 at INA, Centro de Formación Profesional Cuidad Quesada, San Carlos, Costa Rica.

To this end, twenty two students aged between 17 and 32 years old taking a conversational English course for customer service were selected. Thirteen were female and nine were male, all of them Costa Rican and with an intermediate proficiency level. The majority of them were full-time students; that is, they had no job or family commitments that would interfere with their academic endeavors, except for three of them who worked part time and were taking the course at the same time they worked too. Lastly, all the participants had completed secondary school.

3.1. Instruments

The instruments for data collection included: a) *an ordinal scale* (see appendix 1) on students' attitudes towards reading in general and towards reading short stories, b) a *classroom dynamics observation checklist* to measure student centeredness (see appendix 2), and c) a *checklist* to measure self-confidence evolution throughout the course (see appendix 3). Additionally, a self-assessment scale was used as support for the implementation of the teaching paradigm proposed. This scale sought to provide the participants with a tool for measuring their classmates' commitment and overall progress as the paradigm evolved. All these instruments derive from theoretical insights discussed in the review of the literature section. Below is a description of each one of them:

3.2. Description of the Instruments

The attitudes scale comprised twenty questions grouped into two parts, and it was administered at the beginning and at the end of the procedure. The first part, *Students' Views about Reading and about Reading Short Stories*, gathered information as to general opinions regarding the opinions and feelings of the students regarding the reading in general and the reading of short stories. It included statements like *reading in English helps be build tolerance and respect towards other cultures and subcultures,* or *reading short stories in English helps build self-confidence while speaking in the classroom*, which the students had rated as*: fully agree, agree, partially agree, disagree,* or *fully disagree*. The second part, *Students' Practices and Attitudes towards Reading and about Reading Short Stories*, inquired on students' practices and attitudes towards reading short stories. It included statements like *I read newspapers, books, short stories, comics, etc. in my spare time,* or *I believe short stories are an important complement in the process of learning English*, which the students rated the same way as they did in the first part.

The classroom dynamics observation checklist comprised a total of fourteen questions that measured the degree of achievement of the classroom dynamics of the model proposed; it was administered three times during the completion of the study. The degree of achievement for such questions was ranked as *yes, no, partly, or NA (non-applicable).* This checklist was divided into three subsections: a) *classroom atmosphere,* which looked into the degree to which the class environment allowed for a friendly and stress-free interaction; b) *students' role*, which sought to gather information as to whether the learners were given a

role where they would interact as the center of learning, and c) *learners' attitudes*, which measured the participants' overall response to the treatment applied.

The self-confidence checklist collected data about the participants' self-confidence levels while conducting oral communication tasks, and it consisted of fourteen statements related to anxiety, stress, nervousness, self-esteem, and other self-confidence-related factors discussed in previous research. The instrument included items such as *I find it intimidating to work in groups, I feel insecure about the ideas I am trying to express, I get nervous when someone asks questions about what I just said,* or *I avoid risk-taking because I fear making mistakes while speaking English.* The participants checked the statements that applied to them when speaking English in the classroom.

Three artifacts were used to facilitate the completion of the model, but not for purposes of data collection. The first one was a *peer-assessment* form that included a series of statements describing the participants' performance during the communicative activities. The students in the group—or in the pairs— rated according to criteria given (*always, almost always, often, sometimes, almost never*). At the bottom of the form, the rater was given space to provide feedback, which fostered linguistic awareness and commitment while carrying out the communicative activities. The second artifact was a *story map* which the participants used for the completion of while-reading stage (see procedure section). Finally, a *critical reflection form* was handed out to the participants for them to write a short paragraph reflecting on the process they had been immersed in.

3.3. The Research Procedure

The procedure in this study comprises three main stages as described below. Each one of them was equally important for the successful completion of the model.

