

Picture Books with Social Content: Enhancing Critical Reading in EFL.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research aims to analyze the impact of using the natural approach and critical literacy along with picture books with social content in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes to improve reading comprehension. The study was conducted with tenth-grade students at Liceo Femenino Mercedes Nariño school in Bogotá. It was observed that students had low level of reading comprehension in English due to limited exposure to reading in their EFL classes. This research project used a qualitative methodology, including field notes, interviews, and surveys for data collection. The findings suggest that the combination of picture books with social content, the natural approach, and critical literacy can enhance English reading comprehension and promote critical literacy skills among EFL students.

**Key words:** Natural approach, critical literacy, reading in EFL, reading comprehension, picture books with social content.

## **RESUMEN**

Esta investigación tiene como objetivo analizar el impacto del uso del enfoque natural y la alfabetización crítica junto con libros ilustrados con contenido social en las clases de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) para mejorar la comprensión lectora. El estudio fue realizado con estudiantes de décimo grado del colegio Liceo Femenino Mercedes Nariño en Bogotá. Se observó que las estudiantes tenían un bajo nivel de comprensión lectora en inglés debido a la limitada exposición a la lectura en sus clases de inglés como lengua extranjera. Este proyecto de investigación utilizó una metodología cualitativa, incluyendo notas de campo, entrevistas y encuestas para la recolección de datos. Los hallazgos sugieren que la combinación de libros ilustrados con contenido social, el enfoque natural y la alfabetización

critica pueden mejorar la comprensión lectora en inglés y promover habilidades de alfabetización crítica entre los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera.

**Palabras clave:** Enfoque Natural, Alfabetización crítica, lectura en inglés como lengua extranjera, Comprensión lectora, libros ilustrados con contenido social.

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# CHAPTER I

## THE PROBLEM

### Local Context

The educational institution where this research was conducted is Liceo Femenino Mercedes Nariño, located in locality 18, Rafael Uribe Uribe, in the southern part of the San José neighborhood in the city of Bogotá, Colombia. Restrepo neighborhood is close to the school, and it is an area in the center and southeast of the city with multiple accesses by public transport. In addition, “the geographical space in which it is located is recognized in the city as a traditional sector of leather and footwear” (Forero, 2014, p.112). It has a great commercial appeal for its shoe stores that have been expanding throughout the neighborhood, moreover, other places can be found for leisure such as billiards, drinking places and nightclubs.

In Colombia, there is a socioeconomic stratification that, according to DANE, categorizes residential properties into strata; it is the grouping of housing in 6 strata, with 1 being the lowest and 6 being the highest. With the above, in the locality of Rafael Uribe Uribe, strata 1, 2 and 3 are located, but the one that stands out the most is stratum 2. In other words, the selected population for this research belongs to a low stratum according to the socio-economic classifications given above.

At this point it is important to talk about insecurity, an issue that covers Bogota, indeed, Colombia. According to the report on quality of life in Bogota (2021), the perception of insecurity grows since 88% of citizens consider that insecurity in the city increased in 2021. Thus, in this very commercial neighborhood there has been an increase in cases of theft of people and vehicles, as well as illicit activities such as car junkyards. Insecurity is a very common issue among the educational community since many have suffered muggings near

the school.

### **Institutional Context**

The school has two locations (headquarters), the main one is on Caracas Avenue and the other is a few blocks away in the neighborhood. In this area there is little accompaniment from the authorities, therefore, neither the students nor the teachers feel safe when they leave the institution. Due to the lack of rooms for the part-time programs, sometimes the girls must move from one headquarters to another, exposing themselves to the danger of a robbery. For the safety of the girls, the institution does not let them leave the school without a teacher accompanying them.

There is also a problem with litter in the vicinity of the school. There is a tendency for people to dispose of trash here, resulting in an accumulation of garbage. This not only negatively impacts the aesthetics of the institution, but also creates a bad smell that spreads around the surrounding areas, causing discomfort to our students, teachers and workers. Furthermore, another aspect to consider is the disruptive noise generated by the high vehicular traffic, since the school is close to two large avenues. This noise pollution mainly affects those who are near the avenue, such as the guards and the surrounding classrooms.

The Liceo Femenino Mercedes Nariño school is a public institution that has initial, basic, and secondary education in its four school shifts: morning, afternoon, night, and Saturday. It is also the first school in Bogotá with a program only for the victims of the armed conflict, honoring its slogan: Critical, reflective, autonomous, transformative of context for the coexistence. The PEI of the school has this approach in order the girls have a critical view of their context as Colombians, and it is expected that they continue with that view, since "Being a *liceista* is a Lifestyle" (PEI, 2022).

The school's mission is to promote the comprehensive education of its students by promoting the values of respect, honesty, identity, solidarity, and autonomy, which favor the



construction of their life project, aimed at transforming the contexts in which they interact, guaranteeing live/coexist in the enjoyment of a full and happy life to inhabit the present with dignity (PEI, 2022). The institution's mission is to cover the needs of its population, and within the needs is that they can develop their life project.

Lastly, the school's vision is that, in the year 2025, the Liceo Femenino Mercedes Nariño School will be recognized globally for the quality of its service, the excellence of its graduates in the domain of knowledge necessary for the knowledge society and the coexistence, command of foreign languages, English and French, basic sciences, the arts, and information and communication technologies as builders of a society that respects oneself and the other (PEI, 2022). As can be seen, the school has a great emphasis on languages, which with the part-time programs can verify its great effort to ensure that this vision is fulfilled.

### **Population**

This project was developed in "*contra jornada*", this means that students attend at a different time than their normal classes at school. This Project is required for tenth and eleventh grade students. They can choose between different approaches, and they decided on languages which means they are going to see extra hours of English and French.

In the morning the girls study their subjects in the regular classroom and on Wednesday afternoons they must stay in *contra jornada* to study English and French from 1pm to 6pm. The result of this situation is that students arrive at their English class fatigued. Consequently, the teacher tries to offer somewhat dynamic sessions, recognizing the extensive morning study and the additional study commitments made in the afternoons.

The girls in the last grades of the school (10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>) are in campus B of the institution, which is a few blocks from the main campus. This building has five floors, on each floor there are an average of three classrooms, it does not have green areas, and for

security reasons girls are not allowed to leave the building during break time. Therefore, the girls are around 10 hours in a building when they have *contra jornada*. The room where they take classes is located on the second floor of the building. This classroom is not suitable for receiving language classes since it does not have any resources except for a traditional board.

The girls sit around the room in what looks like a horseshoe. There are an average of 25 girls, 50% of the girls are in room 1005 of the regular classroom, and the other percentage is between 1007, 1004, 1001, 1006 and 1003. This causes all the girls who are in room 1005 to have more unity than the other girls. Therefore, the classroom is divided by the rooms where the students are. The girls are constantly using their cell phones, and many times they use google translator to carry out the activities proposed by the headteacher.

The teacher speaks to them 90% in English and when he sees that the girls no longer understand him, he uses Spanish. The classes have a focus on communication, on the use of the language in a daily environment, therefore, the teacher tries to promote and encourage participation in class, however, the same girls always participate.

The level that the students should have in tenth grade according to the *Estandares basicos de aprendizaje* (2020) is B1, however, in an interview with the teacher and in the observations that were made, an A1 level is evidenced. For this reason, the teacher had to start the classes as a course that starts from scratch.

### **Statement of the Problem.**

Concerning the data extracted during the diagnostic phase, which required the implementation and triangulation of a students' questionnaire (see annex 2), a diagnostic test align with *Estandares Básicos de Aprendizaje* (see annex 3), and a set of field notes derived from the observations documented by the pre-service teacher throughout the semester 2023-1 (See annex 4), it was determined that tenth-grade students were facing two essential difficulties when it came to language skills development: reading in English as a foreign

language on one hand, and comprehension skills on the other. Given students' lack of prior exposure to reading in English, the fundamental role of fostering reading skills in this foreign language context becomes evident. Developing reading proficiency in English not only improves linguistic skills but also enables students to analyze, interpret and interact with a broader range of information and ideas.

According to the *Estandares Básicos de Aprendizaje* (2020) for this level, students are expected to comprehend narrative and descriptive texts in English from various sources on familiar topics. These standards also encompass the ability to understand texts with short and simple arguments. In summary, students are anticipated to be proficient in English reading comprehension, in accordance with the established standards (MEN, 2020).

However, the diagnostic results revealed a contrasting scenario. During the observation period, I conducted a diagnostic assessment that included a survey (see Annex 2) and a reading test (see Annex 3) following the *Estandares Básicos de aprendizaje* (2020). The objective was to acquire a better understanding of how they approach reading comprehension in English as a foreign language and their connection to the language.

These considerations led me to conduct an initial reading comprehension diagnosis based on an advanced A2 level, in line with *Estandares Básicos de aprendizaje* (2020), which state: "I read and understand narrative and descriptive texts or narratives and descriptions from different sources on topics that are familiar to me, and I understand texts with short and simple arguments." The findings were lower than expected.

In addition, in a conversation with the teacher, the need for students to study Anglophone literature in 10th and 11th grades was emphasized, a level for which they are unprepared. According to the *Estandares Básicos de Aprendizaje* of the MEN, students are expected to have a pre-intermediate B1 level by the 9th grade, however, the gathered information unveil that they are in A1 level.

The diagnostic revealed that reading is not being implemented in English classes. Additionally, it was possible to observe that students who have read in English exhibit a higher level of reading comprehension in English than those who have not. The diagnostic results indicated that, while students face challenges in all skills, reading comprehension is the most problematic. This is primarily due to their specific requirements for the 11th-grade Anglophone literature course, their performance in the ICFES exam, and any university admission exams they may choose to take.

### **Research Question.**

What is the impact of a set of activities based on picture books with social content and designed under the principles of the Natural Approach to improve critical reading comprehension in a group of tenth-graders at Liceo Femenino Mercedes Nariño school?

### **Research Objectives.**

#### *General*

To analyze the impact of a set of activities based on picture books with social content and designed under the principles of the Natural Approach to improve critical reading comprehension in a group of tenth-graders at Liceo Femenino Mercedes Nariño school.

#### *Specific*

1. To explore the roles of picture books with social content in the development of reading comprehension in EFL following the principles of the natural approach.
2. To identify students' responses to the use of picture books with social content to promote critical reading in EFL.

### **Rationale of the Study**

Reading comprehension holds a supreme importance in the academic and professional lives of students. Standardized tests, such as the ICFES exam, university admission assessments, and language proficiency tests, consistently include reading comprehension as a

fundamental component. Proficiency in this skill is indispensable for success in these evaluations and, by extension, for future academic and career prospects. Therefore, it is essential to nurture and elevate the reading skills of students, thereby equipping them for the challenges they will find on their educational journey.

In addition, according to a statistical analysis report by *Universidad Javeriana* and *laboratorio de la economía de educación* (2021), it is concluded that improving reading skills are necessary in Colombia. On one hand, it would assist students in enhancing their ability to comprehend texts in various knowledge domains, potentially leading to improved academic performance and a reduction in school dropout rates. On the other hand, it would contribute to the expansion of their communicative, linguistic, analytical, and critical capabilities, among others. These skills are fundamental and essential for addressing everyday situations, affording them better preparation for both personal and professional life (Informe Análisis Estadístico LEE No. 031, 2021).

The proposed strategy of using picture books with social content offers a distinctive and promising alternative. This strategy has a dual purpose: first, to improve language skills and, second, to encourage critical literacy. Picture books have long been an essential part of early childhood education in English-speaking countries. Its content, characterized by simple but valuable vocabulary and stories that revolve around social issues, provides a unique experience. Students not only learn to read in English but also learn to decipher the world through these narratives.

By exploring the fusion of the natural approach and critical literacy in conjunction with the reading of picture books with social content, this research embarks on a journey to enhance reading comprehension. The primary aim of this study is to attempt to develop the essential competencies required for reading skills and to develop critical perspectives in students. As students advance in their academic journey, the goal is to foster a diverse

spectrum of reading comprehension abilities, encompassing literal, inferential, and critical levels. In pursuing this objective, the research aims to equip students with the capacity to read, comprehend, and decipher the world they inhabit, contributing to a richer educational experience and a brighter future.

## CHAPTER II

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter you will find the theoretical constructs that support this research. First, a search of previous research related to reading comprehension in a foreign language was carried out, considering the difficulties and the strategies that have been implemented to address reading comprehension. For this, international, and local references were considered. Then, the definition of the key constructs which are: Natural approach, Critical literacy, Reading comprehension, Reading in EFL, Picture books with social content, are presented.

#### **State of Arts**

This initial review highlights the absence of reading in the classroom, resulting in students having very poor reading comprehension skills. This is an international thesis titled "*Los cuentos de hadas como recurso para el desarrollo de la comprensión lectora en el idioma inglés*" by Luis Eduardo Aguirre (2019) from the Universidad Central of Ecuador. The objective of his research was to determine the use of fairy tales as a resource for reading comprehension of the English language in the seventh-grade students of basic education of the Paulo Sexto Private Educational in the period 2018-2019. This research used the quantitative-qualitative method with a descriptive and experimental depth level of documentary and field type. The population was investigated through a teacher survey (156 seventh grade students). The author concludes that there is a lack of reading in the English

language by students since teachers do not use resources that arouse the interest of students. Consequently, it was determined that using fairy tales as a resource is beneficial for enhancing reading comprehension processes in English.

The contribution of this research is that it shows how necessary it is to find strategies to bring students closer to reading according to their context. If this can be accomplished, it will lead to an enhancement in reading comprehension, along with improvements in other language acquisition skills. Not only will reading comprehension improve in English, but also in their mother tongue. The strategy that will be used in this study aims to foster an understanding of both the literal text and the broader societal and cultural context within which it is situated. In essence, students are guided to cultivate critical thinking skills through picture books as a strategy. This research employs critical literacy along with picture books for children. The results of this study have the potential to inform us about the power of understanding not only words but also images through reading.

The second study considered relevant for the current proposal is titled “Critical Literacy: Using Picture Books to Read the World” by Birner and Bromley (2015) who emphasizes the valuable contribution of picture books in developing critical literacy skills, particularly for young learners who are naturally drawn to visual imagery. The integration of images and text in picture books provides an excellent opportunity for meaningful English language learning, enhancing various language skills while fostering critical reflection. They chose some picture books for kids that are in kindergarten. While they learn how to read words, they are also learning how to read the world. They decided to use picture books because at this moment the world is “saturated not only with print, but also with visual modes of communication.” Hence, the utilization of picture books serves as the initial step for these students to progress further in reading, with the support of critical literacy.

This research has motivated me to explore picture books that can be beneficial in the Colombian context. Starting with picture books intended for children can be enriching. This approach allows students to enhance their vocabulary and overall English language skills while nurturing their critical thinking abilities.

The following work by Arias (2018) explores new strategies to encourage reading in young learners in a Colombian context. This is entitled “Reading comprehension through visualization and reading strategies on short stories.” from the Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas. It also contributes to us since it is a recent investigation of reading comprehension in EFL. The objective was to explain the effects generated when involving students in visualization and reading strategies to contribute to reading comprehension skills (Arias, 2018). This action research was carried out with fifth grade students, and the instruments used were teachers` journals, questionnaires, and students' artifacts. The strategies they used were visualization, bottom up and top down, and with them an improvement was evidenced in the three levels of reading comprehension (literal, inferential and critical). The conclusion they reach is that reading comprehension improves when the teacher uses the correct strategies to motivate and to keep students' attention in a story.

A successful approach to reading can foster a genuine interest in students to continue reading. Consequently, it is essential to avoid using the same strategy for all picture books, as it may lead to monotony and, subsequently, disinterest. Therefore, it is crucial to explore various strategies to facilitate classroom reading.

Another work from the previous university that really enriched the current project is “Critical Literacy Development with the use of Narratives”, written by Rodríguez & Torres (2018) from Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas. The aim of this research was to trace the development of Critical Literacy among basic-level English students in the second semester of the Bachelor’s in Arts program at the same university, through the use of



narratives. In order to increase participation, the project included units on socially relevant topics such as feminism, environment, and social justice. This helped students to connect with the content and their social contexts. As a result, students were able to recognize statements in the narratives and relate them to their real-life situations, due to their analytical, reflective, and problem-solving skills. This research is essential because it demonstrates the significance of using narratives to enable students to become critical readers and responsible members of society.

This study is closely related to the research being conducted here, as it provides insight into the potential impact of using the narrative of this project, which revolves around picture books. To explore effective tools for promoting reading in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), we discovered a research study from Universidad Pedagógica Nacional.

The following research is “Literacy rich environments: a tool to foster reading comprehension in EFL.” By Castaño (2016). This action-research project was developed with 34 first grade students. The instruments used for data collection were field diaries, surveys, recordings, and artifacts. The activities that were used were short stories in English supported by images, audios, and the mother tongue was used to learn the foreign language. The research concludes that learning environments directly influence the teaching and learning processes. And, that there should be a large number of resources for students to interact with the foreign language to improve reading comprehension.

The findings of these research studies are pertinent to my research project as they converge on the common understanding that reading pleasure is contingent on the teacher providing the necessary tools. These texts collectively underscore the crucial role of the teacher as a facilitator and guide in directing students towards knowledge acquisition. Consequently, teachers must adopt effective strategies to help students develop their language skills when learning a new language.

Reading in a foreign language is forgotten in the classroom, teachers do not have the resources to bring students closer to reading in English as a foreign language. In addition, the teachers know that they cannot give books in English to their students because if they do not understand it, it will cause them frustration. That is why I propose a synergy between the natural approach and critical literacy. The natural approach facilitates students' intuitive and comprehensive understanding of books, making them more accessible. In conjunction with critical literacy, students can analyze and interpret texts within the broader context of their social, cultural, and political significance, thus enhancing their reading experience.

### **Theoretical Framework.**

#### **Natural Approach.**

The theoretical framework of this research is grounded in the Natural Approach in a synergy with the Critical Literacy and its possible relevance in the context of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Colombia. The Natural Approach, developed by Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell in 1983 in their book “the natural approach: language acquisition in the classroom”, is known for its emphasis on second language acquisition through exposure to comprehensible input. While this approach was originally designed for second language acquisition, it holds significance within the Colombian context of teaching English as a foreign language.

