

LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: THE USE OF STORYTELLING AND ITS EFFECTS ON GENDER STEREOTYPES

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Abstract

This study focuses on how very young learners can learn the names of different jobs in English that do not have a gender bias. It also aims at finding out whether the words learned carry out gender stereotypes for these very young learners. Three tests were carried out at different times of the study; at the beginning, at the end of the storytelling sessions and a final test four weeks later to be able to identify and analyze the acquisition of vocabulary from the storytelling. The results suggest that storytelling is a useful tool to teach the target language and to break gender stereotypes.

Key words: vocabulary acquisition, storytelling, gender stereotypes

Resum

Aquest estudi es centra en com els alumnes molt joves poden aprendre els noms de diferents oficis en anglès que no tenen un biaix de gènere. També pretén esbrinar si les paraules apreses tenen estereotips de gènere per a aquests aprenents molt joves. Es van realitzar tres proves en diferents moments de l'estudi; al principi, al final de les sessions de l'explicació de la història i una prova final quatre setmanes després per poder identificar i analitzar l'adquisició de vocabulari a partir de la narració. Els resultats suggereixen que la narració de contes és una eina útil per ensenyar la llengua estrangera i trencar els estereotips de gènere.

Paraules clau: adquisició de vocabulari, literatura, estereotips de gènere.

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1. Introduction

The acquisition of the English language in Early Childhood Education is a controversial topic among many professionals. This study deals with the acquisition of the vocabulary of a Foreign Language with a group of 5-year-old preschool learners. The research is based on storytelling, a tool that is very present in Early Childhood Education and that teachers consider important and valuable at such a young age. Moreover, gender stereotypes that children may already have at such a young age on the topic of jobs also wanted to be observed.

The main objectives of this research project were to analyze the acquisition of vocabulary in Early Years and to see whether young learners had already got gender stereotypes when they learnt these words in English. This study analyzes if storytelling is a great tool to introduce vocabulary, promote its acquisition to children and break gender stereotypes. The sessions were developed around a story, a useful tool for teaching vocabulary to young students.

The reason why this topic was chosen was because the names of jobs is attractive for young learners and these words can be associated to their daily lives. Also, because even though in English the words chosen had no bias in term of gender, some of them had different forms in Catalan when referring to one gender or another. Once the topic was chosen, it was decided to carry out a didactic intervention through storytelling, to make the presentation of vocabulary more dynamic, motivating and catch students' attention. The didactic intervention proposal was developed from the storytelling, as literature has a really important role in Early Childhood Education and it must be present during this educational stage. Overall, from a didactic unit about jobs, the researcher wanted to help children to learn English and break down the gender stereotypes that are present and make them realize that there is not one job for men and one for women.

The project has been divided into two parts. The first part is the theoretical framework where the main aspects of vocabulary acquisition, storytelling and gender stereotypes are defined. The second part is the study which includes the research questions, the data collection, the instruments, the data analysis and the results obtained during the didactic unit. At the end of the study, the discussion links the theoretical framework and

the results of the study and are discussed in order to answer the research questions. To finish the project, some conclusions will be drawn in order to conclude the study.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Language learning in Early Childhood Education

Learning and teaching English in Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a controversial topic among many professionals. Some of them argue that schools should wait for children to develop cognitively and to wait until Primary Education. Lobo (2011) argues that very young children can learn English, mainly by understanding the new language, copying sounds and reproducing the language that is part of routines and activities. For this reason, introducing English to Early Childhood Education offers a great opportunity to lay a solid foundation for future stages and learning.

Second language acquisition refers to the acquisition of a Foreign Language by children and adults. People learn a new language in naturalistic environments or in tutored environments. Nunan (2010) uses the term naturalistic environments to refer to the way that the student learns the target language without formal instruction, so when the learner receives training, the author talks about tutored environments. European education programs are different for each country, as the age at which Early Childhood and Primary Education starts changes. Mainly in Early Childhood Education, English is introduced as a Foreign Language without following a curriculum, since there is none for it. At the Primary school stage, second language instruction takes place, so formal L2 training begins. During Early Childhood Education, English is introduced in a naturalistic environment where children are exposed to everyday contexts and activities, for example, routines and doing crafts (Flyman & Norrby, 2013).

In order to boost second language acquisition, children need to be exposed to the target language and have the opportunity to use it frequently (Nunan, 2010). Input, interaction and output are three components which are necessary for successful second language learning. Input alone is not enough for language learners to be able to use it in their speech. It is for this reason that output and interaction are also necessary in the process of learning a L2 or a Foreign Language. Both the quantity and quality of the L2 input play a very important role in the understanding of grammar and vocabulary for young

learners (3-6 years). In addition, interaction allows students to learn grammatical structures and vocabulary of the foreign language. Therefore, the learners need to have the opportunity to produce the target language (Flyman & Norrby, 2013).

Cameron (2001) exposes that vocabulary development consists of the acquisition of words, which never ends. In fact, it is not only about words, it is more than that. It is learning about these words and formulaic sentences and finding terms inside them. It must be kept in mind that people do not learn the second language the same way as the mother tongue, since when learning a Foreign Language, learners have already been able to experience a language (Nunan, 2010). To teach new languages, it is important to start from vocabulary. Meara (1995) exposes in his article that most experts recommend teaching new vocabulary in context, specifically *pregnant contexts* which are contexts that offer the possibility to the learner to discover the meaning of the word that s/he meets for the first time. However, Nation (2021) states that only a small proportion of the words which are taught are actually being retained, so teaching vocabulary is not always efficient.

2.2. The role of the teacher in teaching vocabulary

Introducing new vocabulary to very young learners must be as varied and contextualized as possible. Teachers can introduce things that the pupils can feel, see, touch and play with in everyday life: dolls to present the parts of the body, posters hanging in the classrooms are examples of useful resources that can be used (Pinter, 2006). Moreover, teaching vocabulary requires several skills on the part of the teacher: planning, organizing, training, testing and teaching (Nation, 2021).

Planning consists of focusing on the vocabulary that will be most useful to the students. To learn this vocabulary, it should appear in meaning focused input situations so that it can be produced as part of meaning focused output speech. Organizing means that the class, the students and the activities work and that the teacher promotes the children's motivation. In addition, the learning of the vocabulary requires other conditions, which are: "repetition, noticing, retrieval, meeting and using words in varied contexts, elaboration, and deliberate attention" (Nation, 2021, p. 2). For Nation (2021) the training consists of educating the students, so that they are competent to make use of

different strategies when acquiring vocabulary, such as, for example, getting to know a word from the context. In addition, the author points out that it is important to do testing, because teachers cannot plan correctly or adequately if they do not know the students' knowledge and, moreover, it is important to be able to give them feedback on their progress. The last requirement is teaching, which according to Nation (2021, p.3) “occurs when the teacher is the source of information, the teacher is the focus of attention, and the teacher determines the pace of the learning”.

Teachers must bear in mind that in order to promote vocabulary learning, it is necessary that the teaching is rich and that a certain amount of time is dedicated to each word, which should be between 3 and 5 minutes. Nation (2021) proposes learning from flashcards or other materials, since the second language must be taught by focusing on those words and elements of immediate use for the learners and the vocabulary that is most frequent.

2.3. Storytelling as a tool in EFL

Some authors consider storytelling to be a valuable tool in Early Childhood Education, especially for learning a Foreign Language. Svenssons (2009) exposes that reading books to children is a way to improve their vocabulary and introduce them to words of the target language. Stories are an effective and powerful tool in language learning since they help the students to acquire L2 unconsciously, develop the four language skills in a meaningful context, increase self confidence in order to use the target language orally and improve syntax, which allows students to be able to narrate their own stories with success (Kirsch, 2016). Along the same lines, Cameron (2001) states that the predictable patterns of the stories, its pictures and the context created by them, help listeners to understand unfamiliar words, encouraging children to acquire those words they liked, in order to grow their vocabulary. For this reason, it is necessary to have different books in the classroom and give time to the students to touch, observe and experience them. Therefore, literature must be present in Early Childhood Education. Books are a tool that help children discover, enjoy and make use of words that they may not use in their everyday language (Vallejo, 2017). Lenox (2000) also argues that storytelling is a fun way to provoke learning while children increase their understanding and awareness of the diversity of the world. Storytelling prepares children for living in harmony with other

inhabitants who do not belong to their culture and that are not part of their lives. Wright (2009) defends the idea that stories have to be a central part of a teacher's work, whether this teacher teaches in a native language or in a foreign one. Children have to develop listening and reading skills in Foreign Languages, as they already do it in their mother tongue.