3.3.1. Stage 1: Teaching elements of a short story

This model was not aimed at analyzing or explaining elements in a short story; however, these were taught because they would provide learners with an ampler understanding of the content so that more successful communicative tasks in class would ideally be carried out. These had to be taught and discussed beforehand as a way to equip students for the upcoming while-reading tasks. By conducting in-class short story analyses with the learners, elements such as *setting, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution, characters, point of view, plot, tone and style, conflict, irony, theme, etc.* were made clear

from the onset. This was done during the first two weeks of class. Afterwards, the second stage took place.

3.3.2. Stage 2: The running of the model

The running of the model covered the following ten sessions, and participants had to read one short story per week. Here, a series of steps were put into practice in a sequential fashion, for, according to literature reviewed, they would yield more positive results.

a) Selecting the stories: The short stories were selected based on two criteria: the students' proficiency level and the cultural richness present in the stories; that is, they could not be too difficult to read, and they had to offer enough cultural input for the establishment of connections with current cultural realities.

b) The pre reading stage: The stories were read out of class. However, before students did so, they were asked to do research on the author's biography, the story's sociocultural background, or any related information that would give them contextual input before they read. This background information was brought to class and shared with classmates and the instructor before reading started. When required, the instructor provided contextual and lexical feedback to the students. Thus, they were equipped to go home and read.

c) The while reading stage: The while reading stage comprised the completion of two activities. As students read, they had to search unfamiliar words and create a glossary with definitions of them, and they had to complete a story map provided by the instructor. The story map was intended to help participants gain better understanding of the stories, and it included the identification of elements studied during the first two weeks, as well as a section where they would give their personal criticism about the story.

d) The post reading stage: Once students had read the stories at home, they were ready for communicative activities. The post reading stage constituted the most important element in the procedure of this study. Once the pre and the while reading stages had been completed, communicative tasks were set up around the content of the short stories. Prior to this, the story maps were peer-checked as a way to double-check on content comprehension and to eventually provide a chance for warming up before conducting the communicative tasks. These tasks included solving a hypothetical problem through round tables, debating about the psychology or the ethics of a character in the story, establishing connections between the stories and one's lives or, between the setting of the stories and today's society, making decisions about hypothetical situations set up by the instructor, creating a piece of art to

express personal criticism about the story, and a number of other tasks used to elicit communication among the participants. On average, these tasks lasted from 60 to 70 minutes. Finally, students were given the chance to interact with more than one group as a means to expose them to diverse worldviews and experiences. At the end of the session, students received feedback on their oral performance from one another (using the peer assessment form).

3.3.3. Stage 3: The wrap-up

One week after they completed the ten stories, the participants were asked to write a short critical reflection about the reading process they had partaken in. This was aimed at giving them a chance to reflect on their own progress, as suggested by literature on student centeredness. In such reflection, the participants were asked to point out positive as well as negative aspects of the learning model and, if desired, to provide recommendations for the future implementation of similar projects.

3.4. Analysis strategies

The data gathered were analyzed through tables and graphs accompanied by verbal descriptions of them. The results of the *reading attitudes scale* were analyzed in the form of percentages and expressed in tables for each one of the categories inquired. Likewise, in the *self-confidence checklist*, results were expressed in the form of percentages through two tables in the results and analysis section. Finally, data coming from the *classroom dynamics observation checklist* were analyzed by means of degree of achievement of the three categories inquired (i.e., student centeredness, self-confidence, and attitudes towards reading and the reading of short stories); and they were summarized in a graph displaying the data collected from the three observations carried out.

4. Analysis of the Results

4.1. Reading Attitudes Scale

This section analyzes the results from the ordinal scale on reading attitudes. The findings will be analyzed in light of the two parts of the instruments: *a) students' views about reading and about reading short stories* and *b) students' practices and attitudes towards reading and towards reading short stories*.