The Natural Approach stands in contrast to traditional language learning methods such as grammar-based and audio-lingual approaches, which prioritize language learning but often neglect language acquisition. Krashen and Terrell (1983) emphasize this distinction by highlighting the importance of understanding that language learning differs from language acquisition. Language learning is associated with acquiring conscious knowledge about grammar and rules. In contrast, language acquisition occurs naturally, similar to the way

individuals acquire their first language. Krashen and Terrell (1983) argued that children acquire their first language naturally, and this process is likely similar for acquiring second languages.

The fundamental hypothesis of the Natural Approach suggests that language acquisition progresses through a single mechanism: understanding messages. In other words, language is acquired when learners are exposed to comprehensible input, where they understand what they hear or read in the target language. This fundamental premise drives the progression of language acquisition, as students are motivated to continue their linguistic journey when they understand the content. The fundamental principle of the Natural Approach is that understanding precedes production, it states that listening or reading comprehension precedes the ability to speak or write. Consequently, language teachers should focus on ensuring that students understand the messages communicated to them, emphasizing the use of the target language, discussing topics of interest to students and facilitating understanding at all times (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

The application of the Natural Approach in this research seeks to create an effective pathway to foster reading in a foreign language (English). By exposing students to comprehensible input, they earn a deeper understanding of English, thus enhancing their motivation to continue their language studies. This approach offers a different perspective on language instruction, considering the context of Colombia where English is not a second language but rather a foreign language. Even though it may not lead to language acquisition in the traditional sense, it is proposed that students can acquire language knowledge naturally using the effective filter and comprehensible input, moving beyond the rules of learning towards a more intuitive and organic language development process.

As stated previously, this research is grounded in the Natural Approach and Critical Literacy, supporting the enhancement of reading comprehension among tenth-grade students

at Liceo Femenino Mercedes Nariño. The Natural Approach will be comprehensively applied throughout the pre-reading, reading, and post-reading stages, using picture books that align with the principles of comprehensible input. The teacher will predominantly use English in an understandable way to students. This approach fosters natural language acquisition, emphasizing first on listening and reading (input) and then on writing and oral expression activities (output). It guides every stage of the implementation, from material selection to specific activity design. We will now explore the concept of “comprehensible input”, vital for improving foreign language reading proficiency.

**Comprehensible Input.** Comprehensible input is the second language acquisition (ASL) hypothesis of Stephen Krashen and his researchers that attempts to answer the question, how do we acquire language? “This hypothesis simply states that we acquire (not learn) language by understanding information that is slightly beyond our current level of (acquired) proficiency (Krashen & Terrel, 1983, p.32). We aim to emphasize the importance of students’ comprehension, because it is the key to achieve acquisition. "The input hypothesis states that for acquirers to advance to the next stages in target language acquisition, they must understand the input language that includes a structure that is part of the next stage." (Krashen & Terrel, 1983, p.32). Therefore, for the message to be understood, teachers only need to ensure that students comprehend what is spoken or written (Krashen & Terrel, 1983).

The formula that Krashen proposes for this hypothesis is “ $I + 1$ ”. Where “I” is the previous knowledge of the student and “1” is the acquisition of a new language, for example, new vocabulary. With this, Krashen expresses the idea of structures above the current level of competence, the person receives the input in order to advance in language development (Corrales, 2009). This comprehensible Input hypothesis is often compared to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory, since this zone is the area between an

individual's knowledge and what they can learn with support from their environment or collaboration with peers. Therefore, for language teachers it is essential to know the current level of their students and give them an understandable input, but always above their level in order to develop their second language (Corrales, 2009), however, in this context not second but foreign language.

In our research, the concept of comprehensible input will play a fundamental role. As mentioned above, it will be evident in the selection of picture books that are slightly more advanced than the students' current level, in the activities designed for pre-reading, reading and post-reading, and also in the teacher's speech, since it will be about making it easy for students to understand. These strategies will collectively form a solid framework for effective language acquisition among the students.

In the next paragraph critical literacy will be discussed and how these two approaches can work together to complement each other.

### **Critical Literacy**

The theory of critical literacy was born with Paulo Freire in his work "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (1970) where he opposed the traditional education that has been taking place for many years in the world. This theory defines literacy not simply as the ability to read and write but as something that goes beyond that, "Critical literacy practices involve a critical reading of social constructions present in the world" (Birner & Bromley, 2015, p.133).

In the Colombian context of this study, it is crucial to cultivate a conscious awareness in our students about the world they inhabit. This aligns with Dewey's proposals, recognizing that the issues addressed in the world are relevant to us as its inhabitants. Therefore, critical literacy becomes a pedagogy for life "Critical literacy should not be a topic to be covered or a unit to be studied. Instead, it should be looked on as a lens, frame, or perspective for teaching throughout the day, across the curriculum, and perhaps beyond" (Vásquez, 2007, p. 7). This

theory should not simply be a subject that is studied and then it goes on to another topic, this should be a lens through which we see all the topics grounded in our reality, in this case, as Colombians.

The critical literacy seeks to problematize the social and political acts of our environment, to question the beliefs built by society, and all this can be achieved through language, said in another way by Birner and Bromley (2015) "At the heart of all these skills is language, and Freire argued that language is a tool that can be used to empower learners" (p.134).

Considering the study population, employing this theory becomes pertinent. Beyond acquiring a foreign language, students should be encouraged to question the world they inhabit. Understanding that knowledge is socially constructed, they can engage with various issues in their environment, utilizing appropriate picture books at their English proficiency level.

This study aims to demonstrate the need to integrate language learning with critical reflection, emphasizing that critical literacy must permeate all subjects. We have intentionally chosen this synergy between the two approaches to complement each other in the study: critical literacy promotes critical reflection, while the natural approach motivates students to engage in a foreign language reading. This approach will be present in all our classes in the themes presented in picture books, which address social issues (picture books with social content). Thus, as students learn English, they also acquire the ability to read the world, following Paulo Freire's vision.

### **Reading in EFL.**

Reading in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is a fundamental aspect of language learning. This practice involves decoding and comprehending texts in a language that is not the readers' native tongue. Reading in EFL is essential for an effective language acquisition,

as it enhances vocabulary, grammar, and an overall language comprehension.

Reading represents one of the most intricate and essential modalities of linguistic activity. It involves a multitude of factors such as: cognitive, linguistic, textual, sociocultural, biological, etc.; The complexity of reading arises precisely from its multidimensional nature, a complexity that is accentuated in the case of a foreign language. Developing reading skills in both one's mother tongue and a foreign language requires the complex integration of different cognitive processes like knowledge of the language, the content, and a wide array of specific reading comprehension strategies and skills (Jiang & Grabe, 2019).

Promoting reading proficiency in a foreign language is extremely important for the development of cognitive and linguistic processes including writing style, vocabulary, spelling and advanced grammatical competence (Krashen, 1994). Therefore, reading should constitute an integral component of foreign language teaching programs, with a particular focus on enhancing reading comprehension (Esther Usó-Juan, 2019).

In the context of EFL, reading brings multiple benefits apart from improving reading comprehension for learners. While using picture books, it not only enhances reading comprehension but also fosters other linguistic skills. For my research, the integration of Natural approach (comprehensible input), coupled with the principles of critical literacy in the picture books with social content, aims to facilitate a holistic language development.

### **Reading Comprehension**

Reading is a complex process that cannot be simplified to decoding but to understanding, to comprehend the text. According to Goodman (1986) reading is a dynamic process where thought and language engage in continuous interactions as the reader attempts to make sense of the text. Similarly, Cumilaf, Rojas, López, Chihuaicura, & Neira (2014), defined and characterized reading as a mental process involving the decoding of information

(deciphering the visual code), and as a comprehension process which is derived from the interpretation of meaning.

Reading comprehension is the process of interaction between the reader's prior knowledge and the information provided by the text (Esther Usó-Juan, 2019). Vallés (2005, p 57) mentions that "in the reading of texts, complex linguistic cognitive processes intervene that allow access to their meaning and extract the necessary information for their understanding". However, achieving this level of comprehension necessitates the development of reading competence throughout one's life, emphasizing that reading is a process that requires time and effort to develop effectively.

Moreover, the complexity of texts does not always correspond to the readers' biological age but rather depends on their background with reading. When students face texts far beyond their level of comprehension, it can be challenging not only to read but to understand them. The reading process involves more than following a predefined set of steps, it requires a deeper engagement where readers interpret what the author intends to express by connecting it with their prior experiences and knowledge, as suggested by Reyes and Jiménez (2020). This process aligns with the comprehensible input and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory.

Goodman (1986) adds that the relative ability of a reader is essential for successful reading. However, the reader's purpose, social culture, prior knowledge, linguistic competence, attitudes, and conceptual schemes also play crucial roles. In essence, all reading is an act of interpretation, and what a reader can understand and learn from reading depends largely on existing knowledge and beliefs about it. This underscores the importance of fostering critical reading skills in the classrooms, where there are diverse life perspectives, and each student can contribute with their own viewpoint.

Cassany (2006) underscores that learning to read involves not only developing



cognitive processes but also acquiring socio-cultural knowledge specific to each discourse and literacy practice. Thus, reading is regarded as one of the most important cognitive processes as it stimulates the mind, promoting not just reading for the sake of it, but reading to know, understand, and interpret. This understanding of reading is the foundation for developing other language skills.

As mentioned previously, reading comprehension encompasses distinct levels that classify one's understanding of a given text. Strang (1965), Jenkinson (1976) and Smith (1989) cited by Gordillo and Flores (2009) describe three levels of understanding: *textual, inferential, and critical*. These levels are essential for assessing the reading comprehension skills of a population. Colombia currently faces a significant challenge with low reading comprehension levels. This study aims to develop these three comprehension levels through various activities focused on picture books with social content. The ultimate goal is to empower students with strong critical reading comprehension skills, contributing to an effective reading comprehension. Now, we will delve deeper into the three levels of comprehension according to Strang (1965), Jenkinson (1976) and Smith (1989):

**Literal level** (reading the lines). This level involves recognizing key words and phrases in a text and understanding what the text says without the need for deep or active interpretation. It also involves the reconstruction of the text, understanding its basic structure and capturing explicit information such as: the main ideas of a paragraph or the text in general, understand the sequence of events, and make clear comparisons between characters, times, or places, additionally, they discern the cause-and-effect relationships behind the events and actions described in the text.

**Inferential level** (reading between the lines). This level involves going beyond what is explicit in the text. This level focuses on identifying and understanding the relationships, associations, and implicit meanings in the text. Readers are able to make assumptions, deduce

information not directly stated, and formulate hypotheses. They look for connections that go beyond what is written and their main objective is to draw conclusions. This level of understanding allows the reader to relate what is in the text with their previous knowledge and personal experiences. It also involves the ability to make logical inferences and assumptions based on what is written. And enables the identification of additional details from the text, infer main ideas, and predict future events.

**Critical level** (reading beyond the lines). At this level, the reader is able to make judgments about the text read, accept or reject its ideas but with arguments. Critical reading has an evaluative nature, which involves the training of the reader, his criteria and knowledge of what he has read. These judgments take into account qualities of accuracy, acceptability, and probability. The judgments can be: reality or fantasy: according to the reader's experience with the things around him or with the stories or readings; adequacy and validity: compare what is written with other sources of information; appropriation: requires relative evaluation in the different parts to assimilate it; and lastly, rejection or acceptance: it depends on the moral code and value system of the reader.

### **Picture Books with Social Content.**

Firstly, it is important to understand what a picture book is. The books considered picture books are those that are complemented by means of written narratives and images. Therefore, “a true picture book is one where the words and pictures interact in a significant way to create the overall meaning of the text” (Nikolajeva, 2003). As emphasized by Birner and Bromley (2015) it is crucial to read picture books attentively, as words and images work together to create meaning. In the context of a picture book, it's vital to treat both the words and images as equally significant. The interaction between words and pictures is a fundamental characteristic of a picture book. Removing either the images or the words would result in a loss of the complete meaning of the text (Birner, 2015).

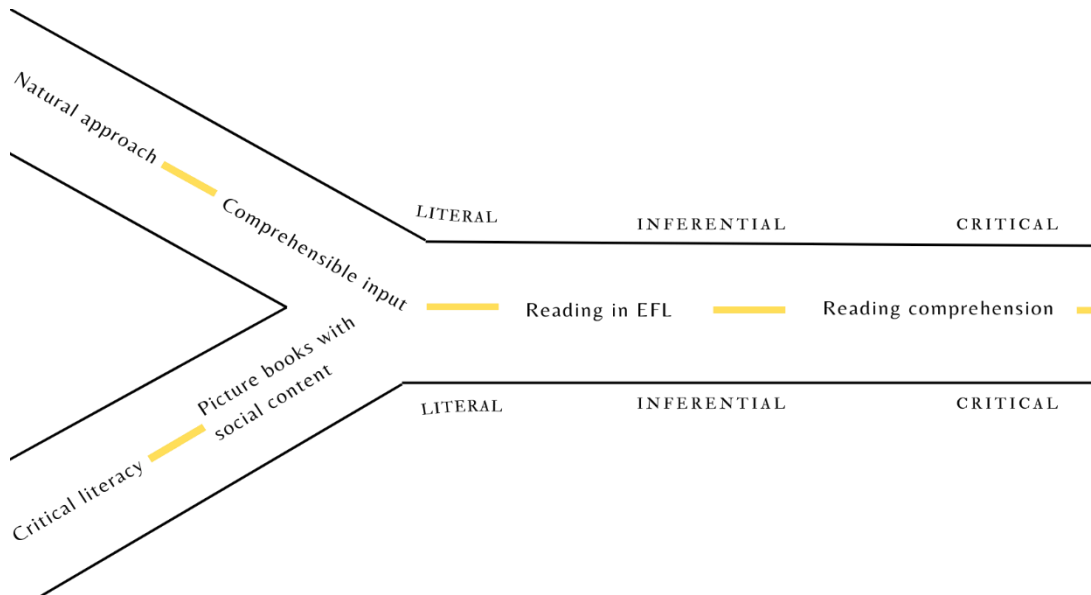
The picture books cover a wide range of topics, but the ones selected for this study were "picture books with social content". These are also called "social issues picture books" or "social justice picture books" by Enriquez (2014) because they address issues such as diversity, equality, justice, human rights, the environment, discrimination, etc. Enriquez (2014) brings us closer to the role of these picture books that seek to "center the plot and development of central characters around issues of equity, human rights, cultural diversity, and environmental justice so the reader gains some insight about the challenges and possibilities involved to contemplate and address these issues in their lives" (Enriquez, 2014, p. 27). The narrative approach in these books may involve recounting a historical event directly or taking a more metaphorical approach, such as using animals as characters to convey profound messages. However, beyond the importance of comprehending both text and images in the picture books, it is essential to engage in discussions about them. As Enríquez also highlights, what truly matters is the way these illustrated books and their representations are critically examined and used as catalysts for more profound explorations of the underlying issues (2014).

The selection of picture books with social content aligns with the main research objective of improving critical reading skills in tenth grade students. These books will be integrated into thematic units of the curriculum and will be used as a basis for discussions and activities that will promote English language acquisition and critical reflection on relevant social issues. Hence, these books offer students the opportunity to engage with real-world problems, promoting English language proficiency. Flexibility in narrative styles allows students to explore social issues from diverse perspectives, facilitating the integration of critical literacy within the natural approach, promoting both language acquisition and a deeper understanding of social issues.

Now the figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the constructs that were previously defined:

**Figure 1: Visual representation of the relationship of theoretical constructs.**

**Source: Own elaboration.**



This graphic representation serves to expose the key constructs that are the basis of this work. Initially, the major constructs follow separate paths: the natural approach and the critical literacy. Nevertheless, they converge at a certain point, forming a single unified pathway. In this manner, the paths of both approaches converge with EFL reading through the use of picture books, utilizing both the natural approach and critical literacy. As the classes progress, critical reading skills are developed across all three levels: literal, inferential and critical. These three levels are situated outside the pathway because they are inherent from the very first encounter with reading. Thus, the synergy between these approaches allows me to reach my research objectives about enhancing reading comprehension in EFL.

### CHAPTER III

#### RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter presents in detail the methodological design that guided the present investigation. This section will address fundamental aspects such as the selection of methods and approaches, the justification of the tools used for data collection and analysis, and the description of the crucial stages of the research process.

### **Research Paradigm.**

This study aligns with qualitative research, which aims to explore and understand social phenomena through close interactions with participants and obtaining qualitative data. This paradigm, particularly suitable for educational contexts, delves into students' perspectives and experiences, offering insights into real-world issues. As Tenny, Brannan JM, and Brannan (2017) point out, qualitative research is a type of research that explores and provides deeper insights into real-world problems. Qualitative research gathers participants' experiences, perceptions, and behavior. By collecting rich data through various interactive methods, it uncovers the "hows" and "whys" instead of mere quantities. This approach values adaptability, cultural factors, and historical influences, enabling a comprehensive and contextualized analysis. Thus, through behaviors that are observable, data can be collected using different methods that usually involve close contact between the researcher and the research participants. These methods are interactive and developmental, allowing for the exploration of emerging issues (Snape and Spencer, 2003). It complements natural approach and critical literacy, which collectively contributes to the study's objectives by addressing the lack of reading in EFL discovered during classroom observations, aiming to delve into the use of picture books with social content as a strategy to encourage reading comprehension. The findings will be supported by the experiences, perceptions and behavior of the girls.

### **Type of Research.**

The previously mentioned objectives of this study are inherently connected to the principles of action research. As stated by Ferrance (2000) action research is a disciplined inquiry process where participants, often teachers, systematically and carefully investigate and enhance their own educational practices with the intention of informing and changing their future teaching. It occurs within the school context, focusing on current educational issues. Taking this into account, this type of research aligned with the problem of my project, which addresses a current educational issue: the low level of reading comprehension. Therefore, the main objective of this research was to analyze what are the impact of using picture books with social content to improve students' reading comprehension.

To develop a successful action research, there is a four-stage cycle (Ferrance, 2000) that was considered for the development of this work: identification of a problem area, data collection, data analysis, and finally evaluation of the results and reflection.

*Identifying a problem area* is the initial step in action research. Teachers must carefully select a meaningful and feasible question that aligns with their daily work. The problem may be evident or arise from a sense of discomfort or tension in the classroom, such as uncertainty about the effectiveness of teaching strategies (Ferrance, 2000). In my research, the problem area was the lack of reading, which had a negative impact on students' reading skills. This led to the following research question, along with a potential strategy to address the issue: What is the impact of a set of activities based on picture books with social content and designed under the principles of the Natural Approach to improve critical reading comprehension in a group of tenth-graders at Liceo Femenino Mercedes Nariño school?