McGrath, Taylor & Kame (2004) argue that the vocabulary of the children is more advanced if they are exposed to different stories regularly. Moreover, receptive language development in listening and reading encourages expressive language development in speech, as children's language skills improve from active participation in storytelling. From the explanation of stories, various grammatical aspects are introduced that will help learners to get to reading and writing in the future. They also argue that children who have the opportunity to listen to stories have more positive behaviors associated with increased literacy rates than those who do not.

At the time of choosing a story or creating it, teachers must keep in mind the five literary elements of a story: setting, theme, characters, plot, and conflict (Lisenbee & Ford (2018). The students process the information of the narration based on the performance of different activities associated with these five elements.

In Iran, a study about how storytelling affects children's learning vocabulary was carried out by Soleimani and Akbari (2013). Thirty-one preschool students participated in the study and the teacher read the story of The Three Bears to them, using the book and flashcards. In order to observe the acquisition of the vocabulary, the authors' study designed a pre-test and a post-test, in which the same nouns were asked. After carrying out the study, which lasted 5 sessions, the researchers concluded that stories have a positive effect on language learning, since the results of the post-test were higher than the ones from the pre-test. It became evident that the use of the stories to teach vocabulary allows students to increase the words in the target language and let them learn vocabulary in context.

In another study carried out in Turkey with 28 children between 3 and 4 years of age was carried out by Tarakçioğlu and Tunçarslan (2014). It was the first time that the students were in touch with English and the mother tongue of all participants was

Turkish. In this project, thirty words related to toys and body parts were introduced through stories. The main aim of the researchers was to determine the effectiveness of stories on vocabulary teaching. They made two groups; in one of them the vocabulary was taught from stories and in the other not, using activities without the narration of the story. At the end of the study, after carrying out the post-test, they observed that 97.6% of the children who were part of the group that the stories were read to them recognized the words, since they learned in a meaningful and enjoyable way. As for the other group, the recognition level was 80,9%. The researchers concluded that stories have a great important effect on learning vocabulary and improving the understanding capacities of the children. Therefore, stories are a good tool to teach vocabulary to young learners.

2.3.1. Resources for storytelling

When teachers teach new vocabulary using the target language, the selection of the material they will use is very important. As Dahniarti, Siti & Fajar (2019) argue, using flashcards with a word, a sentence, or a drawing has a positive effect on vocabulary acquisition. Using this material helps to remember and retain new words. Another strategy which can be used is realia, using a real object to show the pupils a concrete item. Irawan (2017) states that the object should be real, but if it is not possible, we can sometimes use a toy. Moreover, realia increases the sensory experience of the students, as they can use all the senses to explore the object. For example, while children are drawing or painting, teachers can teach them vocabulary related to arts and crafts. Overall, using different strategies to teach and introduce new vocabulary to the students help to improve pupils' English language.

Another form of support to use during storytelling is puppets, a movable figure that a person manipulates in order to provide visual impressions. Moreover, the puppeteer can give a voice to the puppet, so it is an inanimate object that comes to life (Kröger & Nupponen, 2019). Kim, Pyun & Lee (2018) argue that due to the physical presence and the animated and expressive movements of the puppets, they have a strong influence on stories.

Lisenbee & Ford (2018) expose that digital storytelling is the use of technological tools, for instance, a computer, an interactive whiteboard, a phone or tablet, which offer to a classroom different experiences of storytelling. Robin (2006) affirms that there are lots of definitions about “Digital storytelling”, but generally speaking, they are all related around the idea of mixing telling stories with various digital multimedia, for example, images, video and audio. So, as O’Byrne, Houser, Stone, & White (2018) also expose, the key difference between traditional and digital storytelling is the use of different digital tools.

Sánchez, Solano & Recio (2019) state that there is currently a great availability of digital resources that are implemented in schools and that allow a story to be told through text, sound and images, obtaining an enriching result. Digital storytelling promotes more motivation among children than traditional storytelling and, in addition, increases social skills among students. It is for this reason that video is a very interesting tool for digital storytelling and for the different ways that stories can be represented.

The teachers can create their own stories in order to present new vocabulary to their students before starting a unit. So, a multimedia-rich and engaging story can be a hook to catch pupils' attention and pique their curiosity and to activate prior knowledge in order to relate it to what they will learn during the unit (Robin, 2006).

A strategy to use for teaching vocabulary of a Foreign Language, especially in initial stages, is Total Physical Response (TPR) (Asher, 1984). He defined TPR as an approach which consists in introducing the target language through the use of imperative sentences, that is to say, commands or instructions, and the students have to follow them, demonstrating their understanding and comprehension. Nuraeni (2019) exposes that young learners have got a lot of energy, so they need activities which require movement. For this reason, TPR is a useful language teaching method because it is focused on motor activity: students receive a command and they respond with their body. These kinds of activities also reduce the stress that people have when studying a language, so “the lower stress the greater the learning” (Nuraeni, 2019, p.28). In addition, students who cannot read or write can participate and learn a Foreign Language.

Muhren (2003) states that TPR makes children fully involved in the class, as it allows them to concentrate only on representing what they listen and they do not have the pressure to speak the target language. In addition, the author exposes that for children to start speaking a Foreign Language, they must feel capable of doing it. They are first exposed to the sound of the language and its meaning, so that it then emerges from within themselves the sentences they want to convey. It is for this reason that TPR is an effective learning strategy in this aspect.

2.4. Stereotypes

Early Childhood Education is the beginning of many discoveries and relationships with others. During this stage, children begin to relate to the world, forming schemes to build their knowledge and identity, including gender stereotypes¹.

Gender is based on the norms that have been built in society and that determine and impose different relationships and roles on people. So, gender is a social construction and sex denotes the biological characteristics of being a man or a woman (King, Scovelle, Meehl, Milner & Priest, 2021). King et al. (2021) define stereotypes as beliefs that are associated with a person to be part of a social group, just to be part of it. Therefore, gender stereotypes are the beliefs that are associated with people because they are male or female, giving them a role in society.

Master (2021) argues that when children are shaped by gender stereotypes, they form beliefs about what is expected of them and whether they are boys or girls, what areas they will be successful in (e.g., boys may be good at math and girls not). Therefore, these stereotypes created during the Early Childhood Education stage shape the professional decisions that children will make during adolescence. According to White & White (2006) very young children acquire stereotypes through personal experience, but also through the collective knowledge of society, since it has beliefs and assumptions about different people and groups. For this reason, popular beliefs have maintained for a long time that some jobs are suitable for men and others for women, because of their

¹ Generalitat Valenciana. Conselleria d'Educació, Cultura i Esport. (2020). *Guia d'educació sexual integral per a Educació Infantil*. Retrived 14 de juny 2022, de https://ceice.gva.es/documents/169149987/172590358/Guia_ES_Infantil.pdf

stereotyped traits and temperaments. For instance, nursing is a job rated as a feminine occupation for two different reasons. The first one is that this job requires personality traits which can be more found in one gender, which in the case of nursing is caring, due to a woman is perceived as being more caring than a man. The other reason to relate a job to a gender is the sex that is more frequent in the job. When people have a well-established stereotype, it is difficult to break it. On the other hand, if it is weak, it will be easy to break it because there is no previous association to overcome.

3. Study

3.1. Description of the school and the class

The school where the project was carried out is a State School located in a village at the foot of Montseny. It is a small school with one group per year; kindergarten children are mixed in groups in three different classrooms. The center offers education from Early years until Primary Education.