Regarding the students' views about reading and about reading short stories, results indicate that, by the end of the treatment, the participants had developed more positive views about the two components. In the case of their views about reading, for instance, while at the beginning only 27, 27% of them fully agreed that reading helped them to improve their oral skills inside and outside the classroom, 90, 90% indicated to believe so by the end of the treatment. Likewise, whereas only 27, 7% of the participants reported to believe that reading in English helped them gain general knowledge and better understanding of other cultures, 81, 81% reported to believe so after partaking in the short stories reading project. For a fuller reference on the evolution of the participants' views about reading in general, table 1 below details the criteria inquired about this through the ordinal scale.

Table 1: Students' General Views about Reading
FA: Fully Agree   **A**: Agree   **PA**: Partially Agree   **D**: Disagree   **FD**: Fully Disagree

CATEGORIES		DESCRIPTOR				
		FA	A	PA	D	FD
1- Reading in English is important while learning a foreign language.	Before	36,36%	36,36%	18,18%	9,09%	0%
	After	81,81%	18,18%	0%	0%	0%
2- Reading in English helps improve my oral communication skills inside and outside the classroom.	Before	27,27%	18,18%	54,54%	0%	0%
	After	90,9%	9,09%	0%	0%	0%
3- Reading in English helps gain general knowledge and a better understanding of other cultures.	Before	27,27%	63,63%	0%	0%	0%
	After	81,81%	9,09%	9,09%	0%	0%
4- Reading in English helps build tolerance and respect towards other cultures and subcultures.	Before	18,18%	45,45%	22,72%	13,63%	0%
	After	31,81%	22,72%	45,45%	0%	0%
5- Reading in English makes one a better critical thinker.	Before	18,18%	27,27%	27,27%	27,27%	0%
	After	36,36%	40,9%	13,63%	9,09%	0%

In the case of the participants' views about short stories, significant improvements were recorded after the treatment took place. For example, while at the beginning only 36, 36% of the participants fully agreed that short stories helped increase vocabulary and grammatical structures, a total of 81, 81% believed so by the end of the model. Along the same lines, whereas only 22, 72% of the participants reported to think that reading short stories allowed

them to gain a better understanding of other cultures, a total of 63, 63% of them reported to believe so after partaking in the reading project. As further reference, table 2 depicts participants' escalations in terms of their views about reading short stories before and after the treatment.

Table 2: Students' General Views about Reading Short Stories
FA: Fully Agree   **A**: Agree   **PA**: Partially Agree   **D**: Disagree   **FD**: Fully Disagree

CATEGORIES		DESCRIPTOR				
		FA	A	PA	D	FD
1- Reading short stories in English helps increase my vocabulary and grammatical structures.	Before	36,36%	63,63%	0%	0%	0%
	After	81,81%	13,64%	4,54%	0%	0%
2- Reading short stories in English helps build self-confidence while speaking in the classroom.	Before	9,09%	36,36%	36,36%	18,18%	0%
	After	54,54%	18,18%	22,72%	4,54%	0%
3- Reading short stories in English is a useful source of vocabulary for oral communication in a foreign language.	Before	22,72%	54,54%	22,72%	4,54%	0%
	After	77,27%	13,63%	9,09%	0%	0%
4- Reading short stories in English allows one to better understand other cultures.	Before	22,72%	54,54%	22,72%	13,63%	0%
	After	63,63%	9,09%	18,18%	9,09%	0%
5- Reading short stories in English helps improve one's reading rate.	Before	45,45%	45,45%	9,09%	0%	0%
	After	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%

The students' practices and attitudes towards reading and towards reading short stories underwent significant improvements as well, but the main escalation can be seen in the area of reading short stories. To illustrate, only 22, 72% of the participants reported to always read stories as part of their learning process before the application of the treatment, but 100% reported to do so at the end of the treatment. Correspondingly, before the treatment only 31, 81% of them indicated to think of short stories as a good discussion source in the English classroom, while 90, 90% believed this to be true after undertaking the treatment. Another escalation that deserves our attention here—despite its numerical percentage not being so high— is the participants' evolution in terms of reading practices out of the English classroom. In point 2 of table 3 below, one can see that 31, 81% of them reported to read short stories out of the classroom as part of their daily lives at the end of the treatment, a significant

progress if one takes into consideration that Costa Rican students who read outside the classroom are probably not many and that the project was a relatively short one. Table 3 shows the numerical results for the students' practices and attitudes towards reading short stories before and after the treatment.