During the *data collection* stage, multiple data sources are gathered to gain a comprehensive understanding of classroom or school dynamics. Employing at least three data sources (triangulation) provides a robust foundation for the basis of actions (Ferrance, 2000). The collected data encompassed artifacts, surveys, field notes, and interviews. Subsequently,

in the *data interpretation* stage, the researcher systematically analyzes the collected data to identify and uncover key patterns and themes (Ferrance, 2000), which serves as a crucial foundation for the subsequent phase. In the last stage *evaluation of results and reflection* (Ferrance, 2000), the researcher assesses the effects of the intervention, scrutinizes whether improvement is evident, and considers potential adjustments to actions in case of unsatisfactory results.

### **Data Collection Instruments and Procedures.**

To achieve the research objectives, the use of data collection instruments becomes imperative. These instruments facilitate triangulation, a technique that involves multiple data sources and methods to examine and cross-examine collected information from various perspectives (Aguilar & Barroso, 2015). To ensure a solid foundation of data collection, data validity and reliability are essential. Validity refers to the alignment of the instruments with the objectives of the research, ensuring that the representation of the data by the researcher accurately represents the situation analyzed in all its dimensions (Corral, 2006). On the other hand, reliability refers to the consistency of the results produced by the instruments, seeking reliable results that present minimal variation when the study is repeated (Corral, 2006).

#### **Data Collection Instruments.**

**Observation.** Observation is a data collection method that involves direct observation of classes where behaviors and situations in the study environment can be evidenced. (Moriarty, 2011). In my research, I used observation to identify and understand the problem that would serve as the basis for my research. Through observation, I was able to witness the interactions in the English classes and detect the low reading comprehension of the students. This information was crucial to establish the focus of my thesis and design the appropriate interventions. It was a whole semester of observations in the Liceo Femenino Mercedes Nariño school in 2022, and these observations were accompanied by field notes (see annex

4).

**Field notes.** Field notes are data collection tools in which the researcher records his observations and reflections while immersed in the field of study (Moriarty, 2011). In my research I kept detailed field journals during picture book reading sessions. Through these notes, I was able to record my impressions of the students' reactions and comments, as well as my own reflections on the strategies and approaches used. The field notes were essential to capture the processes and dynamics that took place during the sessions, which complemented the data obtained through other data collection methods. The field diaries (see annex 4) were focused on describing the development of the class, the use of the language and the different interactions in the classroom.

**Interviews:** An interview is a structured conversation between a researcher and a participant, typically lasting one to two hours, where open-ended questions are used to explore opinions and experiences, generating substantial data for analysis. Interviews can be either semi-structured, involving a series of open-ended questions on various relevant topics, or in-depth, focusing on one or two topics in great detail. Both types offer the opportunity to discover information beyond the researcher's initial considerations (Moriarty, 2011). In this study a series of semi-structured interviews were developed (see annex 7). These interviews were conducted with four students to gain comprehensive insights into their experiences with the classes, particularly focusing on the strategy employed, namely the use of picture books, and their overall engagement with the activities.

**Surveys.** Surveys are structured data collection tools that allow obtaining information from a sample of participants through specific questions (Snape & Spencer, 2003). In my research, I used surveys to characterize the student population first, in terms of knowing their social background, and then their interests, preferences, and level of proficiency in reading in English. These surveys provided me with an overview of the students' needs and



expectations, which was essential in designing the interventions and adapting the pedagogical approach in this work (annex 2). Two surveys were planned, one at the beginning of the implementation and another in the second cycle. The first to know about their interests and approach to English and the other one to know their perspectives on the project carried out.

**Diagnostic Test.** The diagnostic test was used as a data collection method in my research to assess students' initial level of English reading comprehension (see annex 3). By using a diagnostic test, I was able to obtain objective information about the participants' initial skills and knowledge, which helped me to contextualize the problem and tailor my interventions according to their needs. This test was the one that initially opened the door to my study since from this it was possible to show that the reading experience affects reading comprehension. This was observed in the results since the girls who had read texts in English had more correct questions than those who had not read anything in English.

**Artifacts.** Artifacts are tangible objects or materials that are collected and analyzed as part of qualitative research (Moriarty, 2011). In my research, I used the artifacts in the form of activities carried out by the students in the different interventions (see annex 5). These activities provided an additional source of data about students' reading performance in English and allowed me to examine the strategies and difficulties they faced. The artifacts complemented the data obtained through other data collection methods, providing a more complete and enriching vision of the reading and comprehension process of the students.

At the beginning of a class session, the students were asked to draw a unicorn and write the characteristics or the definition of what they believed a unicorn had. This exercise allowed me to learn more about the writing of the students and they were very motivated with this activity, all the draws made were worthy of admiration (see annex 5). After reading the book, a reading comprehension test was carried out with questions from three levels: textual,

inferential, and critical (see annex 6). It was possible to show that many of the students felt like the main character of the story, which allowed a significant advance in the investigation since it was possible to achieve a greater approach to the subjectivity of the students.

### **Data Collection Procedures.**

To initiate data collection, two consent forms were sent to request permission from the parents to allow their children to participate in this project. The primary objective of the consent forms in this context is to safeguard the rights and well-being of the children who participated in this research. Following the receipt of the first consent form, signed by the parents, observations began to obtain information about the student population, their classroom dynamics, and their relationship with the English language. A field note (see annex 4) was created for each observation and recorded alongside other data collection instruments. Subsequently, a questionnaire was administered to 16 students to gather information about their personal lives and their engagement with English and reading (see annex 2). Finally, a diagnostic test (see annex 3) was conducted to assess their English proficiency and reading comprehension in accordance with *Estandares Básicos de Aprendizaje*.

For the implementation phase, another consent form was sent to proceed. A lesson plan (see annex 8) was developed and executed every Wednesday from 1 to 5 pm. Field notes were maintained throughout the entire implementation, in addition to various artifacts.

In relation to the artifacts (see annex 5), students engaged in various reading, writing, and speaking activities throughout the implementation. Each class began with input activities such as reading, followed by output activities like speaking. In the interviews (see annex 7), four students were interviewed to gather their perceptions about the picture books and the classes. A final questionnaire was administered to collect the opinions of all the students, all of which was compiled as evidence to support the data analysis in this research.

## CHAPTER IV

### INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

In this chapter the fundamental conceptions that support this design are exposed, thus addressing the vision of the curriculum, language, learning and the classroom environment. These fundamental concepts are essential for a deep understanding of the proposal. In addition, a detailed description of the pedagogical intervention is presented through a table organized in cycles, each of them composed of five sessions.

#### **Vision of curriculum.**

The curricular vision of this research project was based on a holistic approach which incorporate Natural approach and critical Literacy in EFL. The curriculum aims to cultivate students' appreciation for individuality, diversity, empathy, and social awareness. By incorporating relevant and engaging picture books, the curriculum encourages active learning, critical reflection, and the development of language skills within meaningful contexts.

The development of the classes maintains a holistic approach where it is about addressing the integral development of the students, therefore, not only their academic part is taken into consideration, but also their values, emotional abilities, and life skills, promoting empathy and understanding. The curriculum also takes into account the curriculum of the Liceo Femenino Mercedes Nariño School, which focuses on the student and has a critical and emancipatory approach.

As was said before this is focused on the student since it seeks to satisfy their needs. The route followed by the pedagogical intervention is to develop reading comprehension through illustrated books, but a critical understanding will also be developed, they will learn to read the world (Freire), and in the last classes of the intervention they will make an activity

as a social act where they must put into practice everything learned during the sessions.

### **Vision of Language.**

The vision of language of this study is to perceive it as a tool for communication, self-expression, and empowerment. The curriculum emphasizes the importance of developing linguistic competence in English and using language as a tool to explore diverse perspectives, challenge stereotypes, and promote social justice (Freire). It recognizes the value of language and promotes the development of linguistic competence in English as a foreign language. Language vision encompasses both receptive and productive language skills, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Using picture books, students will enhance their language proficiency, vocabulary acquisition (Krashen), and understanding of cultural nuances. Encourages students to interact with picture books, to improve their language proficiency while exploring different perspectives and experiences. The goal is to train students to become effective communicators, critical readers, and reflective writers who can express themselves fluently and confidently in English.

### **Vision of Learning.**

The vision of learning in this intervention focuses on the creation of a learning environment centered on the student and on their experiences, since it seeks to have a connection with real life to promote the active participation of students and the practical application of the language in relevant contexts (Dewey).

It embraces the principles of constructivism (Vygotsky), where students actively build their knowledge through meaningful experiences, reflection, and collaboration. It encourages student autonomy, metacognition, and the development of critical literacy skills. The learning process is seen as a continuous journey of exploration, discovery, and reflection, where students are encouraged to reflect on their own experiences, challenge assumptions, and develop a sense of agency as they explore themes of diversity, inclusion, stereotypes, and

social justice. In this pedagogical proposal, students are not merely recipients of knowledge but active participants in their own learning journey. Students are encouraged to engage in open dialogue, share their perspectives, and actively contribute their ideas. Furthermore, the curriculum places a strong emphasis on promoting empathy and understanding, ultimately preparing students to become informed and responsible global citizens. Through this proposal, the hope is that students will emerge not only with a deep understanding of the subjects they study, but also with the capacity to drive positive change in their communities and beyond.

For the development of knowledge, collaborative work has promoted multiple current developments, therefore, teamwork and collaboration among students are promoted here. In each session, students will have activities to develop in groups that will help each one develop social and leadership skills. We must also point out the constant feedback that takes place in the classroom, since at the end of each session they try to reflect on what was learned both individually and as a group.

### **Vision of Classroom.**

The vision of the classroom is to be in a safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environment where students feel valued, respected, and empowered. It embraces a student-centered approach where the teacher serves as a facilitator and guide, promoting active participation, collaboration, and dialogue among students. The classroom is seen as a vibrant space for exploration, creativity, and meaningful interactions. It encourages student agency, promotes positive relationships, and celebrates diversity. The vision of the classroom fosters a sense of belonging, encourages open communication, and provides opportunities for students to develop social and emotional skills, empathy, and respect for others.

### **Instructional design.**

This proposal aims to enhance reading comprehension and foster critical stand

through the lens of critical literacy, all facilitated by the use of picture books. These books share a common theme centered on *social issues*, with the intention of engaging students in reading within a foreign language to improve their reading comprehension. Additionally, the project aims to raise awareness and encourage critical stand among students about the world they inhabit.

During the picture book selection process, special attention was paid to students' areas of interest. This search considered the students' social context and their level of English proficiency. Given that my students are between 14 and 15 years old, it is important to note that the chosen books are actually intended for younger children, typically ranging from 7 to 12 years of age. The reason for this selection is the simplicity of vocabulary found in these books, which aligns with the aim of facilitating easy comprehension and encouraging engagement among my teenage students. Despite the age difference, these books serve as valuable tools for promoting language development and reading comprehension, demonstrating that engaging content transcends age boundaries.

The pedagogical intervention was organized by three cycles: *Embracing Differences: Celebrating Individuality*, *Breaking Stereotypes: Embracing Diversity*, *Raising my voice*. Each cycle is focused on developing language skills, and on fostering a creative and reflective approach to learning. The cycles are also divided into three lessons and five sessions, each one with specific objectives that are tried to be developed through activities. Moreover, each session has a unique lesson plan (see annex 8). The main material that is used in most of the lessons are picture books since this work is developed on that, in addition, each picture book has a different reading strategy. By incorporating various pedagogical strategies and using diverse resources, students were provided with opportunities to enhance their reading strategies and develop critical literacy skills.

***Table 1 display the cycles of intervention.***

CYCLES	Lessons	Objectives	Reading Strategies	Suggested Language and Vocabulary	Picture Book
<p><b>Cycle 1: Embracing Differences: Celebrating Individuality</b></p> <p><b>General Objective:</b></p> <p>To stimulate critical reflections on diversity and cultivate an appreciation for individuality by using picture books as a medium.</p> <p><i>In this cycle:</i> 3 lesson plans for 5 sessions.</p> <p>session: 90 minutes</p>	<p>Lesson plan 1: <b>I'm unique</b></p> <p>Two sessions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To improve reading comprehension and pronunciation through reading aloud.</li> <li>To appreciate and respect individual differences by recognizing and valuing diversity.</li> <li>To reflect on the implicit messages in the work and their relevance in real life situations.</li> </ul>	<p>Predicting and inferring.</p>	<p><b>Cycle's vocabulary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ animal body parts</li> <li>❖ vocabulary from the PB.</li> </ul> <p><b>School's grammar program:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ verb to be.</li> <li>❖ info questions.</li> </ul>	<p>Picture book: <i>I'm a unicorn</i> by Helen Yoon.</p> <p><b>Social content:</b> Diversity, inclusion, empathy, self-acceptance.</p>
	<p>Lesson plan 2: <b>Self-esteem</b></p> <p>Two sessions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To analyze and reflect about the diversity of bodies and the importance of accepting and respecting diversity.</li> <li>To learn vocabulary and language to describe diverse types of bodies.</li> <li>To reflect on my own attitudes towards physical appearance and self-esteem.</li> </ul>	<p>Interactive reading experience.</p>	<p><b>Cycle's vocabulary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Parts of human body.</li> <li>❖ Vocabulary from the PB.</li> </ul> <p><b>School's grammar program:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Singular and plural nouns</li> </ul>	<p>Picture book: <i>Bodies are cool</i> By Tyler Feder.</p> <p><b>Social content:</b> Self-esteem, fights negative body image, inclusion, and empowerment.</p>
	<p>Lesson plan 3: <b>Promoting Positive Body Image</b></p> <p>One session</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To identify and question body stereotypes related to women.</li> <li>To develop self-esteem and self-confidence.</li> <li>To gain awareness about the significance of breaking body stereotypes and promoting a positive body image.</li> </ul>		<p><b>Cycle's vocabulary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Adjectives to describe human body.</li> <li>❖ Vocabulary from the last PB.</li> </ul> <p><b>School's grammar program:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ What an adjective is?</li> </ul>	

<p><b>Cycle 2: Breaking Stereotypes: Embracing Diversity</b></p> <p><b>General Objective:</b></p> <p>To promote empathy and social awareness of students by exploring different perspectives and experiences related to inclusion, discrimination, and identity.</p> <p><i>In this cycle: 3 lesson plans for 5 sessions.</i></p>	<p>Lesson plan 1:</p> <p><b>Exploring Perspectives</b></p> <p>Two sessions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To understand and analyze the concepts of diversity, inclusion, and stereotypes through reading.</li> <li>To identify situations of discrimination or exclusion in their own experiences and in the context of the book "10,000 Dresses".</li> <li>To reflect on the importance of breaking stereotypes and promoting diversity in society.</li> </ul>	<p>Puzzle story.</p>	<p><b>Cycle's vocabulary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Numbers</li> <li>❖ Regular past verbs.</li> <li>❖ Vocabulary from the PB.</li> </ul> <p><b>School's grammar program:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Past simple.</li> </ul>	<p>Picture book: <i>10,000 Dresses</i> by Marcus Ewert.</p> <p><b>Social content:</b> Gender identity, gender diversity, family acceptance, empowerment.</p>
	<p>Lesson plan 2:</p> <p><b>Breaking Stereotypes</b></p> <p>Two sessions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To identify which is the importance of individuality and freedom of expression.</li> <li>To foster empathy and respect for differences, students will reflect on the importance of accepting and respecting the choices and differences of others.</li> <li>To stimulate Critical Reflection, students will analyze, and challenge social norms related to dress and personal expression.</li> </ul>	<p>Visual story creation.</p>	<p><b>Cycle's vocabulary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Clothes</li> <li>❖ Adjectives to describe clothes.</li> <li>❖ Vocabulary from the PB.</li> </ul> <p><b>School's grammar program:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Past simple.</li> <li>❖ Present continuous.</li> </ul>	<p>Picture book: <i>Mary Wears What She Wants</i> by Keith Negley.</p> <p><b>Social content:</b> Independence and authenticity, gender equality, respect for diversity, courage, and empowerment.</p>
	<p>Lesson plan 3:</p> <p><b>Celebrating Diversity</b></p> <p>One session</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To freely express their ideas and individuality through the design of a unique dress.</li> <li>To encourage critical reflection on stereotypes and diversity in society.</li> <li>To value and respect diversity in all its forms, recognizing the importance of free expression and inclusion in society.</li> </ul>		<p><b>Cycle's vocabulary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Textures and fabrics.</li> <li>❖ Past verbs.</li> <li>❖ Vocabulary from the last PB.</li> </ul> <p><b>School's grammar program:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Past perfect.</li> </ul>	



<p><b>Cycle 3: <i>Raising my voice.</i></b></p> <p><b>General objective:</b> To encourage student self-expression and creativity through the exploration of diverse perspectives and issues related to social justice and activism with the book “Click Clack Moo, cows that type” by Doreen Cronin. And the students will present their creation of a picture book.</p> <p><i>In this cycle: 3 lesson plans for 5 sessions.</i></p>	<p>Lesson plan 1:</p> <p><b>Union of voices</b></p> <p>Two sessions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To understand the diverse perspectives of social issues.</li> <li>● To recognize the verbs in the past tense.</li> <li>● To analyze the role of the characters.</li> </ul>	<p>Interactive Reading experience.</p>	<p><b>Cycle’s vocabulary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Farm animals</li> <li>❖ Animals body parts</li> <li>❖ Farm vocabulary</li> <li>❖ Vocabulary from the PB.</li> </ul> <p><b>School’s grammar program:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Future simple.</li> </ul>	<p>Picture book: <i>Click Clack Moo, cows that type</i> by Doreen Cronin.</p> <p><b>Social content:</b> Values of equity and social justice, solidarity and cooperation, negotiation, and conflict resolution.</p>
	<p>Lesson plan 2:</p> <p><b>Empowerment.</b></p> <p>Two sessions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To find a topic related to social issues for the final project.</li> <li>● To discuss social issues with classmates.</li> <li>● To choose a topic to make a group picture book.</li> </ul>		<p><b>Cycle’s vocabulary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Connectors.</li> <li>❖ Vocabulary from the last PB.</li> </ul> <p><b>School’s grammar program:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Present and past perfect tenses.</li> </ul>	
	<p>Lesson plan 3:</p> <p><b>Final work.</b></p> <p>One session.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To Present the final works to the classmates.</li> <li>● To discuss the sample of each group.</li> <li>● To make a final feedback and discussion on the didactic sequence.</li> </ul>			

### **Cycle 1: Embracing Differences: Celebrating Individuality**

The primary objective of this cycle was to stimulate critical reflections on diversity and cultivate an appreciation for individuality. Through the utilization of picture books as a medium, students were encouraged to recognize and value the importance of appreciating and respecting individual differences. Lesson Plan 1, titled "I'm Unique," was done in two sessions and aimed to prompt students to reflect on the implicit messages within the picture book "I'm a Unicorn" by Helen Yoon, and express their own experiences regarding the theme of the book. This lesson incorporated reading strategies such as predicting and inferring, where students were divided into groups to discuss and share their interpretations of selected pages from the book.