The school is characterized by being a Catalan, secular, co-educational, inclusive and democratic school. It promotes social values and relationships and it is also respectful with the environment and open to it and to different methodologies where the child is the protagonist of the learning process.

Catalan is the vehicular language; therefore, it is used in non-linguistic subjects. Spanish is incorporated in the 1st grade at an oral level, with activities such as theater and oral presentations. English Language starts in Year 4 with a weekly session of 30 minutes until 1st Grade, where they have two sessions. They learn the language orally using stories, videos, oral activities, among others. The main goal of language learning is that at the end of the Primary Education stage, all students can communicate fluently in the two official languages, both orally and in writing.

The study was carried out in a class of 13 5-year-old students, whose mother tongue is Catalan except a child who speaks Spanish and another one who combines Catalan and French because his mother is from France.

3.2. Research question and aims

The main aims of this study were to analyze the acquisition of vocabulary in Early Years, specifically with 5-year-old children and to see the gender stereotypes that children can have on jobs. Therefore, the following research questions were formulated.

RQ1. Do children in Early Childhood Education learn vocabulary from storytelling?

RQ2. Do children in Early Childhood Education show gender stereotypes when they learn the names of jobs in English?

The vocabulary chosen for this study was the name of 5 jobs, which do not have masculine or feminine gender in English and that the people tend to associate a specific gender with this profession; for instance, a teacher is frequently associated with a woman and a firefighter with a man. The names of the jobs chosen were: mechanic, doctor, nurse, teacher and firefighter.

To reach the goal stated before, a story was used to present the five words and work them through different activities, so that the children, at the end of the sessions, should be able to identify the different words through puppets and, in turn, identify them orally.

3.3. Data collection and instruments

In order to collect data, three equal tests were carried out. A pre-test (6th February) was done the previous week before starting the three sessions, for the purpose of identifying the previous knowledge of the students. A post-test (13th March) after finishing the sessions, to be able to know if the children remembered and knew the vocabulary they had worked on and a delayed post-test (11th April) four weeks after finishing the didactic intervention to see if the students had retained the vocabulary. The results were registered in a chart where all the answers were written (see Appendix 3).

To carry out the study, permission was requested from the school for the sessions and data collection, guaranteeing the anonymity of the children and the school throughout the work.

FEBRUARY				MARCH		APRIL
6/02/2023	13/02/2023	20/02/2023	27/02/2023	6/03/2023	13/03/2023	11/04/2023
Pre-test	Session 1	No class (holidays)	Session 2	Session 3	Post-test	Delayed post-test

Figure 1: Sessions and tests.

The sessions followed the same structure: first a routine asking how the children felt, the date and the weather (they do that in regular English lessons). Then, the study was carried out using a specific order: an activity to activate the prior knowledge, explanation of the story created by the researcher which follows the same structure all the time and all the jobs are presented, activities to practice the target vocabulary and a closing activity to conclude the session. The story was about a woman who had to attend to different places in the city such as the school, the hospital and the mechanic and in these places, she found the different professionals, the jobs that were introduced to the student (see Appendix 1).

The sessions were done in the following way:

Session 1: an initial activity was done in order to present the vocabulary that would appear in the story and students would work on. Then, the story was explained using a puppet for each character (in total 10 puppets: two for each job, a woman and a man were presented). Later, an activity in which the researcher gave each child a puppet and had to pick it up when the name of the job was said. To finish the session, a closing activity was done to review the vocabulary.

Session 2: an initial activity was done in order to review the vocabulary studied in the previous session. Then, the story was explained through a video created by the researcher. After that, a TPR (Total Physical Response) activity was carried out and, to conclude the session, a closing activity to review the vocabulary.

Session 3: an initial activity was carried out in order to review the vocabulary done in the previous sessions. Then, the story was explained using a crankie box. Afterward, an

activity to relate a tool or a material of the jobs with them was done and to finish the session, a closing activity to review the vocabulary.

3.4. Data analysis

As mentioned before, all the answers that the students gave during the pre-test, post-test and the delayed post-test were noted on a specific chart, the same for each test to identify if the children were acquiring the target vocabulary and if they could remember it one month after finishing all the sessions. The names of the 5 jobs were written on the grid and below each trade an M (man) and a W (woman). If the student gave the correct answer, it was marked with an X, on the other hand, if the answer was not correct, the initial letter of the job the child had indicated was written. Depending on whether the pupil pointed to the man, the woman, or both, the answer was under the M, the W, or both. Once each test was finished, all the answers were counted to find out how many children knew the word (see Appendix 3).

During the sessions, while the activities were done, some notes were taken by the researcher in order to see the progress of the children and identify if they were learning and achieving the goals (see Appendix 9).

Afterwards, in order to be able to analyze all the data collected during the tests and the activities, the information was transferred using bar graphs and a percentage of correct answers per job was also calculated.

3.5. Results

In this section of the project, the results of the analysis are presented. In order to introduce the results obtained, the pre-test and the post-test will be compared. Then, the results of the pre-test and the delayed post-test are going to be compared too. Finally, a general comparison between the results of the three tests is going to be done.

Pre-test and post-test results

According to what has been mentioned in the previous paragraph, the pre-test and post-test are first going to be compared. Figure 2 shows the words that the children knew on the pre-test.

The results of the pre-test suggest that the word mechanic was the most known for the students, since all the pupils said the correct answer. Doctor was a word that almost all children (85%) knew. Half of the students (54%) knew the word teacher. However, the percentage of the word firefighter (8%) and nurse (15%) shows that they were unknown to the children.

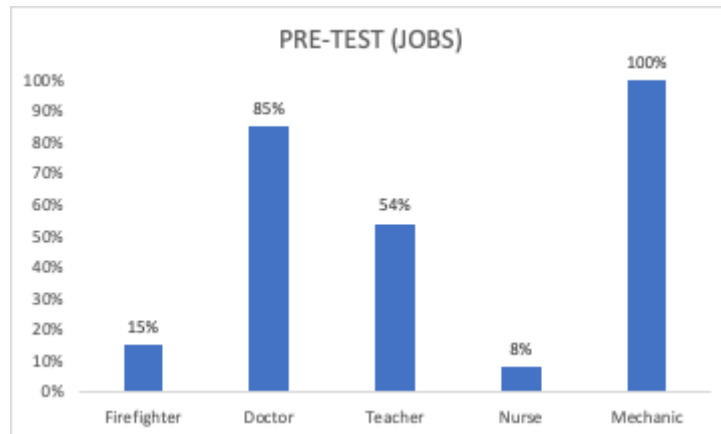


Figure 2: Words that the children knew in the pre-test.

Regarding the outcomes of the post-test, children at the end of the didactic intervention seem to know more than at the beginning of the study, as the vocabulary knowledge increased for all the words. There was a large increase in knowledge of the words firefighter and nurse, going from 8% (nurse) and 15% (firefighter) to 92% in both words. The word mechanic continued with the same percentage (100%) and doctor was acquired by a child who did not know (see Appendix 5). As for the word teacher, a small improvement was seen, as the percentage increased by 22%. Moreover, it was the least known word for the students.

Observing the answers written in the post-test chart, two children, when they were asked the word "teacher", pointed to the nurse and one of them, when the nurse was asked, pointed to the teacher. The other student, when the word nurse was asked, pointed to the correct images, although she had pointed before to the nurse, and at the end of the test she said that the researcher did not ask for the teacher (see Appendix 5).

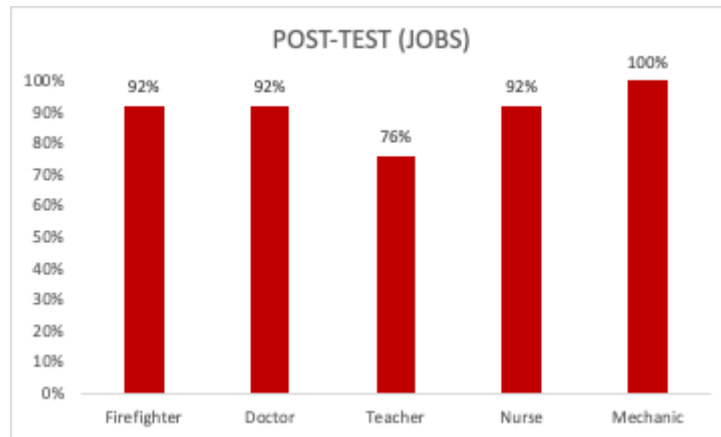


Figure 3: Words that the children knew in the post-test.