Table 3: Students' Practices and Attitudes towards Reading Short Stories
A: Almost   **AA**: Almost Always   **O**: Often   **S**: Sometime   **N**: Never

CATEGORIES		DESCRIPTOR				
		A	AA	O	S	N
1- I read short stories as part of my learning process.	Before	22,72%	9,09%	0%	13,63%	54,54%
	After	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
2- I read short stories on a regular basis outside the English classroom.	Before	0%	0%	22,72%	9,09%	68,18%
	After	31,81%	13,63%	18,18%	9,09%	27,27%
3- I find short stories to be an important complement in the process learning English.	Before	36,36%	9,09%	9,09%	13,63%	31,81%
	After	63,63%	22,72%	0%	13,63%	0%
4- Short stories are a good source for discussion in the English classroom.	Before	31,81%	22,72%	9,09%	18,18%	18,18%
	After	90,90%	0%	0%	0%	9,09%
5- Short stories should be used more as a way to improve oral communication skills of the students.	Before	36,36%	22,72%	9,09%	22,72%	9,09%
	After	50%	9,09%	27,27%	0%	13,63%

In terms of the participants' practices and attitudes towards reading in general, numerical data gathered suggests positive results too. One of the most significant escalations can be seen in point 2, where only 31, 81% of the students reported to read newspapers, books, short articles, comics, etc. in English during their spare time before participating in the short stories reading project; as opposed to 68, 18% of them who reported to do so at the end of it. In a similar way, before the treatment only 40, 90% of them reported to be able to read and understand materials in English (point 2), while a total of 77, 27% indicated so after partaking in the project. The evolution of the other aspects inquired through the reading attitudes scale can be seen in table 4 below.

Table 4: Students' Practices and Attitudes towards Reading
A: Almost   **AA**: Almost Always   **O**: Often   **S**: Sometime   **N**: Never

CATEGORIES		DESCRIPTOR				
		A	AA	O	S	N
1- I read newspapers, books, short articles, comics, etc. on a regular basis.	Before	86,36%	13,63%	0%	0%	0%
	After	90,90%	9,09%	0%	0%	0%
2- I read newspapers, books, short articles, comics, etc. in English during my spare time.	Before	31,81%	13,63%	9,09%	22,72%	22,72%
	After	68,18%	18,18%	0%	13,63%	0%
3- I am able to read and understand materials in English.	Before	40,90%	18,18%	13,63%	27,27%	0%
	After	77,27%	13,63%	9,09%	0%	0%
4- When I read material in English, I am interested in what I read.	Before	45,45%	22,72%	9,09%	9,09%	9,09%
	After	63,63%	9,09%	18,18%	9,09%	0%
5- In general, I find reading interesting and productive.	Before	45,45%	22,72%	13,63%	18,18%	0%
	After	77,27%	13,63%	9,09%	0%	0%

All in all, results from this instrument suggest that the participants held positive perceptions in terms of their progress in the matter of reading in general and reading short stories after participating in the research project in question. Hence, the following section depicts the results from the self-confidence checklist administered before and after the treatment.

4.2. Self-confidence Checklist

As shown in table 5, the most significant progress was made in risk-taking willingness while communicating (item 10). Before the treatment, 50% of the participants reported to avoid risk-taking in oral activities, while the number declines to 22, 72% after the treatment. A similar improvement is recorded in students' insecurity to express ideas. Twenty seven point twenty seven percent of students reported to feel insecure about the ideas they were trying to communicate, while none of them informed to do so after the treatment was applied. These numbers suggest that, the same as for reading attitudes, participants' self-confidence levels improved after implementing this model. Table 5 below shows all the data recorded through the checklist.