Lesson Plan 2, titled "Self-esteem," was done in two sessions and is focused on understanding the diversity of bodies and the significance of accepting and respecting different types of bodies. Through an interactive reading experience of the picture book "Bodies are Cool" by Tyler Feder, students engaged in vocabulary development and discussions related to physical appearance and self-esteem.

Lesson Plan 3, "Promoting a Positive Body Image," will be held in one session and students will be tasked with identifying and challenging body stereotypes related to women. Working in groups, they will create artistic performances challenging these stereotypes and promoting a positive body image.

### **Cycle 2: Breaking Stereotypes: Embracing Diversity**

This cycle aimed to promote empathy and social awareness among students by exploring different perspectives and experiences related to inclusion, discrimination, and identity. Lesson Plan 1, titled "Exploring Perspectives," will be held in two sessions and focuses on understanding and analyzing the concepts of diversity, inclusion, and stereotypes. Students will be encouraged to identify situations of discrimination or exclusion in their own

experiences and in the context of the picture book "10,000 Dresses" by Marcus Ewert. Through the reading strategy of a puzzle story, students will work collaboratively in groups to piece together the full story, improving their comprehension, analysis, and understanding of themes related to identity and self-expression.

Lesson Plan 2, "Breaking Stereotypes," will be held in two sessions and aims to highlight the importance of individuality, freedom of expression, and respect for differences. Students will engage in critical reflection by analyzing and challenging social norms and cultural biases related to dress and personal expression. They will explore these concepts through the picture book "Mary Wears What She Wants" by Keith Negley. In the visual story creation activity, students will work in groups of three to create their own stories based on the illustrations, fostering creativity and highlighting similarities and differences with the original story.

In Lesson Plan 3, "Celebrating Diversity," in this one-session lesson the focus is on celebrating diversity and promoting critical reflection on stereotypes in society. Students will work in small groups to design unique outfits that reflect their ideas and individuality, while also promoting diversity. They will be encouraged to write descriptions explaining the symbolism and values behind their designs. This activity fosters creativity, originality, and an appreciation for diversity in all its forms, emphasizing the importance of free expression and inclusion in society.

### **Cycle 3: Raising my voice.**

The purpose of this cycle is to encourage critical thinking in relation to social problems and, through the reflection in the picture book "Click Clack Moo, Cows That Type" by Doreen Cronin, inspire students to take action when necessary. Through this illustrated book, it is intended that students can understand a story from different perspectives and reflect on the relative that reality could be.

The last two lesson plans will be dedicated to the final project, which consists of creating a group picture book, addressing a topic chosen by them that is related to the topics covered in the didactic sequence. Finally, the groups will present their picture books and receive feedback on their work.

## CHAPTER V

### DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In this chapter, we embark on an in-depth exploration of our data analytics journey, uncovering the insights gained from the information collected. It provides a detailed overview of our analytical approach and presents the categories and their associated findings. Through this comprehensive examination, we aim to shed light on the results and discoveries emerging from our research.

#### **Data Analysis Procedures.**

Initially, the data collected at the beginning of the implementation was categorized based on the data collection instruments: field notes, interviews, artifacts, and surveys. Each of these data sources was assigned a unique color code to facilitate efficient organization. Subsequently, when the first cycle was completed, a new folder was opened to begin collecting data for the second cycle, following the same method for the third cycle.

The approach employed to analyze the data was grounded approach, which is a research method focused on systematically collecting and analyzing data to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena, including aspects such as social relationships and group behaviors, known as social processes, to develop and built theory (Merriam, 1998). This approach consists of three stages (Noble & Mitchell, 2016). The first stage is *open coding* (Noble & Mitchell, 2016), involving line-by-line coding, where key concepts and phrases are identified, highlighted, and categorized into subcategories and subsequently into

categories. In this initial stage, we carefully reviewed the collected data, identifying keywords and highlighting phrases for subcategorization. Through this process, we discovered subcategories that were initially keywords but could be grouped into categories once the data had been fully coded.

To further strengthen the analysis, each subcategory was documented within an expansive chart, facilitating a more comprehensive view of the data under each subcategory. The data was effectively compartmentalized, and relationships among subcategories emerged, leading to the formation of broader categories; an integral aspect of the second stage, axial coding. In this stage, an in-depth exploration of relationships between categories was undertaken, and interconnections were established.

Furthermore, during the data analysis process, we adhered to the concept of theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation implies continuing the sampling and coding of data until no new categories can be identified, and until new instances of variation for existing categories have ceased to emerge (Hennink, Kaiser, Marconi, 2017). This rigorous approach allowed us to ensure that the theory developed was grounded in the data and that no essential insights or categories were overlooked.

Finally, the last stage was *selective coding* (Noble & Mitchell, 2016), which involved identifying the core category and systematically linking it with other categories. Relationships needed to be authenticated, and categories refined. The categories were then integrated, culminating in the development of the grounded approach. At this point, with subcategories grouped into categories, we discovered relationships between categories and began writing the textual content of the theory developed.

This meticulous data analysis process, in which subcategories were integrated into categories and relationships between categories were distinguished, served as the basis for developing the textual content of the theory derived from this research.

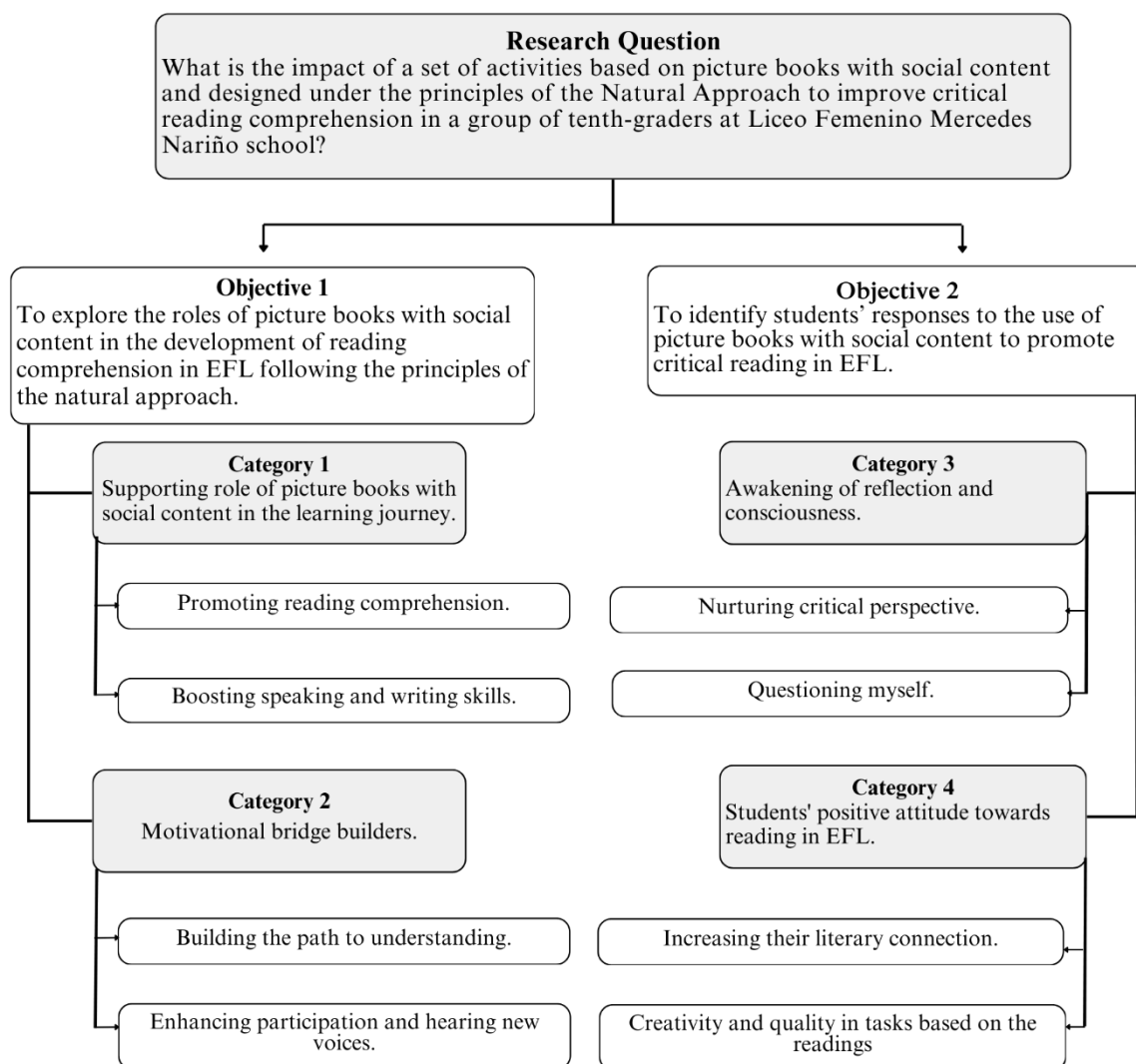
## Categories of the Analysis

The primary objective of this research was to analyze the impact of using picture books with social content to improve students' reading comprehension through a natural approach among tenth-grade students. To achieve this main objective, two specific objectives have arisen from it. Firstly, to explore the roles of picture books with social content in the development of reading comprehension in EFL following the principles of the natural approach, and secondly, to identify students' responses to the use of picture books with social content to promote critical reading in EFL. With these objectives in mind, the following categories and subcategories have been developed in a hierarchical system to address the research question.

Two categories emerged from the first objective, firstly, *Supporting role of picture books with social content in the learning journey*, secondly, *Motivational bridge builders*. These categories were developed to explore the role of picture books with social content in reading comprehension skills. For the second objective, two categories were derived from it. Thirdly, *Awakening of reflection and consciousness*, and lastly, *Students' positive attitude towards reading in EFL*. These categories were established to identify students' responses to the use of picture books with social content to promote critical reading in EFL.

The categories carry two subcategories, thus, for the first category: *Promoting reading comprehension* and *Boosting speaking and writing skills*; for the second category: *Building the path to understanding* and *Enhancing participation and hearing new voices*; for the third category: *Nurturing critical perspective* and *questioning myself*; finally, the last category: *Increasing their literary connection* and *Creativity and quality in tasks based on the readings*. Having this in mind we provide the following hierarchical visual representation.

*Figure 2, visual representation of the categories resulting from the analysis.*



**Category 1: Supporting role of picture books with social content in the learning journey.**

In this category the role of picture books with social content will be developed in order to answer the first objective of this research: To explore the roles of picture books with social content in the development of reading comprehension in EFL following the principles of the natural approach. Firstly, picture books serve as a strong material that helps in the reading process. Nikolajeva (2003) suggests that picture books, with their combination of text

and images, can enhance students' understanding of the text, therefore, it is a more approachable way for elementary level students when facing reading in a foreign language. In Addition to fostering reading skills, it also enhances writing and speaking skills.

At the beginning of the intervention, the picture books were chosen according to the principles advocated by Krashen regarding *comprehensible input*, and Vygotsky concerning the *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)*: picture books with a step above their level in order to advance in their language development.

To delve into the role of picture books, two subcategories emerged. One of them is *promoting reading comprehension*, which through the constant exposure to picture books, reading skills, and subsequently reading comprehension, improves. And the other subcategory is *boosting speaking and writing skills*, a result of classroom activities with picture books. As an initial discovery, it was found to be a good support for the reading classes and was warmly embraced by the students.

After giving general ideas about the category, the subsequent step involves the exploration of the subcategories identified in this first category.

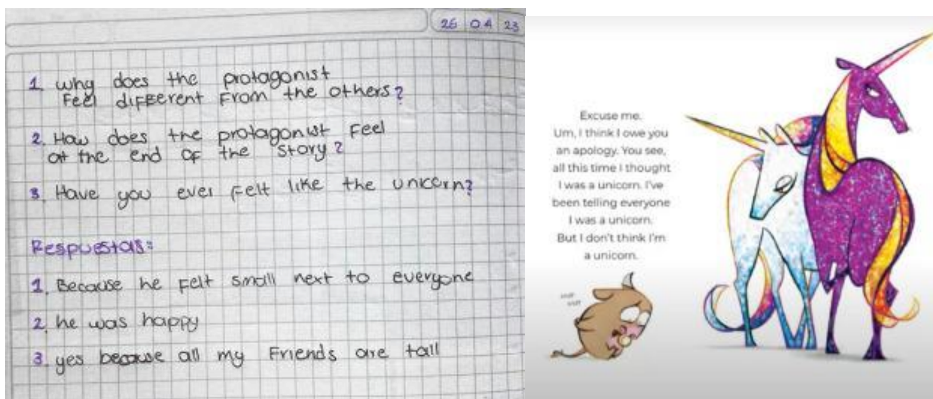
**Promoting reading comprehension.** This subcategory gathers the data on the role of picture books with social content in the development of tenth-grade students' English reading. Using picture books aim to bring students closer to reading in a foreign language in an approachable way, moreover, Jiang and Grabe (2019) claimed that the development of this skill both in the mother tongue and in a foreign language, requires an integration of different cognitive processes, that can be developed with specific strategies to promote linguistic skills such as reading comprehension.

Picture books have been a valuable resource due to their ability to be complemented with texts and images, which, according to what was proposed by Krashen and Terrel (1983) help students to understand the text through a natural approach. Based on the information



collected during my teaching practice period, it confirms that the use and exposure of *picture books* improves reading comprehension, and this statement can be supported by the following findings obtained during the data collection phase:

The picture books that were presented during the cycles, were accompanied by a reading comprehension task, with literal, inferential and critical questions. The collected data reveal the process of improving reading comprehension in EFL students.



[Artifact #2 First cycle: April 26th, 2023. Student #9.]

(Yoon, 2022, p 15)

This was a student who faced reading an English book for the first time. It reveals how the student guided the reading strongly by the images, rather than the text because of her lack of vocabulary. In the first literal question, the student understood that the character felt different but not why, then she tried to deduce the answer by paying attention to the images of the book. And here is an example for trying to understand the students' thoughts based on the preceding image in the picture book. She read the book with the lens of her life, that is why she answered in the third question something related to height, which was not the problem in the book. Conversely, she understood the general essence through the images, and transformed the story according to her life, which is a step for enhancing critical literacy. On the other hand, this student had only one right answer in the first reading comprehension test, which included only written content. It suggested that she neither understood the main ideas nor the general essence. Therefore, it proves that the images have a strong impact on understanding the readings in comparison to only writing texts.

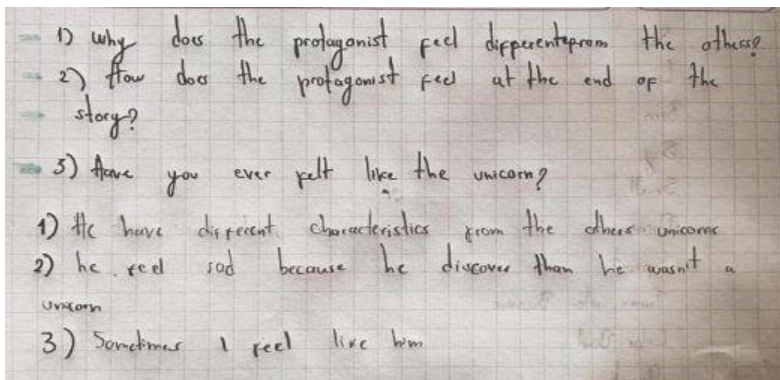
I can infer that the students liked reading but their level of English frustrated them a bit. They tried to understand the story more through its images than through its text.

[Field note #2. April 12th, 2023]

**S#2:** Pues el que más me gustó a mí fue el del unicornio, tenía más vocabulario y podía, como con las imágenes me podía ubicar más de lo que quería decir el libro.

[Semi-structured interview #2. September 6th, 2023. Q#3 ¿Cuál es el picture book que más te ha gustado?]

Nevertheless, other students who had more vocabulary showed a better understanding of the picture book due to the answers given by them.



[Artifact #1 First cycle: April 26th, 2023. Student #3.]

The reading comprehension test for the picture book “I’m a unicorn” showed a better result compared to the first reading comprehension test (only written content). Despite the fact that the first test were just literal and inferential questions, 64,71% of the students obtained between 1 and 3 correct answers.

At the beginning of my intervention, they presented their first reading comprehension test (the one mentioned above), along with a survey to gauge their approach to reading in a foreign language. Student 3, who had previously read books in English, answered all the questions correctly, whereas *student 2*, who had never read one, answered only 2 questions correctly. After the second cycle, they presented another reading comprehension text evaluating only literal and inferential questions. They had already read three picture books, and student 2, who initially struggled on the first test, improved from answering two questions correctly to answering all the questions right.

In the second cycle for reading the picture book “10,000 dresses” a different strategy was used. They were divided into small groups to encourage cooperative learning, then the

sheets of the picture book were distributed to them in a random order, and they had to arrange the book by reading and looking at the pictures. When the time of reading comprehension came, we conducted it through spoken discussion. Three questions were made (literal, inferential and critical) to discuss, but the one who had more voices were this one:

What does Bailey's dream of creating 10,000 dresses symbolize in terms of her search for identity and self-expression? The girls responded that the dresses symbolized freedom, because when the character wore the dresses she was breaking the rules imposed by a sexist society. In this question they began to talk more about society, and came to the idea that women have always been oppressed by the church and began to question gender roles.

[Field notes #6. September 20th, 2023]

That was a critical question, which can also support the literal and inferential ones, as their answers covered all aspects of the three levels of reading comprehension. At this point in the intervention, it is visible how they learn to read not only the words but also the images and the world, as they have acquired the vocabulary to comprehend texts and express their ideas.

Then the last question was asked: what are some gender stereotypes challenged in the book? How do you think these stereotypes can impact people in real life? And they responded that the gender stereotype that is being challenged is about the way of dressing, expressing oneself, breaking with the idea of masculinity and femininity. And this can affect people in the way they view life and how they feel compelled to do something simply because society has put them in that role.

[Field notes #6. September 20th, 2023.]