Concerning the two vocabulary tests from a general perspective, words like firefighter and nurse had a low percentage at the beginning and at the post-test they increased. Other words such as doctor and teacher started with a high percentage and it continued to increase, above all the word teacher. As for the word mechanic, it had the same percentage in the pre-test and post-test (100%).

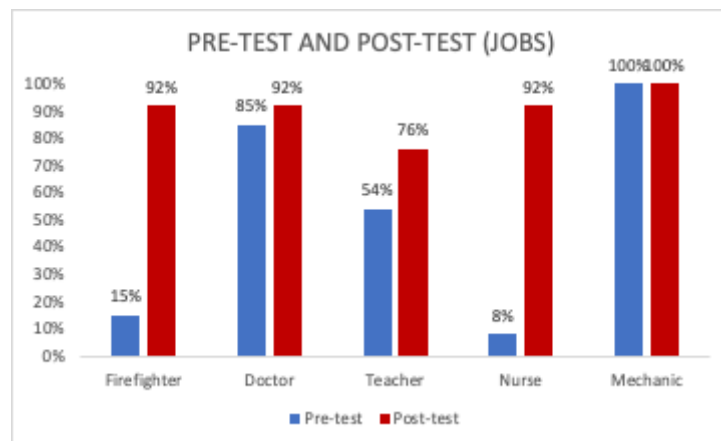


Figure 4: Results of the pre-test and post-test.

Regarding the answers that the students gave, the gender stereotypes that children may already have on jobs wanted to be analyzed. On the pre-test, the jobs that the man was pointed at more than the woman were doctor, mechanic and teacher. There was a large difference between the percentages of the mechanic and the doctor answers between men and women, 46% for the job of the mechanic and 35% for the doctor. The mechanic was associated to a man by 84% of the children and doctor by 76% of the participants in the pre-test. However, the children who gave the good answers of the firefighter and the nurse, pointed more to the woman than the man. Concerning the answers of the

chart of the pre-test (see Appendix 4), one child pointed to both images, boy and girl, for each job. The other pupils pointed to the man or the woman of the job that they thought the researcher was asking for. A student (S5), when the word mechanic was asked, she started pointing to the woman, but S5 changed her mind, and finally decided that the correct answer was the man.

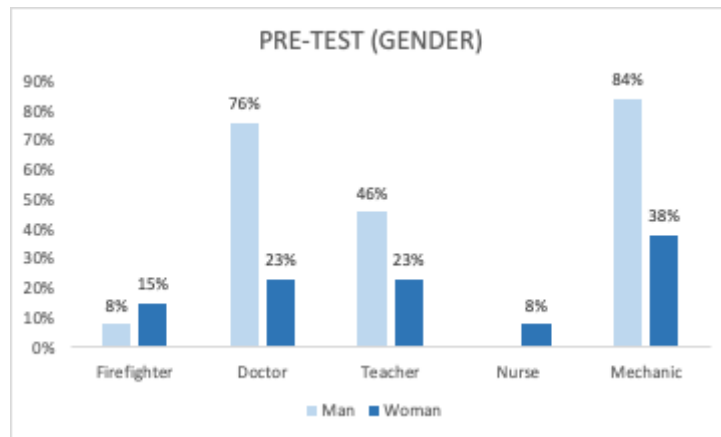


Figure 5: Answers given by children taking into account the gender of the jobs in the pre-test.

Regarding the answers obtained during the post-test, there was little difference between the responses of the teacher, the nurse and the mechanic jobs taking into account the gender. In the case of the doctor, nurse and mechanic, the female gender dominated and the male gender predominated in the teaching profession. As for the firefighter, the same number of answers for the man and the woman was got. In the post-test, half of the class gave as an answer both images of each trade, that is to say, they pointed to the man and the woman of the jobs which were asked (see Appendix 5).

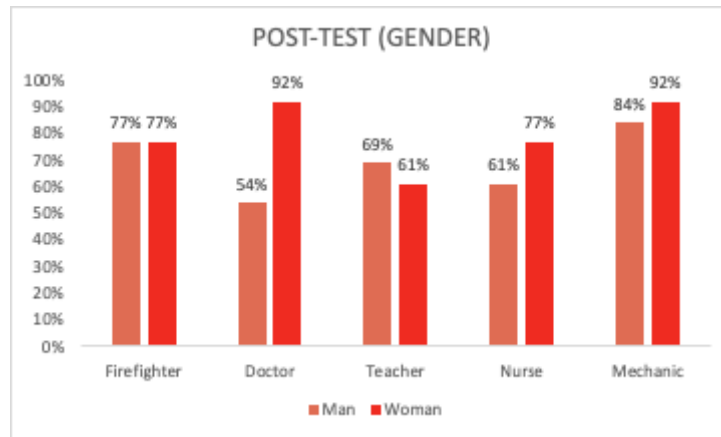


Figure 6: Answers given by children taking into account the gender of the jobs in the post-test.

Concerning the two vocabulary tests from the gender stereotypes perspective, the following results were obtained. Teacher as a male always obtained more answers than the woman; on the other hand, nurse was associated with a woman. As for doctor and mechanic, there was a change. In the pre-test, the responses of the male gender stood out with a large difference in percentage and, in the post-test, the children gave the female answer more times. For the firefighter, the answers in the post-test were the same for the boy and the girl.

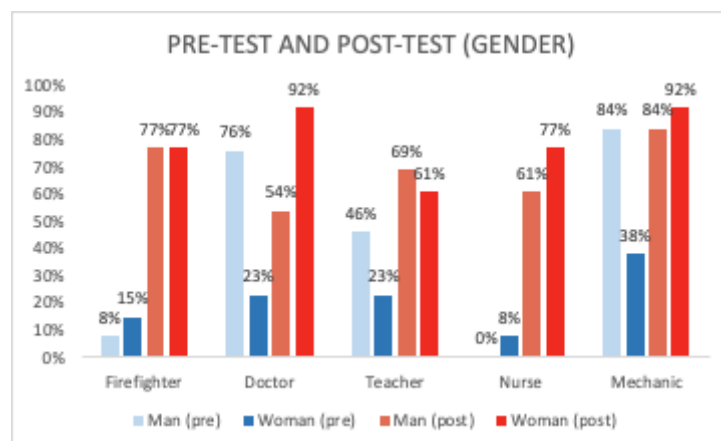


Figure 7: Results of the pre-test and post-test related to the gender of the jobs.

Post-test and delayed post-test results

In this section of the analysis of the results, the outcomes obtained in the post-test and the delayed post-test were analyzed.

In the delayed post-test, the word that children remember the least was firefighter (77%), followed by doctor and nurse with an equal percentage, 85%. The word teacher had a total of 92% correct answers and the mechanic, as in all the other tests, all the children were able to identify the job (100%).

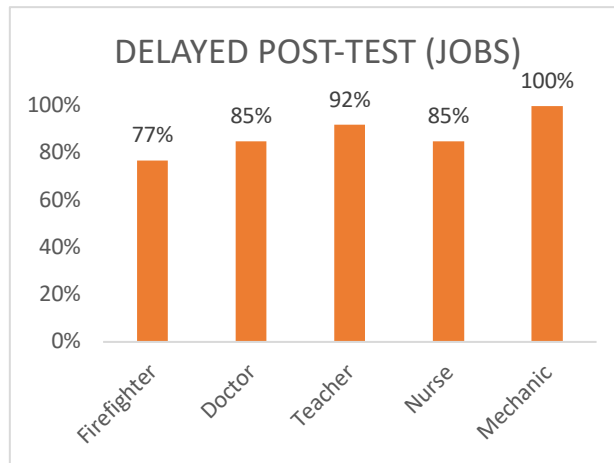


Figure 8: Words that the children knew in the delayed post-test.