Table 5: Self-confidence Checklist result before and after the treatment

When speaking in class I…

Percentage		
Before	After	
22,72%	4,54%	find it intimidating to work in groups.
36,36%	13,63%	take a generally passive role in group discussions.
31,81%	9,09%	find it hard to express an opinion because I do not have enough information about the topic.
27,27%	0%	feel insecure about the ideas I am trying to express.
36,36%	4,54%	feel anxious about interacting with my classmates in group discussions.
31,81%	13,63%	experience discomfort while expressing ideas in English only.
27,27%	9,09%	believe that my classmates have better English skills than I do.
31,81%	13,63%	worry about being criticized or judged by my classmates.
36,36%	9,09%	feel stressed if being corrected by either my classmates or my teacher.
50%	22,72%	avoid risk-taking because I fear making mistakes while speaking English.
27,27%	0%	get nervous when someone asks questions about what I just said.
36,36%	0%	have feelings of discomfort while asking others questions about what they just said.
27,27%	4,54%	prefer not to express an opinion because I feel I do not have enough vocabulary to do it.
68,18%	18,18%	find it difficult to apply the vocabulary that is read in short stories.

4.3. Classroom Dynamics Observation Form

This section displays the results from the three classroom observations done by one of the researchers to the instructor of the course. Each observation is analyzed in light of the total score that resulted from adding up all the aspects in the instrument.

The total score for the first observation is 71% out of a 100%. Results show that classroom atmosphere is generally appropriate for the learners, while the students' confidence and comfort do not appear as appropriate. The students' role is generally appropriate as well, though some weaknesses were observed in the maximization of student-taking time, the development of leadership, and student-to-student interaction. Learners' attitudes were recorded as the weakest aspect in the observation. By and large, results

display a need for improvement in students' respect, commitment, and interest in the subject matter. Although some weaknesses were recorded in this first observation, the dynamics generally conform to the desired outcomes of the model.

The total score in the second observation is 85% out of 100%; the interaction among students increases significantly. The tasks assigned to the groups allow students to take the central role as the teacher-talking time is minimized. Still, some participants do not show a positive attitude and commitment towards the dynamics. Confidence and comfort while carrying out the tasks seem to be a challenge for the class; consequently, there is an important gap in the classroom atmosphere that needs to be filled.

The last observation shows great improvement in terms of students' attitudes and commitment towards the tasks performed. Significant progress can also be observed between the first and the last observation's score; that is, 71% and 95%, 6, respectively. It should be noted that the classroom atmosphere was also enhanced, probably due to the improvement in attitudes and commitment. Lastly, a high degree of confidence was not fully accomplished. Nonetheless, this may have occurred because the participants' language command was not fully developed as to allow full involvement in the speaking tasks. Graph 1 below summarizes the data obtained through the three observations.

Graph 1: Results from Classroom Observation Checklist
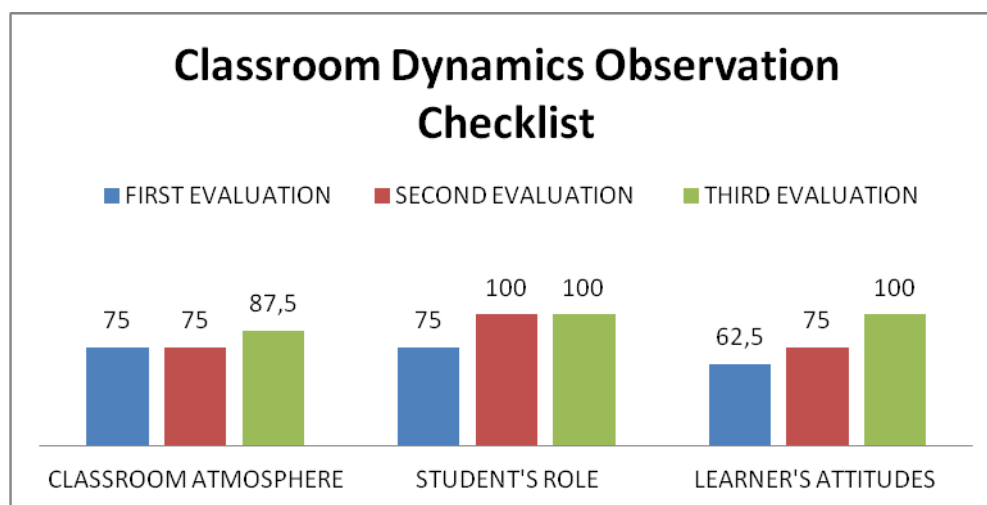
5.   Discussion and Conclusions