One of the expected outcomes was to bring students closer to the level they were supposed to achieve according to *Estandares Basicos de Aprendizaje*. And since reading comprehension activities were integrated alongside the picture books, students experienced an improvement. Hence, it is evident that the use of images helps the EFL learners when reading a text, and exposure to reading contributes to improvements in their reading comprehension skills.

**S#4:** Entonces he mejorado en eso (listening and writing) e incluso en la lectura, porque hay palabras que identifico y pues ya se me hace mucho más fácil ir leyendo algo en inglés.

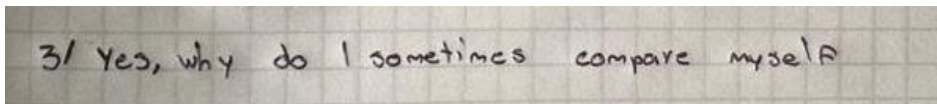
[Semi-structured interview #4. September 6th, 2023. Q#2 ¿En cuál habilidad crees o sientes que has mejorado?]

**S#1:** Siento que mi relación con la lectura ha mejorado. Creo que leer cualquier tipo de libro con cualquier tipo de ilustración, hace que tengas un mundo más amplio de lo que es la literatura y eso ayuda muchísimo a entender la lectura y a ser una persona más pensante, más creativa.

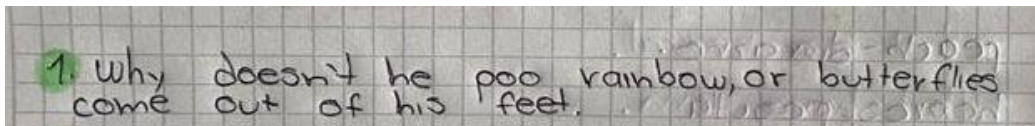
[Semi-structured interview #1. September 6th, 2023. Q#5 *¿Crees que tu relación con la lectura ha mejorado?*]

**Boosting speaking and writing skills.** The observations made throughout the research process demonstrate that the use of picture books along with activities foster linguistic skills in EFL learners. In this manner, with the use of picture books many activities were carried out focusing on writing or speaking skills. The classroom dynamic extended beyond simply reading and answering questions, it also included vocabulary acquisition, story writing, sharing ideas, vocabulary-based activities, and more.

Exploring the data collected on the roles of picture books illustrates an improvement in speaking and writing skills.



[Artifact #7. First cycle: April 26th, 2023. Student #8.]

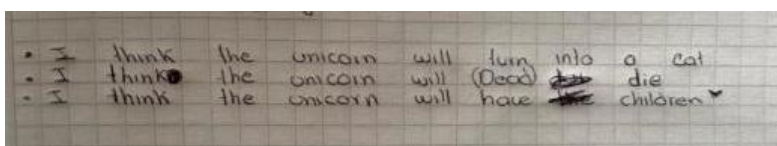


[Artifact #9. First cycle: April 26th, 2023. Student #6.]

In the first cycle, their writing skills presented problems regarding grammar and vocabulary. As it is presented in the extract from students' writings, they do not know the word "because" to express causality. After various sessions, they started to inquire about their writing texts.

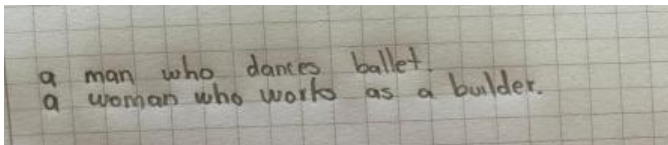
In this class, the students used writing more than speaking since the activities proposed for this day were more focused on developing writing. An interesting thing was that in their writings there were fewer spelling errors than in the first sessions. In addition, they called me more frequently to ask me questions about their writings.

[Field notes #3. May 24th, 2023]



[Artifact #8. First cycle: April 26th, 2023. Student #2.]

And here is one of their writings after making the corrections by the teacher. It shows an improvement in the grammar, the mistakes committed are not as significant as in the last sessions. During the second cycle, they were very concentrated on what I explained about grammar with the aid of the picture books, they inquire and asked me to review their writings, and as a result, they produced correct sentences.

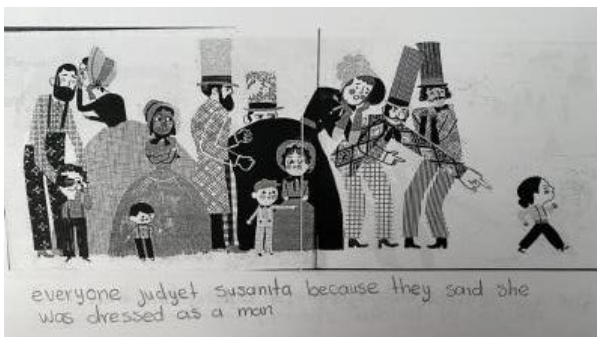


[Artifact #10. Second cycle: September 9th, 2023. Student #8.]

The students called me to correct their writing, this time an improvement in the grammar and cohesion of their sentences could be observed.

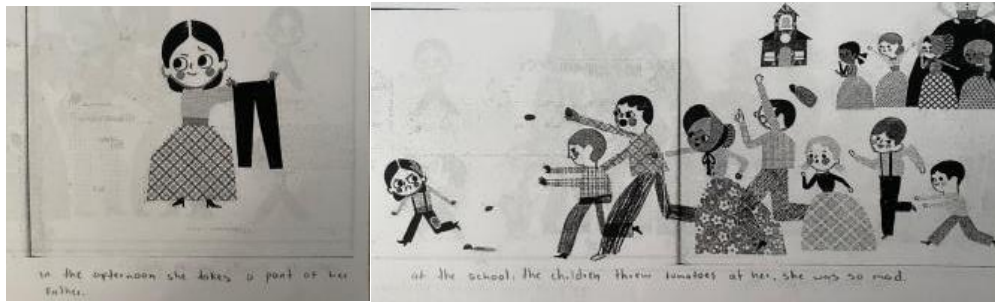
[Field notes #4. August 23rd, 2023]

A different activity for reading “Mary wears what she wants” was proposed. The sheets of the books were distributed to them without text on it, and in groups, they had to write the story according to the images. In this activity, a significant enhancement of their writing skill became noticeable. In Particular, they had defeated their prior confusion between the use of “why” and “because”.



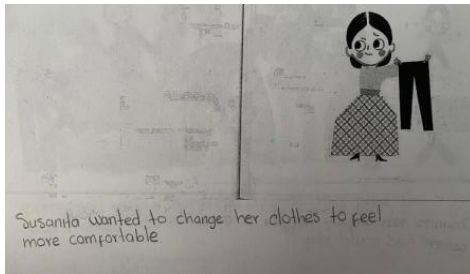
[Artifact #18. Second cycle: August 23rd, 2023. group 2.]

And here are extracts of their writing story.



[Artifact #13.

Second cycle: August 23rd, 2023. group 2.] [Artifact #14. Second cycle: August 23rd, 2023. group 2.]



[Artifact 15. Second cycle: August 23rd, 2023. group 2.]

Based on this evidence, we can support that fostering reading proficiency in a foreign language plays a crucial role in enhancing cognitive and linguistic abilities, including writing, vocabulary expansion, spelling, and advanced grammar competence (Krashen, 1994). In addition, presented below are the girls' words concerning their English proficiency in the last sessions.

**S#4:** yo siento que he mejorado en la escucha ya que pues en cada clase, cada profesor que da clases, como entendiendo cada vez más lo que está diciendo también en la escritura. Porque ya entiendo lo que estoy escribiendo.

[Semi-structured interview #4. September 6th, 2023. Q#2 *¿En cuál habilidad crees o sientes que has mejorado?*]

**S#2:** Yo creo que en el escucha y en el de hablar, porque pues en el escucha, porque en la gran mayoría de las clases entiendo, puede ser un pedacito o todo lo que me estás diciendo. Y también, pues en lo de hablar o escribir, porque creo que ya tengo más vocabulario y sé expresarme mejor.

[Semi-structured interview #2. September 6th, 2023. Q#2 *¿En cuál habilidad crees o sientes que has mejorado?*]

Shifting our focus to speaking skills, it is fundamental to highlight the positive outcomes when using picture books to encourage speaking skills. All sessions had a specific time for those activities, conducted either with the entire class, in small groups or in pairs. In the first cycle, the girls were too shy to participate in speaking activities. However, as the

sessions progressed and their comprehension of the readings improved, an increasing number of girls started feeling comfortable and began to participate actively.

The following extracts are taken from the field notes during the initial cycle:

Students have a limited vocabulary in English to express their opinions, which sometimes leads them to prefer to participate in Spanish, and in that one they have some very interesting ideas.

[Field notes #5. August 30th, 2023]

We began to discuss the book. They wanted to talk to me about their thoughts on the book but in Spanish. In English they limited themselves to telling me “excellent” “good”.

[Field notes #5. August 30th, 2023]

The following are from the second cycle. And the subsequent images vividly depict the students' enthusiastic and active participation in class.

For this class all the girls spoke in English. At first, they were a little shy when speaking because they did not know the vocabulary, but after reading they all began to feel confident about participating.

[Field notes #2. May 17th, 2023.]



**S#1:** Siento que he mejorado en la habilidad, la cual retengo las palabras porque antes creo que era un defecto mío que no solía como que aprenderme las palabras de una manera más sencilla, como que me costaba retenerlas, por así decirlo, entonces ahora logro entender con más facilidad lo que las personas me expresan. Y siento que me puedo comunicar mejor con el vocabulario que tengo ahora.

[Semi-structured interview #1. September 6th, 2023. Q#2 *¿En cuál habilidad crees o sientes que has mejorado?*]

In summary, Picture Books emerge as a powerful pedagogical tool that effectively enhances both speaking and writing skills among students. Their strategic integration into the curriculum showcases a substantial and measurable improvement in students' linguistic development. Beyond merely fostering language proficiency, these books stimulate creativity, critical thinking, and broader cultural awareness, positioning them as indispensable in the educational field.

All the students were very participatory with these topics, it was a little difficult to conduct the whole discussion in English, then, for this class there was few interference from Spanish of words they did not know, so in order to they could say all the ideas they had they use some Spanish words, however, now they use vocabulary to express their ideas such as: in my opinion, I think, I agree, I disagree.

[Field notes #6. September 20th, 2023.]

**S#3:** Yo pienso que pues he mejorado mucho en gramática porque pues hay temas que ya uno trata recuerda y también pues en las habilidades, O sea, cada clase es un recorderis más y pues como en los libros se ven temas ya de gramática, más vocabulario, entonces uno va recordando más con los libros y se puede tener una mejor comunicación.

[Semi-structured interview #3. September 6th, 2023. Q#2 *¿En cuál habilidad crees o sientes que has mejorado?*]

## **Category 2: Motivational bridge builders.**

Transitioning to the subsequent subcategory, it is noticeable that picture books with social content not only enrich linguistic skills but also serve as motivational builders.

Throughout the research, it has been emphasized how important reading is and how Colombia has a substandard level on reading comprehension. In this context, it was important to identify an effective tool for introducing students to reading in a foreign language, then picture books emerged as the chosen strategy. The use of picture books proves to be an effective tool for introducing reading and, as a result, improving in reading comprehension. Furthermore, it should be noted that they also are a useful material for motivating students, not only to learn English but also when facing reading in a foreign language.

In this way, two subcategories emerged, the first one is related to the better understanding of the students when using picture books: *Building the path to understanding*; and the second one, related to the increase of participation in the class: *Enhancing participation and hearing new voices*.

According to Krashen and Terrel (1983) the process of acquiring a language can be affected by a lack of motivation, therefore, it has been observed that when students understand the readings, their motivation increases. That is what is going to be presented in the subsequent subcategories.



**Building the path to understanding.** Reading can develop an integrated learning process. By introducing students to reading in an engaging way, first, they will establish a positive and solid relationship with reading; and second, they will develop stronger cognitive abilities (Jiang & Grabe, 2019). However, in order to achieve the aforementioned, it is necessary that the students feel motivated to learn. Even if my target population had no problems with that, it is an important word in the educational field. Taking that into account, the picture books demonstrate to be a functional strategy to achieve the integrated learning process and bring motivation to students.

When students do not understand a text, their motivation tends to decrease, instead, when they understand, they feel motivated to learn more. Hence, reading comprehensible picture books serves as a catalyst for reading, learning and as a potent motivator, as they have text and images to a better understanding of the reading.

Here is the process of reading, and how the behavior of students changes throughout the classes.

They seem to be more focused on understanding the reading with images (I'm a unicorn) than the reading with just words on it.

[Field note #1. April 4th, 2023.]

**S#1:** Siento que es una manera muy didáctica y creativa para abrirnos a un mundo más amplio de lo que es la lectura y la literatura.

[Semi-structured interview #1. September 6th, 2023. Q#1 *¿Qué opinión tienes de los libros ilustrados?*]

They spend more time observing the picture book presented, than the text we read in the previous class, which only had written content. Thus, they rather read text with images that facilitates the comprehension than just writing texts.

**S#3:** Bueno, yo pienso que los libros ilustrados son una buena forma de saber como vocabulario y es una manera más didáctica y más fácil de aprender. Y pues más que todo cuando son así, cortos, e ilustrados porque, si nos ponen un texto muy largo, pues ya es como medio difícil de comprender y nos puede llegar a aburrir porque no entenderíamos todo.

[Semi-structured interview #3. September 6th, 2023. Q#1 *¿Qué opinión tienes de los libros ilustrados?*]

**S#2:** como todos los libros han sido con ilustraciones, siento que como que me llama más la atención y me gusta como más leer y aprender lo que están diciendo, tanto en inglés como en español.

[Semi-structured interview #2. September 6th, 2023. Q#5 *¿Crees que tu relación con la lectura ha mejorado?*]

This class was very interactive, the activities that were carried out while we read the book made all the students connected with the reading, the images, and the teacher.

[Field notes #3. May 17th, 2023]

It is evident how participation and cooperative work increased in the classroom with the integration of PB. Furthermore, it should be noted that this didactic sequence attempted to encompass the whole linguistic skills. Consequently, the active participation observed in both the comprehension of readings and the other activities implies a strong degree of motivation.

After this, we read the real story, and because of the vocabulary we have worked on, it was easier for them to understand the story, which was 85% similar to all the ones they themselves had written before. They all seemed very motivated when reading the story to know how much they had gotten it right in their writing.

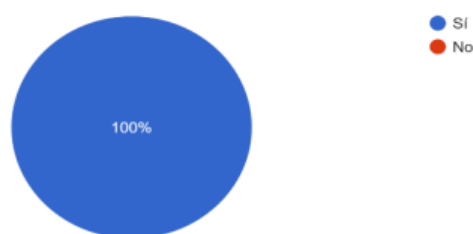
[Field note #4. August 23rd, 2023]

**S#4:** yo siento que es una manera de aprender, la cual es más divertida, nos puede enseñar a escribir, a leer, mejorar e incluso la pronunciación porque la profe nos pone a leer en voz alta. Y a entender, a entender pues como vemos cada imagen reflejada en el libro para descifrar lo que dice. Y también siento que cada libro lleva como una enseñanza, la cual nos impulsa a ser mejores.

[Semi-structured interview #4. September 6th, 2023. Q#1 *¿Qué opinión tienes de los picture books?*]

Lastly, the survey results can also provide evidence of the warm embrace of picture books with social content by students. This substantiates the role of picture books as motivational bridge builders, as they facilitate the path towards comprehension through the integration of text and images.

¿Te sientes más motivada para buscar información adicional sobre temas sociales después de leer estos picture books?  
12 respuestas



[Questionnaire #2. September 13th, 2023]

¿Qué crees que te han aportado estos Picture books que hemos leído?

- Me han aportado vocabulario sobre temas sociales y sobre lo que hay en el mundo.
- Me han generado curiosidad sobre el mundo.
- He aprendido más palabras en inglés, y siento que me están preparando para textos más largos.

[Questionnaire #2. September 13th, 2023.]

**S#1:** El aspecto de la clase que más me ha gustado y siento que es el más favorable para todas son las imágenes. Creo que muchas aquí tenemos memoria fotográfica y es una buena manera de aprender y

empezar a leer en inglés.

[Semi-structured interview #1. September 6th, 2023. Q#4 *¿Qué aspectos de las clases te han gustado y qué aspectos crees que podrían mejorarse de las clases?*]

**Enhancing participation and hearing new voices.** Motivation may manifest in a comfortable environment where students feel agreeable participating, devoid of anxiety or stress, as emphasized by Krashen, as these factors can indeed impact motivation.

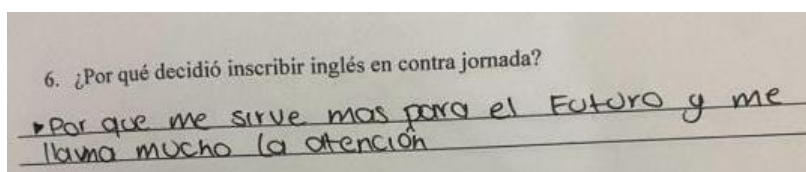
In the following collected data, it will show the process of students' participation throughout the didactic sequence.

When the first observations were made this was a recurrent fragment on the field notes:

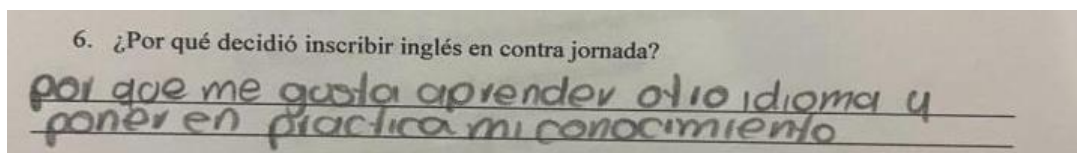
Only three students have an active participation in class.

[Field notes #0. April 4th, 2023]

As stated above, motivation of students can appear in a comfortable environment and the participation can prove the level of motivation in a classroom. In the first survey, girls indicated that they decided to enroll in the English class since they feel a genuine interest and because it is a personal choice for their future, which serves as a strong argument for classroom motivation. However, their actions demonstrate a different reality.



[Questionnaire #1. April 12th, 2023. Student #7]



[Questionnaire #1. April 12th, 2023. Student #4]

The students are very participative in translating words, but to speak in English only three girls participate.

[Field notes #1. April 12th, 2023]

The lack of participation was recurrent in the first observations, however, in accordance with Lopez (2004), when the tension in the classroom decreased and cooperative learning as well as interactive activities were implemented, participation increased to a high level.