Comparing the answers given by the students between the post-test and the delayed post-test, the word mechanic was known by all the pupils. Almost all of the words were less remembered in the delayed post-test than in the post-test, as was the case of firefighter, doctor and nurse. In the case of the teacher, the percentage of correct answers rose. However, these percentages were really small, only one or two answers were different in each job.

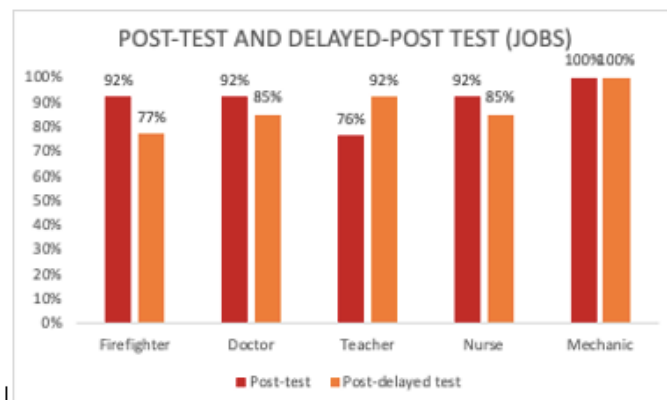


Figure 9: Results of the pre-test and post-test.

Taking into account the answers given by the children regarding the gender of the jobs, the number of answers for the doctor and the mechanic had the same percentage for

both men and women, 85% in the case of the mechanic and 69% the doctor. In the case of the mechanic, in the previous table, all the children gave the correct answer about this job, but there were some who identified it only with men, others only with women and some children with both genders.

Related to the jobs of firefighter and nurse, children answered men more often, with 77% in the case of firefighter and 69% in the case of nurse. On the other hand, regarding the profession of teacher, more answers were given with the female gender.

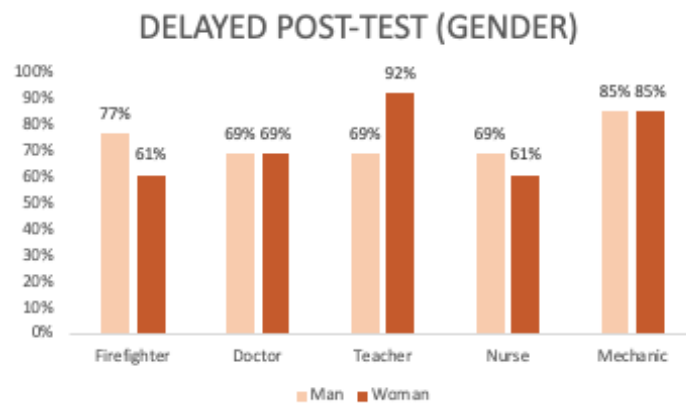


Figure 10: Answers given by children taking into account the gender of the jobs in the delayed post-test.

Comparing the answers given by students in the post-test and delayed post-test taking into account the gender, the firefighter's job had practically always been the same percentage (77%), except for the delayed post-test where the answers for female's were 61%.

In the case of the doctor, in the post-test there was a difference in answers between the male and female genders; on the other hand, in the delayed post-test the answers were equalized to 69%. This also happened with the mechanic, who in the post-test predominated in the female gender and in the delayed post-test it equalized with 85%.

On the other hand, the jobs that had the most change in percentage were the teacher and the nurse. In the post-test, the children related teacher more to the male gender; on the other hand, in the delayed post-test, the percentage of girls rose to 92%, a big difference compared to the male gender with 69%. In the case of the nurse, in the post-test, the female gender predominated with 77%, and on the other hand, in the delayed

post-test, this percentage decreased to 61%. And as for the male gender, it went from 61% (post-test) to 69% (delayed post-test).

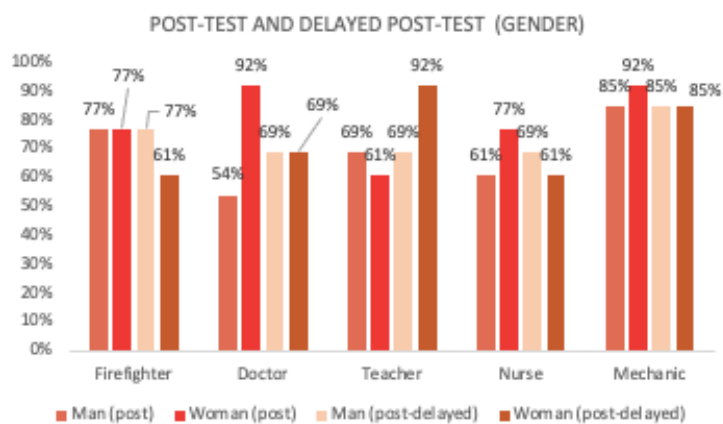


Figure 11: Answers given by children taking into account the gender of the jobs in the post- test and delayed post-test.

Pre-test, post-test and delayed post-test results

Taking into account the words that the students knew during the tests, the job of the mechanic was identified by all the students in each test.

In the case of the firefighter and the nurse, a great change was seen between the pre-test and the other two tests, as the percentages increased to reach 92% of correct answers in the case of the post-test and between 77% and 85% in the delayed post-test. Even so, one month after having carried out all the sessions, the children remembered less these words than in the post-test, the test taken one week after finishing the didactic unit.

In the case of the teaching profession, the percentages increased in each test, starting with 54% of correct answers in the first test and ending with 92% in the last test given to the children.

As for the doctor, the percentages were very equal. In the case of the pre-test and the delayed post-test, the number of correct answers was 85%, while in the post-test it was 92%.

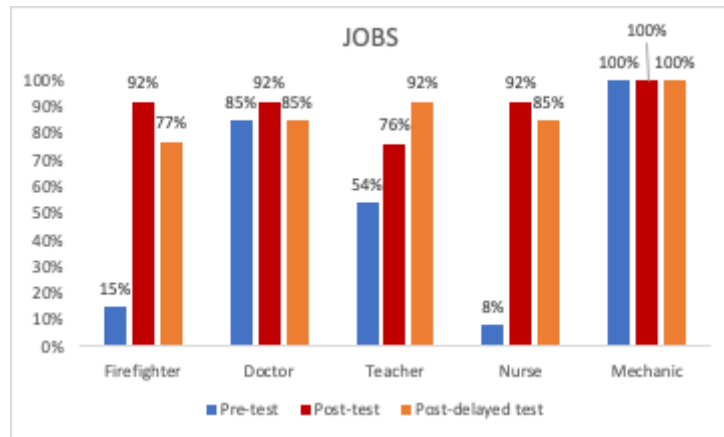


Figure 12: Results of the pre-test, post-test and delayed post-test.

With regard to the answers given by the children taking into account the gender of each job, in the case of the doctor and the mechanic, the percentages were equalized in the delayed post-test with respect to the pre-test, in which the gender males predominated in both jobs. Therefore, in the results of the post-test, in the case of the doctor, the answers towards the woman stood out, with 92% and 54% with the man.

In the case of the firefighter, the female gender obtained more answers in the pre-test. Then, in the post-test, the answers were the same for both genders, they got the same number of answers (77%) and, finally, in the delayed post-test the man got a higher percentage.

As for the teacher, in all the tests, the answers of the male gender predominated, on the other hand, in the delayed post-test, the female gender obtained a higher percentage. Moreover, it was the highest percentage obtained in the three tests, 92%.

As for the nurse, quite the opposite happened. In all the tests, answers related to the female gender predominated and in the delayed post-test, the male gender obtained a higher percentage than the female one.