This quantitative study looked into the relation between reading short stories and the promotion of students' centeredness, self-confidence, and positive attitudes towards reading in English in oral communication courses. Findings show that, by using short stories as a platform for learning, these three elements can be enhanced significantly. In the case of student-centeredness, it can be achieved by providing students with enough opportunities for authentic communication, as proposed by current theory on second and foreign language learning. Findings also indicate that learners' self-confidence can be improved by exposing them to interactive dynamics such as debates, round tables, and group discussions around the content of the short stories studied. Likewise, they show that positive attitudes towards reading can be fostered by allowing learners to bring their own experiences into the classroom. All this was achieved as the result of combining theoretical principles—in this case, the Compensatory Model and Schema Theory— that allowed for communicative learning scenarios during the implementation of this model.

There are, however, some limitations that teachers and researchers in this field of study must be aware of. First, the model's success depends, to a large extent, on the teacher's commitment to guiding the completion of the tasks. It also depends on the teacher's knowledge of literature and, more specifically, knowledge of short stories. Second, a careful selection of the texts needs to be done in order to achieve positive results for, as stated in the method section, it is crucial that the lexical complexity of the stories match the students' proficiency level. Another limitation is the lack of reading habits on the part of students. If students are not used to reading on a regular basis, an extra challenge will need to be met on the part of the instructor. Lastly, a high level of cultural literacy is needed on the part of the instructor if cultural competences are to be enhanced. Despite these limitations, improvement can be done if the teacher is resourceful enough and considers potential obstacles beforehand.

Upon completion of this research, the researchers suggest that future research be oriented in three directions. First, a similar study could be run by integrating different literature genres (i.e., poetry, drama, short stories, etc.) into a model like the one proposed herein. This would provide insights on the appropriateness of different literature genres in EFL teaching, as it would inspire replication that confirms the feasibility of the model. Second, a correlational study can be conducted so that the link between reading short stories and the promotion of critical thinking skills is determined. Finally, research should look into the possible link

between short stories and the development of cultural awareness and competence in the EFL classroom.

While the findings of this study do not yield conclusive results as to the benefits of short stories for every oral communication course in EFL, they do offer an insight of why and how to use short stories beyond the conventional language-input-development model. Future research in this area of applied linguistics should help teachers, researchers and curricular planners arrive at a fuller understanding of the issue so that the communication challenges posed by today's multicultural and multilingual world can be met.

6.   References

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7. Appendices

APPENDIX A: ATTITUDE SCALE

Part A: Students' Views about Reading and about Reading Short Stories:

Instructions: tick (✓) the box that best applies to you according to: a) your general views about reading in English and b) your views about reading short stories in English. Below are the abbreviations for your performance descriptors.

FA: Fully Agree   **A**: Agree   **PA**: Partially Agree   **D**: Disagree   **FD**: Fully Disagree

CATEGORIES	DESCRIPTOR				
	FA	**A**	**PA**	**D**	**FD**
A. Students' General Views about Reading					
1- Reading in English is important while learning a foreign language.					
2- Reading in English helps improve my oral communication skills inside and outside the classroom.					
3- Reading in English helps gain general knowledge and a better understanding of other cultures.					
4- Reading in English helps build tolerance and respect towards other cultures and subcultures.					
5- Reading in English makes one a better critical thinker.					
B. Students' Views about Reading Short Stories					
1- Reading short stories in English helps increase my vocabulary and grammatical structures.					
2- Reading short stories in English helps build self-confidence while speaking in the classroom.					
3- Reading short stories in English is a useful source of vocabulary for oral communication in a foreign language.					
4- Reading short stories in English allows one to better understand other cultures.					
5- Reading short stories in English helps improve one's reading rate.					