For this class all the girls spoke in English. At first, they were a little shy when speaking because they didn't know the vocabulary, but after reading they all began to feel confident about participating.

[Field notes #2. May 5th, 2023]

In this class the students fought to participate in the competition activity where the idea was to have a clear vocabulary to win.

[Field note #4. August 23rd, 2023]

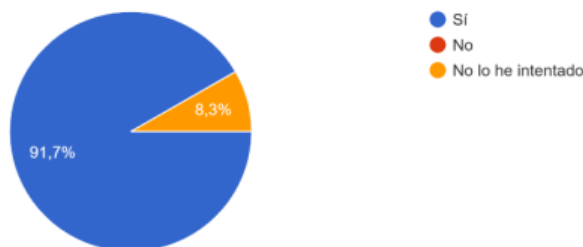
**S#2:** A mí me parece muy chévere que en todas las clases que tenemos es muy dinámica, tiene siempre actividades donde nos gusta participar y entonces eso nos ayuda tanto con lo que nos están enseñando, Como también a recordar las cosas, porque siempre es con imágenes o con libros y cosas así.

[Semi-structured interview #2. September 6th, 2023. Q#4 *¿Qué aspectos de las clases te han gustado y qué aspectos crees que podrían mejorarse de las clases?*]

**S#3:** Bueno, pues lo que más me ha gustado de la clase es que pues siempre la profesora, pues trataba de hacer estos juegos y dinámicas más activas como para que uno trabaje como esa parte y no sea como sólo literalmente escribir. Entonces eso es más que todo lo que a uno le ayuda los juegos y la interacción con los otros. Y más que todo la competencia entre grupos. Los juegos y actividades son lo que más nos ayuda a recordar. Y eso es lo que más me gusta.

[Semi-structured interview #3. September 6th, 2023. Q#4 *¿Qué aspectos de las clases te han gustado y qué aspectos crees que podrían mejorarse de las clases?*]

¿Te sientes más cómoda participando en debates y conversaciones sobre temas sociales después de haber leído estos picture books?  
12 respuestas



[Questionnaire #2. September 13th, 2023]

This demonstrates the evolution of classroom participation. With the introduction of meaningful activities, participation increased significantly. Currently, both the previous active students and the others show a high level of involvement in the classroom. In addition,

they answered in another survey that they felt more comfortable participating after having read the picture books.

In summary, the findings support that the implementation of PB with interactive activities increases motivation. First, picture books prove to be an efficient strategy for first-time foreign language readers. The combination of text and images enhances comprehension and makes the reading more pleasant compared to writing-content text, ultimately fostering motivation among our students. Second, active participation in a comfortable environment along with appealing strategies, diverse activities, and consideration of their comfort, allow students to engage in classroom participation.

### **Category 3: Awakening of reflection and consciousness.**

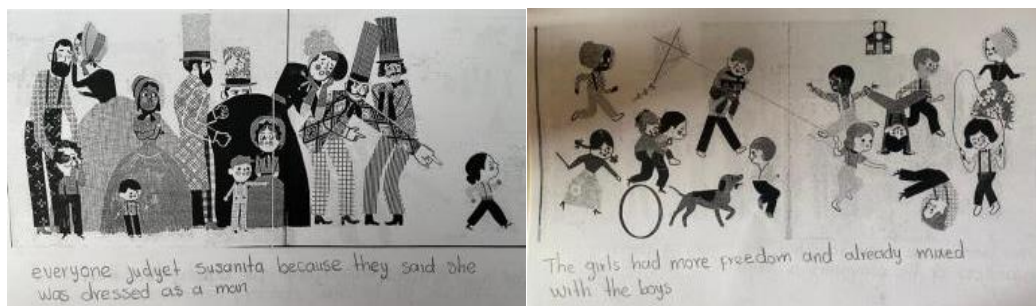
In this category, students' responses, and experiences to the use of picture books with social content will be explored to address the second objective. Firstly, there was clear evidence of an improvement in students' critical perspectives when reading about the social issues presented in the picture books. As Enriquez (2014) points out, picture books with social content serve as catalyst for more profound explorations of the underlying issues. This exploration, facilitated by the English language learning process, significantly enhances students' critical perspectives and their ability to analyze complex social matters.

Furthermore, the impact of these picture books extends beyond global concerns, reaching into the ambit of self-awareness. They encourage students not only to contemplate global societal issues but also to reflect on their personal values and beliefs. The power of these books lies in their ability to unchain introspection, leading students to question their own identities and positions in the world. To support these insights, two subcategories have emerged. The first subcategory, *Nurturing Critical Perspective*, highlights the ways in which students develop a more critical lens when approaching social issues. The second

subcategory, *Questioning Myself*, delves into the transformational journey of students as they begin to scrutinize their own beliefs, values, and roles within the broader societal context.

**Nurturing critical perspective.** Within the framework of reading comprehension levels, there exists the critical level. This level holds significance not only for understanding texts but also for life in general, due to the significance of reading in our life (Goodman, 1986). The strategy employed to promote the critical literacy involved the use of picture books with social content, complemented by activities designed to cultivate critical perspectives.

As soon as the first picture book was introduced, the activities focused on critical perspectives were also implemented. Keeping this in mind, throughout the entire implementation, there was a dedicated space for conducting these activities. Here are some excerpts from the students' activities during the reading of the picture book “Mary Wears What She Wants”. In the following activity, they had to write the story based on the images. It was evident through their writing that this activity marked a first step in shaping a critical perspective, drawing from their observations and social knowledge.



[Artifact #17. Second cycle: August 23rd, 2023. group 2.] [Artifact #23. Second cycle: August 23rd, 2023. group 2.]

The girls could empathize with the main character of the story as they thought about the past, and how the society were with women, and how in the present still exist discrimination against women.

[Field notes #7. August 23rd, 2023]

**S#1:** Siento que el libro que más me ha gustado es el de Mary, porque ha sido un libro, el cual nos ha impulsado a tener otra perspectiva de la sociedad en base a las mujeres.

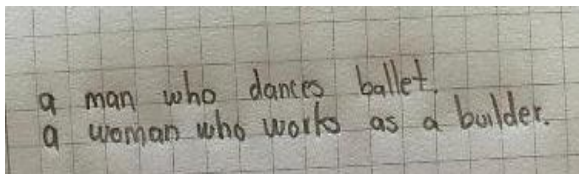
[Semi-structured interview #1. September 6th, 2023. Q#3 *¿Cuál es el picture book que más te ha gustado?*]

**S#4:** A mí El libro que más me gustó fue el de Mary, porque la verdad siento que nos mostraba como antes los hombres o las personas decían cómo tenían que ser las mujeres, que solamente pueden usar faldas que sólo sirven para la cocina. Entonces siento que ella nos mostró cómo el cambio que ella en la sociedad y pues la verdad, siento que este libro le puede ayudar a algunas mujeres ahorita en esta época, que se quedan aun así en ese mundo.

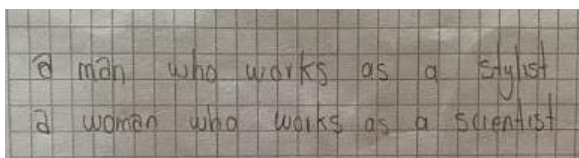
[Semi-structured interview #4. September 6th, 2023. Q#3 *¿Cuál es el picture book que más te ha gustado?*]

Following the students' engagement with "Mary Wears What She Wants" and their initial critical perspectives, it is evident that picture books served as a catalyst for deeper reflection. Thanks to the incorporation of picture books and activities related to them, holistic learning is evident. This approach not only focuses on teaching English language skills but also fosters critical thinking. Through the implementation of these activities, students can acquire a lens through which they can view the world from a more critical perspective. This not only aids in improving their reading comprehension and academic performance but also manifests in their personal development as critical thinkers and in their decisions as global citizens.

Here was an activity related to the picture book "10,000 Dresses". In this activity, they were tasked with composing two sentences that challenged social stereotypes based on gender roles.



[Artifact #10. Second cycle: September 9th, 2023. Student #8.]



[Artifact #11. Second cycle: September 9th, 2023. Student #3.]

After that activity, each student wrote two more sentences, and we discussed it. We asked ourselves how many women drivers we knew, or how many men were working as babysitters or working in a kindergarten, and with this we reflected on these stereotypes that we must break.

[Field notes #7. September 20th, 2023. Lines 20-24.]

**S#1:** Creo que leer cualquier tipo de libro o cualquier tipo de ilustración, hace que tengas un mundo

más amplio de lo que es la literatura y eso ayuda muchísimo a ser una persona más pensante, más creativa.

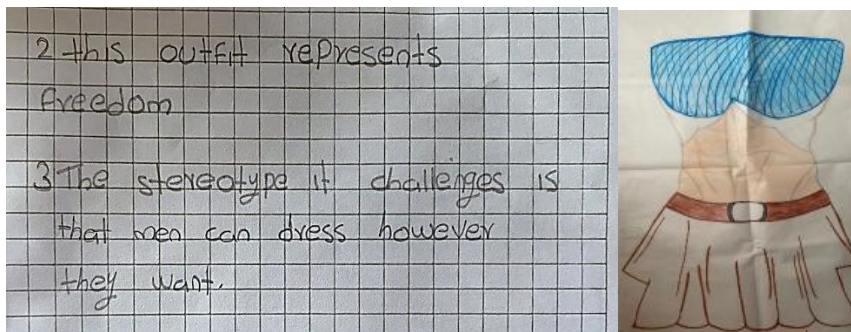
[Semi-structured interview #1. September 6th, 2023. Q#5 *¿Crees que tu relación con la lectura ha mejorado?*]

**S#4:** Y también siento que cada libro lleva como una enseñanza, la cual nos impulsa a ser mejores.

[Semi-structured interview #4. September 6th, 2023. Q#1 *¿Qué opinión tienes de los libros ilustrados?*]

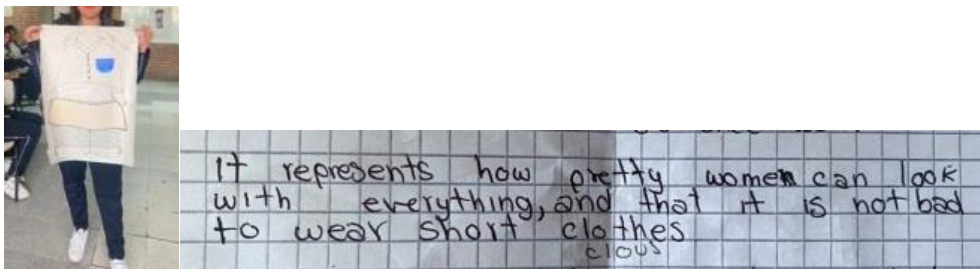
And here are some excerpts from the activity where students were tasked with

creating an outfit that challenges stereotypes. They wrote about what represents their design.



[Artifact #25. Third cycle: October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Student #5 and 8.] [Artifact #27. Third cycle:

October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Student 5 and 8]



[Artifact #29. Third cycle: October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Student 3 and 9] [Artifact #24. Third cycle: October

18<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Student #3 and 9.]

As observed here, these students designed numerous contemporary societal stereotypes in their designs. Many of them expressed frustration over street harassment when wearing short clothing, hence their creations were oriented towards aspects closely tied to their lives. This illustrates the cultivation of critical thinking, where initial observation and analysis of the picture books were followed by peer discussions, culminating in the students' independent critical perspectives.



¿Puedes mencionar un picture book que hayas leído y que te haya hecho pensar mucho sobre un tema social? (Te recuerdo los libros que hemos le...cool, Mary wears what she wants, 10000 dresses)  
12 respuestas



Furthermore, in the last survey, students were asked about their opinion on the use of picture books in the following way: *Can you mention a picture book that you have read and that made you think a lot about a social issue?* and within the responses all the picture books were mentioned in students' responses.

[Questionnaire #2. September 13th, 2023]

This suggests that all the picture books were wisely selected as they resonated with the students. In response to another survey question about whether they felt they understood social issues better after reading these picture books, everyone responded affirmatively, and some provided reasons behind their answers. We collected their responses as follows:

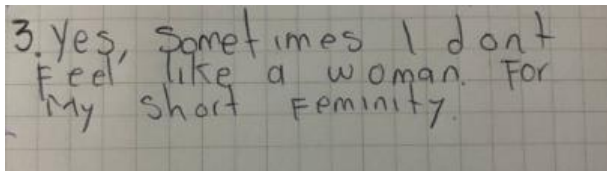
- sí porque son temas en los qué hay que darle visibilidad
- Si, ya que me ayudó tanto a mi inglés como a saber más sobre las diferentes cuestiones sociales que hay en el mundo.
- Si, por qué me ha hecho entender como la sociedad piensa sobre las mujeres y nos subestiman al momento de hacer cosas
- Si, por que me enseñaron cosas como aceptar a los demás y a mí misma
- Emm sí, porque la mayoría de estos libros tratan sobre problemas sociales que hay en el día y nos muestra que siendo diferentes somos iguales y merecemos lo mismo que todos
- Si, porque los libros tratan sobre esos temas y dejan reflexiones interesantes

[Questionnaire #2. September 13th, 2023]

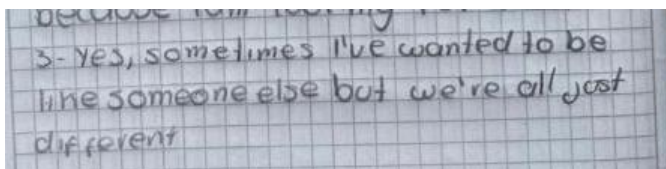
Thus, the unanimous affirmative responses regarding the enhancement of their understanding of social issues, accompanied by their thoughtful explanations, underline the significant impact of this pedagogical approach in fostering critical literacy and social awareness.

The incorporation of picture books with social content and related activities in the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) has proven to be an effective strategy to encourage critical literacy in students. This approach not only improves reading comprehension but also sensitizes students to social issues, promoting empathy and preparing them as thoughtful and aware global citizens.

**Questioning myself.** Picture books with social content not only promote critical literacy but also encourage individual self-reflection. It is essential to emphasize the need for critical engagement with the world, including our own role within it (Freire, 1970). Activities were designed to encourage self-critical reflection, and as a result, these reflections about themselves were facilitated to some extent with the help of the picture books. To illustrate this, here we present the responses of two students regarding the first picture book, “I’m a Unicorn”, which delved into the theme of identity.



[Artifact #4. First cycle: April 26th, 2023. Student #5.]



[Artifact #3. First cycle: April 26th, 2023. Student #7.]

**S#2:** Pues el que más me gustó a mí fue el del unicornio (...) Y me hizo cuestionarme sobre mi identidad, pensando en la identidad de las personas trans.

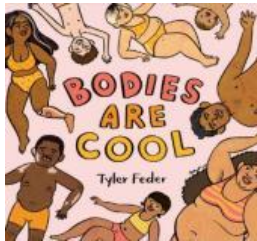
[Semi-structured interview #2. September 6th, 2023. Q#3 *¿Cuál es el picture book que más te ha gustado?*]

All of these activities with the picture books aimed to delve into the students' lives, encouraging them to engage in introspection individually. Consequently, when we read

“Bodies Are Cool” a sense of curiosity emerged, particularly in response to the striking images of diverse bodies. The objective of this book was to emphasize that there is no “perfect” body and that all bodies are valid.

What intrigued the students the most were the images, as they portrayed a diverse range of bodies not commonly depicted in books. These images elicited a sense of curiosity and intrigue among the students, as none of the bodies in the picture book conformed to the notion of a 'perfect' body.

[Field notes #3. May 17th, 2023.]



(Feder, 2021, p1)

*The front page is included to illustrate the appearance of the images in the picture book.*

Finally, in the last survey, students were asked if they had experienced moments where they questioned themselves after reading a picture book related to social issues. The responses varied, with some students answering affirmatively and providing their reasons, while others simply responded with 'no'.

- Si, con el de los cuerpos
- Si, con el de Mary y el de los cuerpos, en el de Mary porque siempre una piensa en la opinión de la gente y deja de hacer lo que a uno le gusta, y ps ahí nos dan un claro ejemplo de que si lo queremos lo hacemos porque no hay nada de malo es ser diferente
- Si, si yo si sirvo para algo que me gusta en el futuro
- Si, me he preguntado que hubiera pasado si la mujer que cambio la sociedad y la manera de pensar no hubiera existido como sería la época de ahora en día
- Si cuando leí el del unicornio reflexioné y entendí que me debo aceptar como soy
- La verdad no
- Si, sobre la percepción de mi imagen
- Sobre mi no

[Questionnaire #2. September 13th, 2023]

In summary, the use of picture books with social content has proven to be a powerful tool to promote both critical thinking about the world and self-reflection. These activities encouraged students to engage in introspection and question not only social issues but also their own identities and perceptions.

#### **Category 4: Students' positive attitude towards reading in EFL.**

The current state of reading in Colombia reflects a lower-than-desired level of engagement. However, in today's globalized world, reading is an indispensable skill. Consequently, it becomes imperative to explore diverse strategies to bring students closer to the world of reading. The strategy employed in this study involved introducing picture books that were slightly above the students' current proficiency level, guided by the principles proposed by Krashen and Terrel (1983), which emphasize the importance of understanding the message for effective language acquisition.

The students' positive attitude toward reading was notably perceived through their behavior within the classroom environment. This positive disposition was evident in their active participation and the quality of work produced during various reading related tasks. Consequently, it became evident that the incorporation of picture books, had a perceptible impact in promoting a more favorable attitude towards reading.

In that order, two distinct subcategories have arisen. The first subcategory, *Increasing their literary connection*, highlights how students made a stronger connection to the world of literature. The second subcategory, *Creativity and quality in tasks based on the readings*, delves into the improvements in creativity and quality of work resulting from these new reading experiences.

##### **Increasing their literary connection.**

Compelling students to read materials that fail to evoke their interest is unlikely to foster a genuine passion for reading. Therefore, it becomes imperative to introduce reading materials that resonate with students on a personal level. Reading is a mean of establishing an emotional connection, and our students are more likely to make this connection with texts

that they can easily understand and that deeply engage them as emphasized by Reyes and Jiménez (2020).

Based on the data analysis, these were our findings regarding the students' literary connection:

**S#1:** Sí, siento que mi relación con la lectura ha mejorado. Creo que leer cualquier tipo de libro o cualquier tipo de ilustración, hace que tengas un mundo más amplio de lo que es la literatura y eso ayuda muchísimo a ser una persona más pensante, más creativa. Entonces sí.