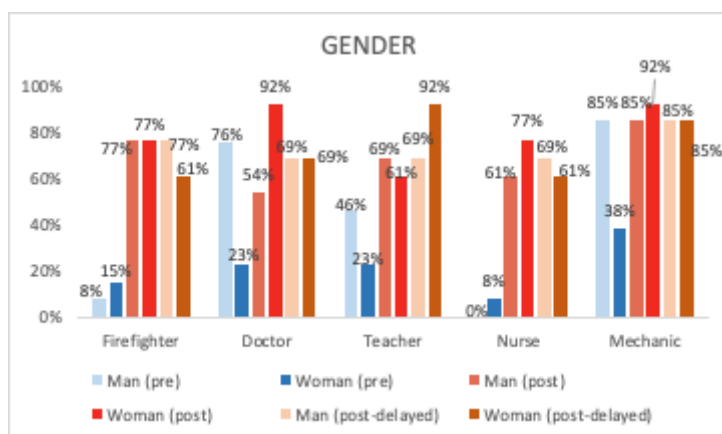


Figure 13: Answers given by children taking into account the gender of the jobs in the pre-test, post- test and delayed post-test.

To conclude this section, after analyzing and comparing all the tests (pre, post and delayed post-test), two aspects can be highlighted:

1. For all the words, children at the end of the didactic unit knew more than initially. However, one month later, some students had forgotten some words. Even so, taking prior knowledge into account, their current knowledge of the target vocabulary has increased.
2. Before carrying out the didactic unit, the children related the jobs only to one gender. Now, most of the students relate a job to both, man and woman.

4. Discussion

As mentioned before, the aims of this research project were to find out vocabulary acquisition among very young learners as well as gender bias in the target words. In this section of the project, the research questions that were established as guidelines for the study will be answered, based on the results obtained from the analysis of the data collected with 5-year-old students, and interpreted accordingly.

Storytelling seems to be a good tool to teach vocabulary and promote its acquisition with very young learners. The results have shown that vocabulary knowledge increased from the pre-test to the post-test. However, a little decrease in the vocabulary knowledge was also appreciated when the delayed post-test was done four weeks after finishing the didactic intervention. As Nation (2021) said a small proportion of the words

which are taught are actually being retained, so teaching vocabulary is not always 100% efficient. It must also be said that in this study the amount of words the children were exposed to was limited. However, Nation's idea can be seen in two of the words: firefighter and nurse. These two words were truly unknown by the children in the pre-test and although most of them remembered the word after the post-test four weeks later, not all of them were able to recall the word. Nation (2021) also says that to be able to recall a word, students need to be exposed between 3 and 5 minutes to each word. In this study, students were certainly exposed to this ideal time because the story was repeated three times, once per session.

The stories provided a naturalistic environment; according to Nunan (2010) and Flyman & Norrby (2013) naturalistic environments provide a way for students to learn the target language without a formal instruction. The students learn from being exposed to the language every day in different contexts and activities. In this study, the students were exposed to the stories three times due to the limited amount of exposure offered in early years. The story also provided *pregnant contexts*, the term used by Meara (1995) making reference to the recommendation of teaching new vocabulary in context, which offers the possibility for the learner to discover the meaning of the word that s/he meets for the first time.

While explaining the story, different supports were used in order to facilitate students' comprehension. For instance, while the story was being told, a PowerPoint was used. In the PowerPoint, the pictures of the five jobs targeted in the study were presented. They were presented in context (see Appendix 2). Moreover, the vocabulary was not only introduced through the story, but also through TPR activities. Nuraeni (2019) states that TPR is a useful language teaching method because it focuses on movement and very young learners need activities which require movement. Moreover, it is not necessary that the students know how to read and write, as they can complete the activities responding to the command given by the teacher. During these activities, the children showed understanding of the words, as they responded to the command correctly (see Appendix 7).

The role of the teacher suggested by Nation (2021) played a fundamental role in vocabulary learning during the study. The stages of planning, organizing, training, testing and teaching were taken into account, so they guaranteed the acquisition of the names of the jobs after carrying out the study, especially the words teacher, nurse and firefighter. While testing the children for the first time, it was noticed that the word mechanic was known by all the children before starting the study, probably because it was associated with their mother tongue since it is practically the same. Doctor was also known by almost all of the students, possibly for the same reason, that is why the words teacher, nurse and firefighter became the target words in the study.

As mentioned before, regarding the results of the study, storytelling is a powerful tool to teach vocabulary to very young learners as the stories help the students to acquire L2 implicitly (Kirsch, 2016). Moreover, as Cameron (2001) states, the predictable patterns used in the story and the supports provided help listeners to understand unknown words, such as firefighter, teacher and nurse which as was mentioned above were almost unknown names in the pre-test. In the post-test, these words were nearly recognized by all the students. Kirsch (2016), McGrath, Taylor & Kame (2004) exposed that receptive language development in listening encourages expressive language development in speech, an improvement of syntax and participation during the explanation of the story. Through the observations done during the sessions (see Appendix 9), when the story was told for the third time, the students participated in its explanation, without the researcher asking for the students' help. The pupils used the grammatical sentences that appeared in the story, for example, "Berta is a firefighter", without the researcher having explicitly taught how to formulate these sentences; the sentences were only introduced orally in the story.

Nation (2021) proposes that the target vocabulary should be taught using different supports, such as flashcards, because they facilitate its acquisition. During the study different supports were used, mainly puppets; as exposed by Kröger & Nupponen (2019) puppets are figures that a person can manipulate and give them a voice in order to make them an animated object. In addition, Kim, Pyun & Lee (2018) stated that puppets have a great influence in stories, due to their presence and the movements that the puppeteer can do with them. During the study, when the children saw a puppet, they

directly related it to the name of the job and said it orally. In addition, in one activity, each child had a puppet and when the researcher gave it to a student, some of the children said "Oriol is a firefighter" or said the name of the job that they had in their hands without being asked the name of the job (see Appendix 9).

The results of this study are similar to the ones obtained in the study done by Soleimani and Akbari in Iran (2013). The authors concluded that storytelling has a positive effect on language learning, as in their research, the results of the post-test after carrying out 5 sessions in which The Three Bears story was explained, the students showed an improvement in vocabulary knowledge from the pre-test. Therefore, the same happened in this study. After three sessions and explaining the story in each of them, the students increased their vocabulary knowledge related to the jobs. Another study which obtained similar results was done in Ankara by Tarakçioğlu and Tunçarşlan (2014). The words of the topics chosen, toys and body parts were also introduced through stories. However, in this study two groups were made: in one group, the vocabulary was taught through stories and the other through vocabulary activities. When the study was finished, the researchers observing the results of the post-test of each group, found out that the students who had been in contact with the stories acquired more words (97,6%) than the others (80,9%). The researchers concluded that learning in a meaningful and enjoyable way has a positive effect in language acquisition.

In this study the gender stereotypes that children can have on the names of jobs were also observed. Early Childhood Education is the beginning of many discoveries and relationships with others, including gender stereotypes. Moreover, White & White (2006) state that very young children acquire stereotypes through personal experience, but also through the collective knowledge of society, since it has beliefs and assumptions about different people and groups. During one session, there was a student that put into words what these authors claimed: "there are no women doctors". However, some students were against this sentence and told him that their doctor is a woman. The sentence of this student is possibly related to the life experience of the student who associates his doctor to a particular gender.

The story may have contributed to break gender stereotypes especially with the words mechanic and doctor, which in the pre-test were recognized as men jobs: 76% the doctor and 85% the mechanic. In the delayed post-test, however, the percentage equalized, having the same number of answers for men and women in each job. Mechanic and doctor that traditionally have been associated with the masculine gender, that may be the reason why they chose this gender at the beginning. Moreover, in the case of the mechanic, some personality traits are associated with it, such as strength, which usually relates more to the man than to the woman (White and White, 2006).

In the delayed post-test, the female gender obtained a high percentage in the teaching profession, 92%, although during the sessions, the answers for the man predominated. In this job, the gender stereotype was not broken, as White & White (2006) exposed, when people have a well-established stereotype, it is difficult to break it. Teaching is a profession in which the feminine gender predominates. Moreover, in the school where the study was carried out, all the teachers are women, there is not any man working in the center. Therefore, the male model is not present in the daily life of the students.