Part B: Students' Practices and Attitudes towards Reading and towards Reading Short Stories:

Instructions: tick (✓) the box that best applies to you according to: a) your practices/attitudes towards reading in English and b) your practices/attitudes towards reading short stories in English. Below are the abbreviations for your performance descriptors.

A: Always   **AA**: Almost Always   **O**: Often   **S**: Seldom   **N**: Never

CATEGORIES	DESCRIPTOR				
	A	**AA**	**O**	**S**	**N**
A. Students' Practices and Attitudes towards Reading					
1- I read newspapers, books, short articles, comics, etc. on a regular basis.					
2- I read newspapers, books, short articles, comics, etc. in English during my spare time.					
3- I am able to read and understand materials in English.					
4- When I read material in English, I am interested in what I read.					
5- In general, I find reading interesting and productive.					
B. Students' Practices and Attitudes about Reading Short Stories					
1- I read short stories as part of my learning process.					
2- I read short stories on a regular basis outside the English classroom.					
3- I find short stories to be an important complement in the process learning English.					
4- Stories are a good source for discussion in the English classroom.					
5- Short stories should be used more as a way to improve oral communication skills of the students.					

APPENDIX B: CLASSROOM DYNAMICS OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Observation Nº_____/   Date: _____

CRITERIA	DEGREE OF ACHIEVEMENT			
	YES	NO	PARTLY	N/A
A. CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE				
1. Does the class exhibit a friendly and comfortable atmosphere for learners to participate naturally throughout the tasks?				
2. Do learners show a high level of comfort and ease while carrying out the tasks?				
3. Is the class planned in a way that it allows for an appropriate development of the tasks?				
4. Does the sitting arrangement of the class favor effective oral communication skills?				
B. STUDENTS' ROLE				
1. Are the students the primary discussion leaders?				
2. Do students work in pairs or groups?				
3. Is the student-talking time sufficient enough as to allow interactive communication?				
4. Are students given the opportunity to assess their own progress?				
5. Do activities and classroom dynamics promote cooperation?				
6. Is there a predominantly interactive atmosphere during in the classroom?				
C. LEARNERS' ATTITUDES				
1. Do students show a positive attitude while carrying out the tasks?				
2. Is there a respectful mood among the participants throughout the tasks?				
3. Do learners show commitment towards keeping discussions going and asking/answering questions?				
4. Do learners appear interested in the topics being discussed?				

GENERAL CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

A. CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE:

_____
_____

B. LEARNERS' ROLE:

_____
_____

C. LEARNERS' ATTITUDES:

_____
_____

APPENDIX C: SELF-CONFIDENCE CHECKLIST

Objective: to collect information about to the students' self-confidence levels while conducting oral communication tasks.

Instructions: Read the statements below. Tick (✓) the boxes that are true for you.

When speaking in class, I …

	find it intimidating to work in groups.
	take a generally passive role in group discussions.
	find it hard to express an opinion because I do not have enough information about the topic.
	feel insecure about the ideas I am trying to express.
	feel anxious about interacting with my classmates in group discussions.
	experience discomfort while expressing ideas in English only.
	believe that my classmates have better English skills than I do.
	worry about being criticized or judged by my classmates.
	feel stressed if being corrected by either my classmates or my teacher.
	avoid risk-taking because I fear making mistakes while speaking English.
	get nervous when someone asks questions about what I just said.
	have feelings of discomfort while asking others questions about what they just said.
	prefer not to express an opinion because I feel I do not have enough vocabulary to do it.
	find it difficult to apply the vocabulary that is read in short stories.