[Semi-structured interview #1. September 6th, 2023. Q#5 *¿Crees que tu relación con la lectura ha mejorado?*]

**S#2:** Yo también porque pues, como todos los libros han sido con ilustraciones, siento que como que me llama más la atención y me gusta como más leer y aprender lo que están diciendo, tanto en inglés como en español.

[Semi-structured interview #2. September 6th, 2023. Q#5 *¿Crees que tu relación con la lectura ha mejorado?*]

**S#3:** Siento que sí. O sea, los picture books también ayudan a crean como un hábito. Entonces cada vez que te gusta un libro y ves que, pues que te es más fácil comprenderlo, pues te genera como el habito de querer leer más, entonces es una gran ayuda como para empezar a tener hábitos de lectura en inglés más que todo, pues. En lo que estamos acá.

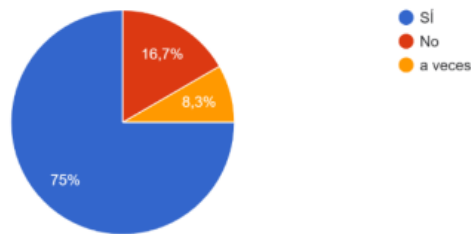
[Semi-structured interview #3. September 6th, 2023. Q#5 *¿Crees que tu relación con la lectura ha mejorado?*]

**S#4:** Eh, pues a mí, pues a mí ya me gusta leer, pero pues ya había perdido el hábito más o menos con el tiempo, y ya que volvimos a leer estos libros, la verdad me hicieron otra vez que me gustara mucho la lectura, ya que, pues nos enseñan muchas cosas, entonces nos pueden hacer más sabios. Ah y pues nos ayudarán en cosas del futuro en carrera, cosas así entonces siento que leer es muy bueno para nosotras, ya sea en español o en inglés.

[Semi-structured interview #4. September 6th, 2023. Q#5 *¿Crees que tu relación con la lectura ha mejorado?*]

In the interviews and in the following figure of the last survey it is evident that students feel an increase in their interest in reading.

¿Lees de manera más frecuente desde que comenzaste a leer picture books?  
12 respuestas



[Questionnaire #2. September 13th, 2023]

Furthermore, during the initial sessions, their participation was not as active as it was in the final sessions. The following excerpts from the field notes are presented in chronological order to illustrate the contrast in students' engagement during the intervention period.

The interaction was always given with respect. Many students constantly use their cell phones. The students are very participative in translating words, but to speak in English only three girls participate.  
[Field notes #1. April 12th, 2023]

However, when they encountered something, they didn't understand, they tended to remain silent and indicate that they had comprehended it, rather than expressing their confusion.  
[Field notes #2. May 17th, 2023]

Interactions are progressively becoming more confident and positive. Students are increasingly active participants, and if they encounter something they did not understand, they now feel comfortable responding with a simple "no," indicating their willingness to receive further clarification.  
[Field notes #4. August 8th, 2023]

The interaction was quite positive, as they consistently exhibited a positive attitude towards my activities. They displayed a high level of readiness and commitment in all of the tasks, reflecting their strong willingness to participate actively.  
[Field notes #5. August 30th, 2023]

The students collaborated effectively as teams. Each team demonstrated active participation. Furthermore, when they were divided into pairs, all students exhibited a high level of concentration during the drawing activity.  
[Field notes #7. October 10th, 2023]



Therefore, as evidenced in the survey, most of the students have become more inclined towards reading after engaging with picture books. The intention behind this was not only to draw the students closer to reading in English as a Foreign Language but to reading in general, fostering a critical perspective of the world and themselves.

In summary, discovering the appropriate strategy to engage students in reading must consider the students' individual contexts. The utilization of picture books with social content, combined with activities developed based on the principles of the natural approach, demonstrates a rise in students' attachment to reading. Consequently, an enhancement in their literary connection has become apparent.

**Creativity and quality in tasks based on the readings.** Creativity is a skill that can be developed and enhanced to high levels. When designing the activities, one crucial aspect considered was to encourage students to think and create for themselves. Many of the students have expressed that, due to the various activities we conducted, they were able to utilize their creativity. This creativity and dedication to the tasks have resulted in a commitment to delivering high-quality work. From the same perspective as Krashen and Terrel (1983), these activities have fostered an environment where students feel positive about acquiring reading skills in a foreign language. This is what the data analysis reveals.

**S#2:** Me gustan las actividades que propone la profe porque nos permite mejorar en inglés y ponerle nuestra parte creativa a las cosas. [Semi-structured interview #2. September 6th, 2023.

**Q#4** *¿Qué aspectos de las clases te han gustado y qué aspectos crees que podrían mejorarse de las clases?]*

**S#3:** Me gusta que no solo se trata de escribir, sino que hay actividades más dinámicas, variadas que nos permiten hacer más que lo que siempre se hace en clases como solo escribir.

[Semi-structured interview #3. September 6th, 2023. Q#4 *¿Qué aspectos de las clases te han gustado y qué aspectos crees que podrían mejorarse de las clases?*]

**S#4:** Lo que más me gusta de las clases es que en cada cosa que nos enseña la profesora nos deja una actividad Entonces eso nos ayuda a recordar más y a hacer más divertidas las clases.

[Semi-structured interview #4. September 6th, 2023. Q#4 *¿Qué aspectos de las clases te han gustado y qué aspectos crees que podrían mejorarse de las clases?*]

**S#1:** hace que tengas un mundo más amplio de lo que es la literatura y eso ayuda muchísimo a ser una persona más pensante, más creativa.

[Semi-structured interview #1. September 6th, 2023. Q#1 *¿qué opinión tienes de los libros ilustrados?*]

These interviews suggests that the approach taken in the classroom has been effective in fostering a positive and engaging learning environment. Students appreciate the diversity of activities and how they contribute to their language and creative development. Consequently, the data analysis underscores the success of using picture books with social content and interactive activities in enhancing students' English language skills and promoting a positive attitude toward learning.

Moreover, the inclusion of excerpts from classroom activities, including field notes and examples of students' work, serves to highlight the quality and depth of their engagement. These excerpts provide a clear demonstration of the tangible outcomes of their efforts, from drawings to well-crafted written pieces, as well as the development of their ideas. It is through these practical examples that we witness their active participation and how the classes has translated into meaningful and creative student contributions.

The class began with a warm-up in which they said with their words what a unicorn is, then each one had to draw a unicorn in their notebook. They all seemed very willing in this activity; they made an effort making the drawings so it can be inferred that most girls like this kind of activities.

[Field note #1. April 12th, 2023]



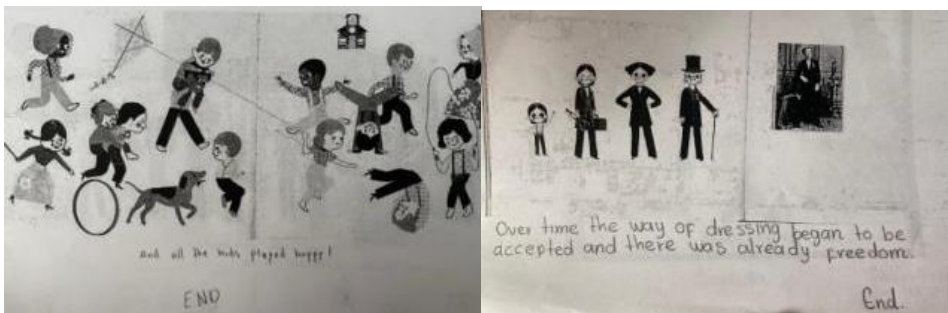


[Artifact #5. First cycle: April 26th, 2023. Student #4.] [Artifact #6. First cycle: April 26th, 2023.

Student #8.]

After this activity, each group received a book with only images, without accompanying text. their task was to write the story of the book. During this phase, all students showed deep concentration as they struggled to understand the images. Once they grasped the visual narrative, they proceeded to write. Most students invested substantial effort in writing their stories, giving the impression of a book written entirely by them. Their dedication was evident in the fact that they wrote on every page of the book.

[Field note #4. August 23rd, 2023]



[Artifact #?. Second cycle: August 23rd, 2023. group 2.] [Artifact #?. Second cycle: August 23rd, 2023. group 4.]

All of their ideas were highly creative, and many of their outfits were linked to the harassment they encounter when wearing revealing clothing. (...) The quality of the drawings presented reflects a significant effort to deliver high-quality work.

[Field notes #7. October 18th, 2023]



[Artifact #26. Third cycle: October 18th, 2023. Student 6 and 14]



[Artifact #27. Third cycle: October 18th, 2023. Student 5 and 8] [Artifact #29. Third cycle: October 18th, 2023. Student 3 and 9]



[Artifact #28. Third cycle: October 18th, 2023. Student 4 and 7]

Creative ideas and student-designed outfits further emphasize their imaginative and inventive approach to tasks. Many of these outfits were inspired by students' personal experiences of street harassment, highlighting the emotional and practical significance of these activities. The quality of their artwork shows the substantial effort they put into producing high-quality work, underscoring their commitment to the learning process.

In summary, the students' responses revealed two key aspects: firstly, their heightened awareness and reflection regarding the use of picture books, and secondly, the positive attitude they displayed during the implementation of the didactic sequence.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

In this chapter, we conclude our research journey by presenting the conclusions drawn from the findings of the study. We reflect on the implications these findings have for educational context and practice. Additionally, we acknowledge the limitations of the study, providing insights into the scope and boundaries of our research. Finally, we present possible avenues for future research.

#### **Conclusions.**

This action research study aimed to analyze the impact of using picture books with social content to improve reading comprehension through a natural approach among tenth-grade students in EFL. Two objectives emerged from this study. The first one was to explore the roles of picture books with social content in the development of reading comprehension in EFL following the principles of the natural approach. The second objective was to identify students' responses to the use of picture books with social content to promote critical reading in EFL.

Regarding the first objective, the data revealed that picture books with social content played dual essential roles in enhancing reading comprehension in the context of EFL: a supportive role and a motivational role. For the supportive role, the data collected clearly demonstrated that employing picture books with social content, in conjunction with activities designed in accordance with the principles of the natural approach, significantly contributed to the improvement of students' reading comprehension, as well as their proficiency in

linguistic skills, such as writing and speaking. As a result of consistent exposure to picture books with social content and the corresponding activities developed under the principles of the natural approach, the data revealed an *improvement in reading comprehension skills*. Consequently, the data also indicated an *enhancement in speaking and writing skills*. This improvement was a direct result of the focus of the sessions on first acquiring input from the picture books and subsequently producing output to develop speaking and writing proficiency.

As for the motivational role, the information gathered showed that the utilization of picture books with social content did boost students' motivation, as they not only comprehended the readings but also actively participated in class. The comprehensible input through picture books used to approach students to reading serve as a *builder to the path to understanding*, thanks to their simple vocabulary and visual aids. Moreover, picture books contributed to *enhance an active participation* in the classroom, due to the dynamic activities conducted during the classes.

In response to the second objective, the information collected reveal two key points in the tenth graders' responses towards the use of picture books with social content in EFL reading. First the *awakening of reflection and consciousness*, their critical perspectives expanded, not only in their inquiries about the world but also in their self-reflection; and second *students' positive attitude in reading*, as students' creativity and quality of their tasks underscored their enthusiastic approach to reading in EFL, and most of the girls demonstrated an increased literary connection.

In conclusion, it is essential to emphasize the successful achievement of the research objective, which significantly enhanced the students' reading comprehension. The importance of reading in individuals' lives is well-established, making it a vital consideration for language teachers who should ensure its inclusion in the curriculum. The study has

underscored the potent impact that books have on language skills acquisition. Through the utilization of books, our students can enhance all their linguistic abilities. This study serves as evidence that picture books serve as a valuable gateway to foster students' interest in reading, laying the foundation for them to delve into more complex texts and further develop their critical perspectives.

### **Implications.**

The analysis of the research results reveals the implications that span across different aspects such as: the educational institution, the study's participants, and our roles as preservice teachers and novice researchers.

Firstly, for educational institutions, integrating reading in EFL as a core strategy involves some implications. First, the curriculum must support reading in EFL and remain adaptable, allowing the incorporation of picture books with social content into the learning process. Furthermore, institutions should invest in educational technology, such as televisions, projectors, and Internet access to facilitate virtual screening of these picture books when necessary. Additionally, it would also be beneficial for institutions to consider investing in expanding their collection of picture books, thus enriching their library resources.

Secondly, there are significant implications for the participants involved in this research study. The students must understand the relevance of reading to their future academic activities, recognizing that the ability to understand and communicate in a foreign language is essential in our globalized world. It is vital to be willing to interact with reading materials and participate in critical discussions and analysis. Also, it is imperative that students transcend mere memorization and attempt to achieve a deeper understanding of the topics and ideas presented in the picture books. Reading is not only a linguistic skill, it is a gateway to broader knowledge and critical thinking.

Following that, educators are essential agents in this transformative process. Firstly, they must understand and believe that through the development of reading skills, students can improve all other language skills, they must have a clear understanding of the importance of reading. Additionally, teachers should invest time in selecting picture books that are slightly above their students' current proficiency levels and exploring topics of genuine interest to students, that is to say, teachers must read a lot of picture books to choose the best ones. Competency in the “natural approach” is crucial for creating interactive activities during the pre-reading, reading, and post-reading phases of picture book lessons. Additionally, teachers must acquire the ability to design activities and discussion guides that encourage critical understanding and reflective thinking among students. Continuous training in these methodologies is essential to have a successful implementation in the classroom.

Finally, as a pre-service teacher and novice researcher, this study has significant implications for my professional growth. It required me to invest time and effort in understanding and applying the “natural approach” and “critical literacy” effectively. It also required me time to observe the students’ needs in order to better understand how to implement reading in that context. Furthermore, this study emphasized to me the importance of continuous learning and innovation in my teaching practices. I have learned that fostering meaningful learning extends beyond the classroom and continued professional development is vital to our success as educators and researchers.

In conclusion, the integration of picture books with social content within EFL education shows a great promise for improving reading comprehension and fostering critical literacy skills among students. Realizing this potential requires collaborative efforts from educational institutions, committed teachers, and motivated students.

### **Limitations.**

The implementation of this project revealed some limitations, which presented challenges to its achievement. One primary limitation emerged from the students' exhaustion. When starting the implementation, it became evident that the girls arrived for “contra-jornada” fatigued from their prior school classes. After six hours of regular classes, they were required to attend this additional class, often extending their study time to 12 hours in total at the school. As a result, many students frequently arrived fatigued and drowsy, and this had an impact on the progress of the class. For that reason, the sessions had to be conducted in a very dynamic and active manner.

Another notable limitation was the insufficient institutional resources to support foreign language learning. In the first cycle of the project, students were asked to use their personal technological devices (smartphones) to access picture books in an attempt to minimize paper consumption. However, a significant limitation arose due to the lack of Internet access, which required me as a pre-service teacher to share my Internet. It should be noted that this was not viewed very favorably by the headteacher. Nevertheless, this was all due to the absence of essential educational technology, such as televisions or projectors, which made the presentation of digital materials difficult, requiring the printing of numerous sheets to ensure equitable access during the second and third cycle of the project.

And the final challenge was related to the available time to implement the three project cycles. The extensive program of extracurricular activities planned over "contra-jornada" posed a significant challenge in ensuring the necessary time to finish the implementation of the project. However, the students' active participation and collaboration played a vital role in facilitating the progress and success of the project.

### **Further Research.**

This study achieved the two primary objectives: exploring the roles of picture books with social content in the development of reading comprehension in EFL following the

principles of the natural approach and identifying students' responses to the use of such picture books. The intervention focused on reading and demonstrated improvements in reading comprehension, as well as an enhancement in speaking and writing skills. I am aware of the limited inclusion of listening activities in my implementation. Therefore, it would be enriching to include more of these activities and explore the long-term effects of these approaches.

This project was developed with teenagers, for that reason, it would also be interesting to apply this method to children. Our society often underestimates kids, but by using picture books to address social issues from a very young age, it's possible that we can raise awareness among our students and start improving their reading comprehension skills.

Despite the availability of numerous picture books with social content on the internet, finding picture books with Colombian social content in the English language is challenging. Translating these picture books or creating new ones related to our social issues would be a substantial and rewarding endeavor for Colombian students. This effort would not only enhance their English language skills but also foster their critical literacy abilities and deepen their awareness of our country.



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## ANNEXES

### Annex 1 – Consent formats

### Annex 2 – Students' questionnaire

  
UNIVERSIDAD PEDAGÓGICA NACIONAL

Universidad Pedagógica Nacional de Colombia  
Liceo Femenino Mercedes Nariño  
Diagnóstico para estudiantes del grado noveno

La siguiente encuesta busca conocer su acercamiento al inglés tanto en el aula como en su vida, para su mayor comodidad se responderá de manera anónima. Gracias por su honestidad.

1. ¿Le gusta el inglés?  
 Sí  
 No

2. ¿Practica inglés en casa?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sí				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No				

3. ¿Le gusta leer?  
 Sí  
 No

4. ¿Ha leído libros o historias en inglés?  
 Sí  
 No

5. Según su respuesta anterior, ¿le gustó leer en inglés?  
 Sí  
 No

¿Por qué?  
a veces no entiendo lo que significa y si me gusta por que desarrollo mi vocabulario

6. ¿Por qué decidió inscribir inglés en contra jornada?  
por que me gusta aprender otro idioma y poner en practica mi conocimiento

7. ¿Dónde prefiere las clases de inglés?

- Aula regular
- Contrajornada

¿por qué?

por que en aula regular no tenemos profesor y no puedo practicar


8. ¿Cómo cree que está su nivel de inglés en este momento? marque con una X

1	2	3 X	4	5
Malo	Indiferente	Bueno	Muy bueno	Excelente

9. ¿Cuáles géneros literarios le gustaría leer en inglés?

- Terror
- Romance
- Drama
- Misterio
- Fantasía/ciencia ficción
- Otra, ¿cuál? \_\_\_\_\_

Annex 3- Diagnostic test

  
UNIVERSIDAD PEDAGÓGICA NACIONAL

1. Read and answer the questions.

**My morning routine**

My name is Bob. Each day I drive my kids to school. My daughter goes to a school that's far from our house. It takes 30 minutes to get there. Then I drive my son to his school. It's close to my job. My daughter is in the sixth grade and my son is in the second. They are both good students. My daughter usually sings her favorite songs while I drive. My son usually sleeps.