White & White (2006) stated that nursing is rated as a feminine job, due to the personality traits which are associated with this profession and because it is the sex more prevalent in this profession. During the study, the feminine gender predominated in the answers of the students, but in the delayed post-test, the male gender got more answers than the woman. Therefore, it can be said that the story may have broken gender stereotypes in some students because in this case there may not have been a strong association that needed to be overcome.

5. Conclusions

In this section of the project, the conclusions obtained after doing the research will be exposed. This project aims to analyze the acquisition of vocabulary through storytelling in Early Years, specifically with 5-year-old children and to see the connection between the names of some jobs and its association with gender stereotypes.

As the main conclusion of the study, it can be said that storytelling is a good tool to learn vocabulary in Early Childhood Education. Tests carried out on children show that they

learn words implicitly and incorporate them into their vocabulary without receiving formal instruction. In addition, during the sessions, the children were able to orally reproduce and identify the sentences that appeared in the story and the names of the jobs. Therefore, the constant exposure to the language is very important, since, as can be seen from the results, the children remembered the words better a week after finishing the study (post-test) than four weeks later in the delayed post-test.

Stories are also a useful tool to break gender stereotypes. Presenting to the students a reality different from the one they know and imagine helps to make them reflect and change their thoughts about gender. For example, in the case of the doctor, a child said that doctors were only men because he does not have any female doctor. Therefore, presenting two characters in the story that are doctors, a man and a woman, made him reflect and realize that it is a job for both genders. Different beliefs and assumptions about different people and groups that people have can appear in the stories, to make them reflect and break with these stereotypes, such as gender stereotypes.

After carrying out the study, some limitations were identified. The first was the short time available to carry out the didactic unit in order to obtain the results of the study. Being able to have more time would have been interesting to check if all the children could acquire the target vocabulary at 100% with all the words presented to them. Furthermore, related to the aspect of time and the fact that the children were very young, five words were introduced, a very limited number and that, in addition, two words were very similar in Catalan; doctor and mechanic.

Carrying out this study allowed me to learn how to do research, that is to say, think of the research questions and look for information on the topic to design the practical part and carry it out with the children to obtain answers to the questions formulated. In addition, I became aware of the importance of observation, since I was able to obtain relevant data from the children's comments and their progress during the sessions and not only from the three tests carried out. As a future teacher, I have to keep in mind that despite all the planning, effort and dedication, the children may not learn 100% of the target words, since it is necessary to do it in a meaningful context and to be exposed to the language on a daily basis. With this study, I realized that English in Early Childhood

Education can be introduced if it is learnt in naturalistic environments, as it can be from stories, songs and games.

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7. Appendices

7.1. Appendix 1: story

Hello, my name is Marta! Today, I have to do some things. Come with me!

First of all, I will go to school. Suddenly, I see two teachers.

- Man: Hello!
- Me: Hello! Who are you?
- Man: I'm Jordi and I'm a teacher.
- Woman: And I'm Júlia and I'm a teacher.
- Me: So you're Jordi the teacher and Júlia the teacher!

Then, I will go to the hospital and I find four people.

- All together: Hello!
- Me: Hello! I'm Marta, who are you?
- Nurse (W): Hello! I'm Núria and I'm a nurse.
- Doctor (m): My name's Guim and I'm a doctor.
- Doctor (w): I'm Laura and I'm a doctor
- Nurse (M): Hello! My name is Gerard and I'm a nurse.
- Me: So you're Núria the nurse, Guim the doctor, Laura the doctor and Gerard the nurse.

Now, I need to go to the mechanic because my car doesn't work. When I arrive there, there is a boy and a girl.

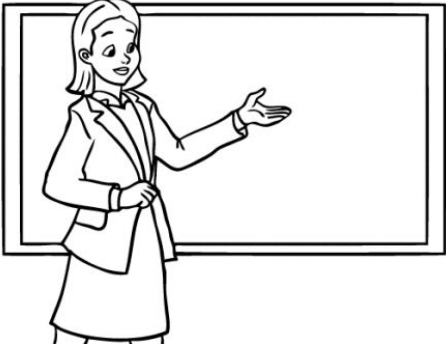
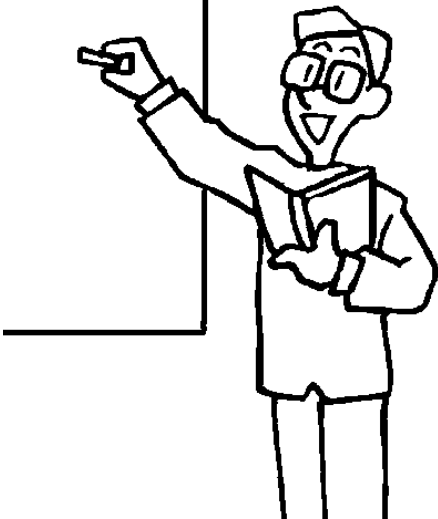
- Mechanic (W): Hello! I'm Marina and I'm a mechanic. What happens to your car?
- Me: The light doesn't work. Can you repair it?
- Mechanic (W): Yes of course! Oleguer, we have to work!
- Mechanic (M): Hello! I'm Oleguer and I'm a mechanic. Marina and I will repair your car.
- Mechanic (W): Yes! I'm Marina and I'm a mechanic.
- Me: So you're Marina the mechanic and Oleguer the mechanic.

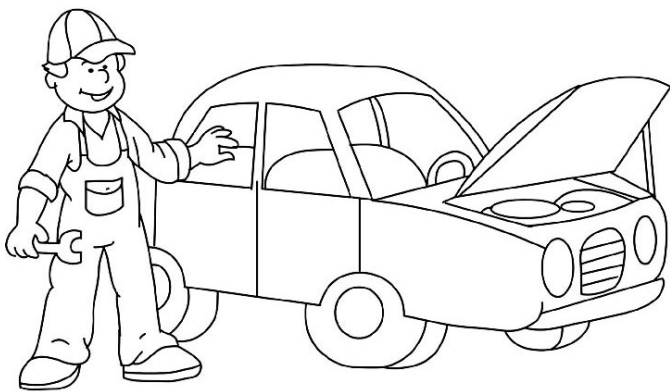
On the way home, I find a fire truck with two firefighters.

- Me: Hello! I'm Marta. Is there a problem here?
- Firefighter (M): Hello! No, there isn't any problem.
- Firefighter (W): Hello! I'm Berta and I'm a firefighter.
- Firefighter (M): Oh, I didn't say my name! My name is Oriol and I'm a firefighter.
- Me: So, you're Berta the firefighter and Oriol the firefighter.

7.2. Appendix 2: images and materials

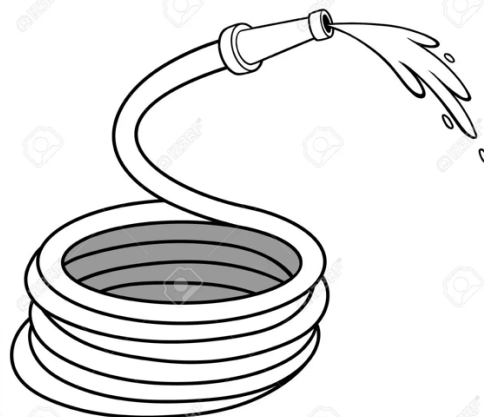
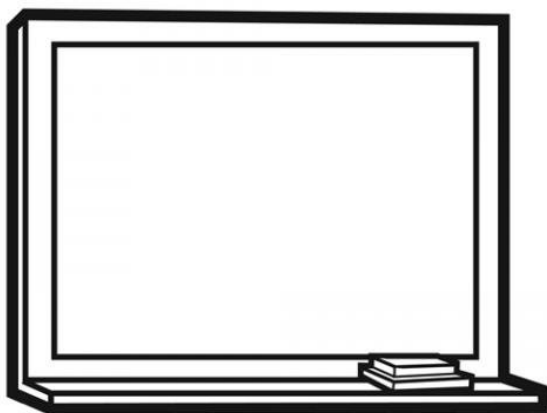
Jobs

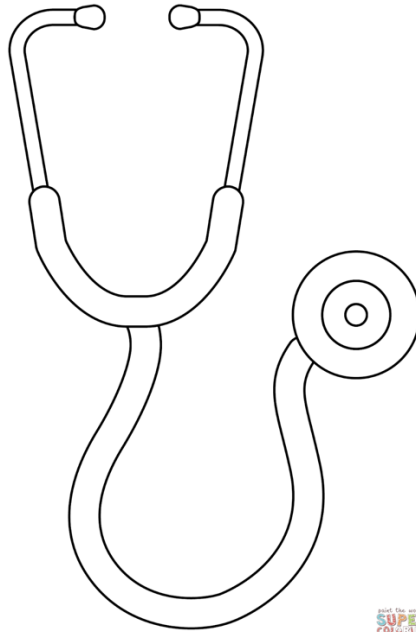
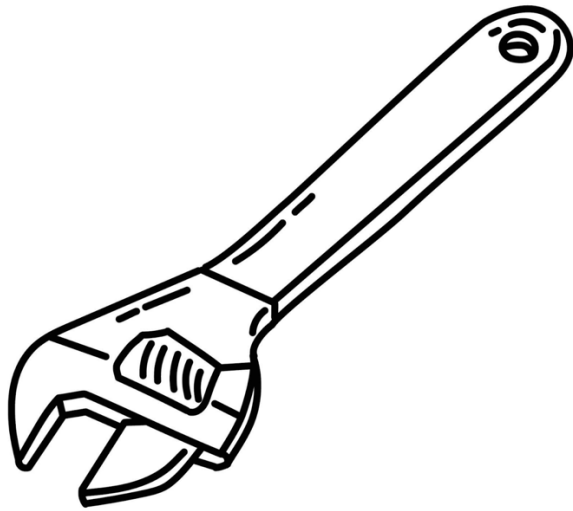






Materials and tools of the jobs





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SUPER
COLORS

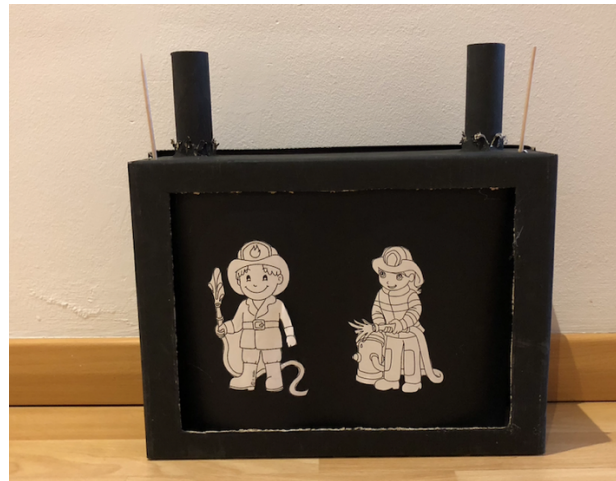
PowerPoint

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1TJwr0rPtAtjK6WyPR0RWr3y5YErrkQreeDYKaP7-YEY/edit?usp=sharing>

Video of the story

https://youtu.be/4SRmUw_6CeM.

Crankie box



7.3. Appendix 3: chart for the tests

	Firefighter		Doctor		Teacher		Nurse		Mechanic		Observations
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	
Student 1											
Student 2											
Student 3											
Student 4											
Student 5											
Student 6											
Student 7											
Student 8											
Student 9											
Student 10											
Student 11											
Student 12											
Student 13											

7.4. Appendix 4: results of the pre-test

	Firefighter		Doctor		Teacher		Nurse		Mechanic		Observations
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	
Student 1	M		N	N		X		X	X		
Student 2		X	X		X			M		X	
Student 3	X	X	X	X	X		M	M	X	X	
Student 4		M	X		X			T	X		
Student 5	N			N	M		F		X		First, S5 pointed to the woman (mechanic), but S5 decided to point to the man and that was the correct answer.
Student 6	N		X			N	F			X	
Student 7	M			N/X	X	X	-	-	X	X	S7 said Nurse didn't know what it was and that's why S7 didn't point to any.
Student 8	M	M	N/X	N/X	X	X	M	M	X	X	
Student 9		T	X		X		T		X		
Student 10		T	X		M			T	X		
Student 11	N		X		M	N		F	X		
Student 12		N	X			N		F	X		
Student 13	D		X			N		F	X		

7.5. Appendix 5: results of the post-test

	Firefighter		Doctor		Teacher		Nurse		Mechanic		Observations
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	
Student 1		T	N			M	X			X	
Student 2		X		X		X		X	X	X	
Student 3	X			X	X		X		X		
Student 4	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Student 5	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Student 6	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Student 7	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Student 8	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Student 9	X	X	X	X	N	N	T	T	X	X	
Student 10	X	X	N	X	X	X	D	X	X	X	
Student 11		X		X	X			X		X	
Student 12	X	X	X	X	N	N	X	X	X	X	
Student 13	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	

7.6. Appendix 6: results of the delayed post-test

	Firefighter		Doctor		Teacher		Nurse		Mechanic		Observations
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	
Student 1	D			N		X	X			X	
Student 2	X			X		X		X	X		
Student 3	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Student 4	X	X	X	N	X	X	X	D	X	X	
Student 5	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Student 6	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Student 7		X		N		D		T		X	
Student 8	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Student 9	D	N	N	X	X	X	F	F	X	X	
Student 10	X		X		X	X	X		X		
Student 11	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Student 12	X		X	X		X		X	X	X	
Student 13	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	

7.7. Appendix: TPR activity (2nd session)

	Firefighter		Doctor		Teacher		Nurse		Mechanic		Observations
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	
Student 1		X				X					
Student 2					X	X		X			First, S2 goes to the woman and then to the man (teacher).
Student 3	X								X	X	
Student 4		X					X	X			
Student 5			X	X		X					First, S5 goes to the man and then to the woman (doctor).
Student 6			X				X				
Student 7	X								X	X	First, S7 goes to the man and then to the woman.
Student 8			X						X		
Student 9	X						X				
Student 10			X	X				X			First, S10 goes to the man and then to the woman (doctor).
Student 11					X				X		
Student 12				X		X					
Student 13								X	X		

During the activity, two rounds were done, so the students were asked two words of the target vocabulary.

7.8. Appendix 8: activity of the tools (3rd session)

	Firefighter		Doctor		Teacher		Nurse		Mechanic		Observations
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	
Student 1	X		X								
Student 2						X			XX		S2 stuck two wrenches under the boy.
Student 3	X							X			
Student 4				X					XX		S4 stuck two wrenches under the boy.
Student 5		X						X			
Student 6							X		X		
Student 7			X		X	X					The board was stuck in the middle of the boy and the girl.
Student 8	X					X					
Student 9				X			X				
Student 10				X					X		
Student 11			X			X					
Student 12		X								X	S5 told the answer of the firefighter.
Student 13					X			X			

During the activity, two rounds were done, so the students were asked two words of the target vocabulary.

7.9. Appendix 9: observations done during the sessions

Session 1

It is the first time that the students listen to the story. Most of them are really attentive and listen to it with a lot of attention. In some occasions, when the name of the character is said, for instance, "Berta", they interrupt the story saying a person who they know with the same name.

While doing the activity with the puppets, some students are distracted by moving them, so it is necessary to catch their attention.

S2, S3, S4, S10 and S13 seem to have a good understanding and comprehension of the story, asking correctly the questions that they are asked.

Session 2

S7: There are no women doctors, all of them are men. Then, some students tell him that their doctor is a woman.

S2 needs some help to solve the activity, especially in the first round.

When it is not students' turn to do the activity, most are seated and attentive to observe and correct their peers.

Session 3

Some students participate explaining the story, saying the jobs, the names of the characters and some sentences such as “Berta is a firefighter”.

When the students are given the puppet, some of them say the name of the job that they have in their hands.