I arrive at the office at 8:30 AM. I say good morning to all my workmates then I get a big cup of hot coffee. I turn on my computer and read my email. Some days I have a lot to read. Soon I need another cup of coffee.

**Now answer the questions**

1) Which two places are near each other?

- A. home and office
- B. son's school and office
- C. home and daughter's school
- D. daughter's school and office

2) Which child is older?

- A. daughter
- B. son
- C. same age
- D. not sure

3) What happens in the car each morning?

- A. father and daughter tell jokes
- B. son and daughter talk
- C. son sleeps and daughter sings
- D. daughter reads and son sleeps

4) What happens at the office?

- A. workmates give Bob a big cup of hot coffee
- B. Bob gives all his workmates a big cup of hot coffee
- C. Bob gets a big cup of hot coffee
- D. all of the above

5) When does Bob get his second cup of coffee?

- A. after driving the children home
- B. before reading his email
- C. before greeting his coworkers
- D. after reading his email

Tomado de: <https://lingua.com/es/ingles/lectura/morning-routine/>



Annex 4- Field notes

FIELD DIARY N° 1

DATE	17/05/2023
Hour	1:00 pm - 5:00 pm
Subject	English
Grade	Tenth
N° Students	17
Theme	Reading "I'm a unicorn"
Objective	To stimulate critical reflections on diversity and cultivate an appreciation for individuality by using picture books as a medium.
Teacher	Miguel Cadena
Pre-service teacher	Andrea Quitiaquez

DESCRIPTIONS	
Development of class - Performed activities	<p>The class began with a warm-up in which they said with their words what a unicorn is, then each one had to draw a unicorn in their notebook. They all seemed very willing in this activity, they made an effort making the drawings so it can be inferred that most girls like to draw.</p> <p>Then they continued reading the picture book "I'm a unicorn" and it was noticeable that the drawings captured his attention more than the words, since his low level of English interrupted a fluent reading, therefore the vocabulary list was written down in the board and an activity was done so that they strengthened that vocabulary and could understand the story.</p> <p>And finally they were asked three questions about reading comprehension and with that it was possible to identify girls with a better level of English than others. In addition, the girls showed a great critical capacity regarding the issue of identity.</p>
Participation - Use of language	<p>The students are very participative in translating words, but to speak in English only three girls participate.</p>
Interactions - teacher- student - student- student	<p>The interaction was always given with respect. Many students constantly use their cell phones.</p>
Evaluation	<p>A reading comprehension with questions: a textual one, an inferential one and a critical one.</p>

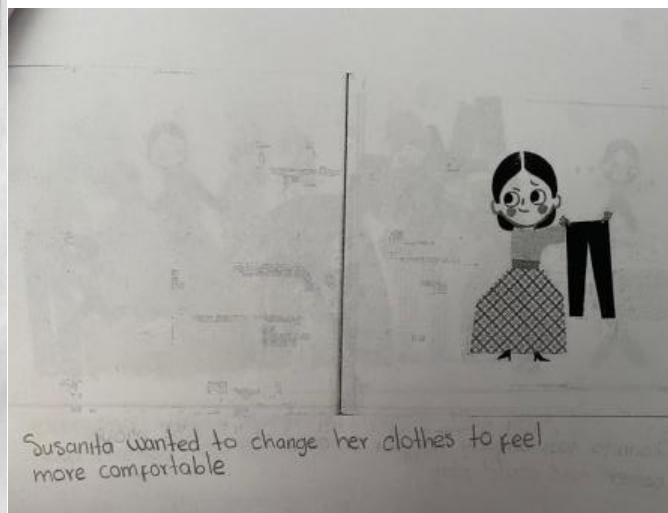


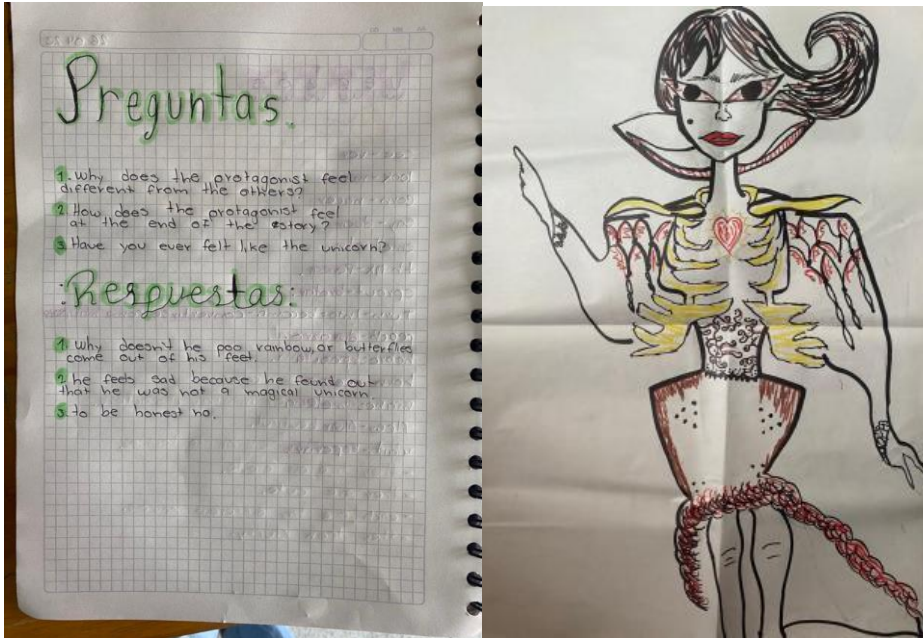
Homework	No
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Inferences	I can infer that the students liked reading but their level of English frustrated them a bit. They tried to understand the story more through its images than through its text. They like the activities to learn vocabulary with lots of games since they are very tired from having been studying all morning.
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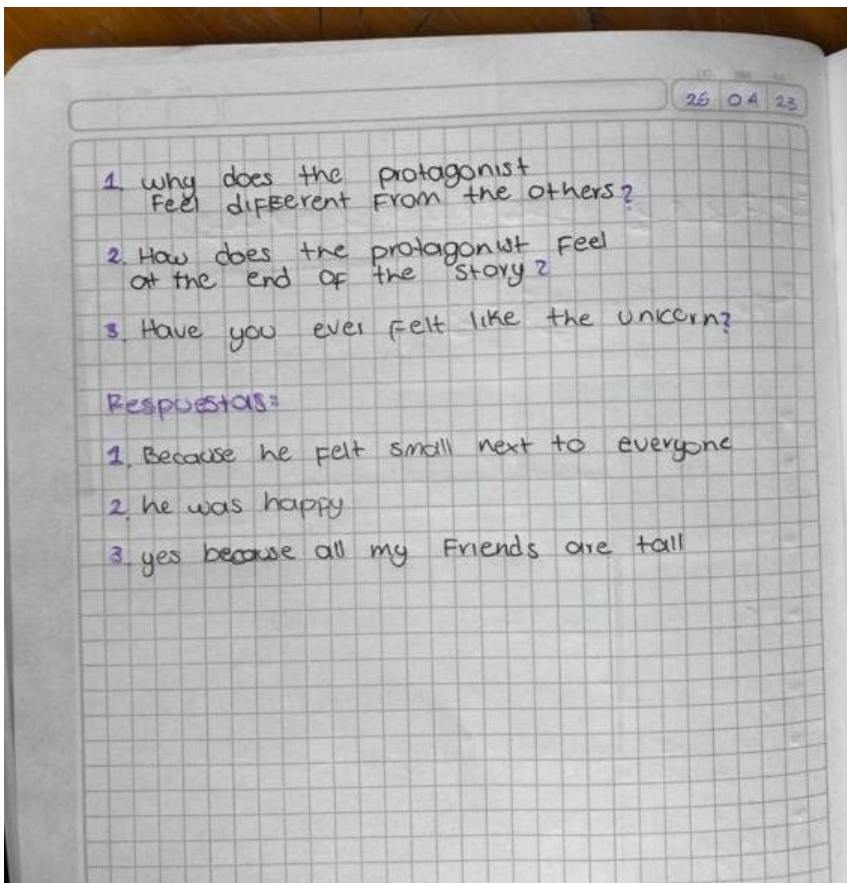
Emerging situations	
Comments	

*Annex 5 -Artifacts*





Annex 6 – Questionnaires (reading comprehension three levels questions).



Annex 7: Interviews

<b>Students' semi-structured interview</b>
<p><b>Interviewer:</b> Andrea Elizabeth Quitiaquez Tupaz <b>Date:</b> September 6th, 2023. <b>School:</b> Liceo Femenino Mercedes Nariño <b>Objective:</b> To know students' viewpoint and insights about the implementation in the second cycle.</p>
<b>Interview</b>
<p><b>1. ¿Qué opinión tienes de los libros ilustrados?</b> <b>S1:</b> Siento que es una manera muy didáctica y creativa para abrirnos a un mundo más amplio de lo que es la lectura y la literatura. Y pues todo eso relacionado con los libros ilustrados.</p> <p><b>2. ¿En cuál habilidad crees o sientes que has mejorado?</b> <b>S1:</b> Siento que he mejorado en la habilidad, la cual retengo las palabras porque antes creo que era un defecto mío que no solía como que aprenderme las palabras de una manera más sencilla, como que me costaba retenerlas, por así decirlo, entonces logro entender con más facilidad lo que las personas me expresan. y siento que me puedo comunicar mejor con el vocabulario que tengo ahora.</p> <p><b>3. ¿Cuál es el picture book que más te ha gustado?</b> <b>S1:</b> Siento que el libro que más me ha gustado es el de Mari, porque ha sido un libro, el cual nos ha impulsado a tener otra perspectiva de la sociedad en base a las mujeres. Y me ha gustado que se sea ilustrado, ya que creo que eso genera más imaginación, una perspectiva más amplia de lo que es la sociedad. Yo creo que sí. Si seguiría leyendo libros así ilustrados.</p> <p><b>4. ¿Qué aspectos de las clases te han gustado y qué aspectos crees que podrían mejorarse de las clases?</b> <b>S1:</b> El aspecto de la clase que más me ha gustado y siento que es el más favorable para todas son las imágenes. Creo que muchas aquí tenemos memoria fotográfica y es una buena manera de aprender y empezar a leer en inglés. y no cambiaré ningún aspecto de la clase. Siento que la clase ya es muy completa. Siento que nuestra profesora ya es bastante preparada. Entonces la clase tal cual está bien.</p> <p><b>5. ¿Crees que tu relación con la lectura ha mejorado?</b> <b>S1:</b> Sí siento que mi relación con la lectura ha mejorado. Creo que leer cualquier tipo de libro o cualquier tipo de ilustración, hace que tengas un mundo más amplio de lo que es la literatura y eso ayuda muchísimo a ser una persona más pensante, más creativa. Entonces sí.</p>

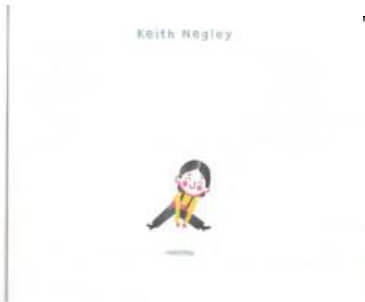
Annex 8- Lesson plan.

Stage	Procedure	Materials	Time
Warm-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For this activity they will think about their favorite piece of clothing, such as a shirt, dress, pants, or shoes.</li> <li>Students will draw their favorite clothing on a paper.</li> <li>They will then write a brief paragraph explaining why they love it, considering factors like comfort, style, memories, or personal significance.</li> <li>After writing, students will share their favorite clothing item and reasons with a partner or in small groups.</li> <li>A brief whole-class discussion will follow, allowing students to share their favorite clothing items and reasons. This is for appreciating the diversity of styles and tastes.</li> </ul>	Picture book: <i>Mary Wears What She Wants</i> by Keith Negley.  Board, markers, pieces of paper (realia).  Picture book sheets.  Flashcards.	10 min
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading</li> </ul>	Visual Story Creation activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The picture book "Mary Wears What She Wants" by Keith Negley will be given to the student without any text on it. (Annex 8)</li> <li>They will be instructed to create a story based on the illustrations they see.</li> <li>In groups of 3 they will write their stories on the picture book sheet.</li> <li>Afterward, selected students will be invited to share their stories and engage in a discussion about the elements they included.</li> <li>The actual story of "Mary Wears What She Wants " will be read aloud to the students. (Annex 9)</li> <li>A comparison will be made between the students' created stories and the original story, highlighting similarities and differences.</li> </ul>		50 min

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Then we will pass to explain the vocabulary about clothes. We will play a competence game with the flashcards in teams of 4 people. Each one of the girls will take a different flashcard and for teams they will try to describe the article of clothing in the flashcard while the other teams try to guess what the garment is. (Annex 10)</li> <li>• A discussion will take place to explore the students' interpretations and reflections, with a focus on identifying aspects they had right or missed in their stories.</li> </ul>		
Reading comprehension	<p>The students will have a paper with these questions.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What happens at the end of the story with the girls?</li> <li>2. Why do you think the girls also make that decision?</li> <li>3. Choose just one question and write the story: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Do you know a similar story in real life?</li> <li>b. Have you experienced something similar to Mary?</li> <li>c. What stereotype have you seen or felt closest to?</li> </ol> </li> </ol>		20 min
Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage in a discussion about the themes and messages of the book "<i>Mary Wears What She Wants</i>" explored in the role-playing activity.</li> </ul> <p>The teacher will explain the research task for the next class.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The task for the next class is in groups, then students have to choose people or groups who challenge stereotypes and promote inclusivity in society in a list made by the teacher. (Annex 10) For the next class they should have read about the achievements and contributions of the group or person they chose.</li> </ul>		5 min

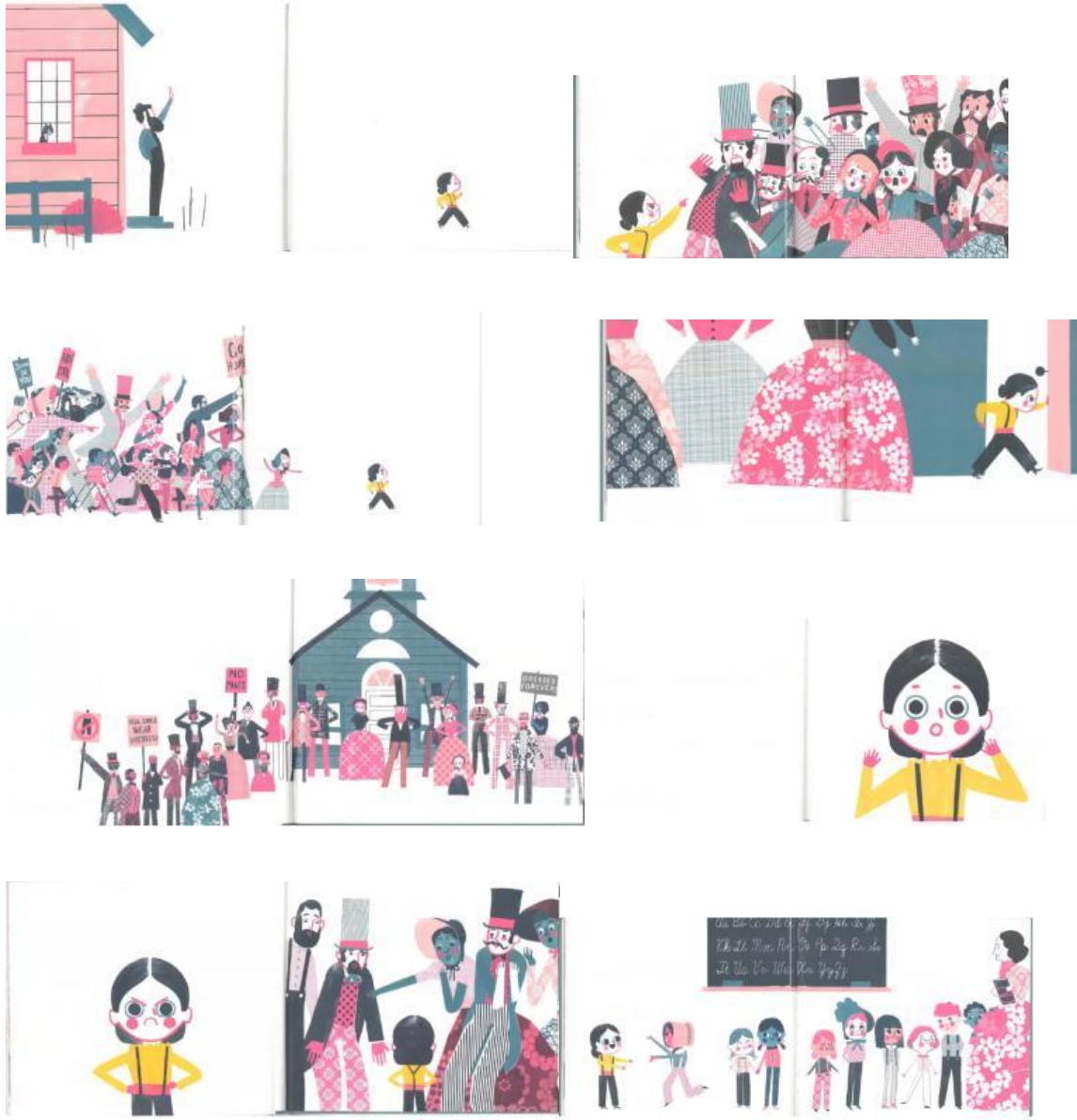
Annex 8- Picture book: *Mary wears what she wants.* (No words for the activity).

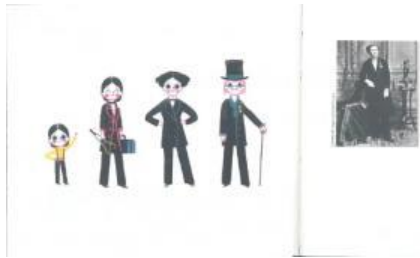












*Annex 10 – Flashcards (own elaboration).*



			Belt	Sunglasses	Uniform	Gloves	Tie	Scarf	T- shirt	Pants/ Trousers	Dress
			Helmet	Necklace	Ring	Boots	Trainers/ Sneakers	High heels	Socks	Shorts	Hat
			Earrings	Watch	Swimsuit	Shoes	Sandals	Flip-flops	Hoodie	Skirt	Jacket
			Pajamas	Bag	Purse	Shirt	Underwear	Cap	Blouse	Coat	Wool hat