

## **Short stories as an Engagement Strategy In Tenth Grade Students**

Valeria Olaya Arrieta, Oscar Estiven Suárez González, Maria Camila Usuga Arboleda

Profesor Claudia Marcela Suescun Giraldo.

Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés

Facultad de Educación y Humanidades

Universidad Católica Luis Amigó

13 de Mayo de 2025

**Abstract:** The research explored the utilization of short stories as a method to enhance student involvement among tenth-grade students. The study aimed to examine how this pedagogical approach influenced the level of engagement of these students in the process of learning the English language. The investigation was conducted with tenth-grade students. The researchers employed qualitative techniques to gather information regarding the students' experiences and their perspectives. The study revealed that the incorporation of short stories led to an increase in the students' interest and their active participation in activities related to learning the language. The research concluded that short stories served as a valuable educational tool for improving student engagement within the context of teaching English as a foreign language.

**Key words:** Reading, Engagement, Foreign Language, Short stories, Language Development

## **CUENTOS CORTOS COMO ESTRATEGIA DE COMPROMISO EN ALUMNOS DE DÉCIMO GRADO**

**Resumen:** La investigación explora la utilización de cuentos cortos como método para mejorar la participación de los estudiantes de décimo grado. El estudio tuvo como objetivo examinar cómo este enfoque pedagógico influía en el nivel de compromiso de estos estudiantes en el proceso de aprendizaje del idioma inglés. La investigación se llevó a cabo con estudiantes de décimo grado. Los investigadores emplearon técnicas cualitativas para recopilar información sobre las experiencias y perspectivas de los estudiantes. El estudio reveló que la incorporación de cuentos cortos condujo a un aumento en el interés de los estudiantes y su participación activa en las actividades relacionadas con el aprendizaje del idioma. La investigación concluyó que los cuentos cortos sirvieron como una valiosa herramienta educativa para mejorar el compromiso de los estudiantes en el contexto de la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera.

Fuentes y contenido relacionado

**Palabras clave:** Lectura, Participación/ Compromiso, Lengua Extranjera, Cuentos Cortos, Desarrollo del Lenguaje

## Introduction

In an era dominated by the pervasive influence of digital media, where "the constant connectivity and rapid flow of information" (Carr, 2010, p. 115) often covered the enduring value of sustained engagement with written texts, educators face a critical challenge: how to reignite genuine student participation, particularly within the demanding field of language acquisition. Genuine student participation is essential, particularly within the demanding field of language acquisition. We envision a classroom where reading transcends rote memorization, becoming a "journey of discovery" (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000, p. 404). However, this vision is increasingly difficult to fulfill, as evidenced by the struggles of tenth-grade English Language Learners (ELLs) who find traditional reading methodologies uninspiring. This challenge is not confined to the classroom, but reflects a larger societal trend where the "shallow processing" encouraged by digital platforms (Wolf, 2007, p. 197) undermines the development of deep comprehension and sustained attention. As Prensky (2001) argued, students are "digital natives" who think and process information fundamentally differently than "digital immigrants" (teachers). Thus, educators are compelled to reconsider their pedagogical approaches, exploring innovative strategies that can bridge the disconnect between student disengagement and active participation. This research, therefore, investigates the potential of short stories as a dynamic tool for fostering engagement, seeking to understand how these concise narratives can revolutionize the English language learning experience for adolescents. By doing so, we aim to cultivate not only enhanced linguistic proficiency but also a renewed appreciation for the transformative power of literature, which, according to Nussbaum (2010), is essential for cultivating empathy and critical thinking in a democratic society.

In today's interconnected world, English proficiency is more than just an academic requirement, it is a gateway to higher education, career opportunities, and meaningful global communication. However, for many high school students, learning English, particularly in the area of reading, can feel like an overwhelming and tedious task. Unconventional teaching methods, often centered on rigid grammar exercises and uninspiring texts, fail to spark students' curiosity and enthusiasm. As a result, many learners disengage, viewing reading

tasks as mere obligations rather than opportunities for personal and academic growth. Given the increasing need for innovative and student-centered approaches, this research explored the use of short stories as a tool to enhance engagement in English language learning. Short stories provided an engaging and accessible way to develop students' language skills through diverse themes and compelling narratives. Unlike lengthy texts, they offered a manageable reading scope that fostered critical thinking, creativity, and self-expression. Our practicum experience revealed challenges in motivating tenth-grade students to engage with reading, highlighting the need for innovative strategies. This research explored the purposeful integration of short stories into the curriculum as a means to enhance student engagement. By doing so, it aimed to contribute to language education by promoting a dynamic, student-centered approach that fostered both literacy skills and a love for reading. Furthermore, this observation was not merely anecdotal; it aligned with broader concerns regarding student motivation and reading development in contemporary educational settings. Specifically, the observed disengagement manifested as a reluctance to participate in reading activities, a lack of enthusiasm for written assignments, and a general sense of detachment from the learning process. This issue is particularly critical within an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment, where students are not only grappling with the complexities of a new language but also potentially lacking the intrinsic motivation that comes from immersion in a language's native culture. Given the foundational importance of reading for academic success and lifelong learning, this disengagement posed a substantial obstacle to students' linguistic and cognitive development. Therefore, our research project was driven by a compelling need to address this challenge directly.

We investigated how teachers can effectively leverage short stories to foster meaningful engagement in reading skill among tenth-grade EFL students. This approach is grounded in the belief that engaging narratives can provide a compelling context for language learning, sparking students' interest and motivating them to actively participate in the development of their literacy skills. By exploring the pedagogical potential of short stories, we aimed to provide practical insights and strategies that can empower teachers to create more engaging and effective English language learning experiences. This was a journey in which we were able to look for different perspectives on literature and how it works. Additionally, we reviewed what engagement is and how it works in teenage students. This research was based on the idea of continuing to cultivate the habit of reading in teenagers, as a way to increase their linguistic skills in the classroom and their life. Author Kelly Gallagher (2009)

established that nowadays young people have lost the habit of reading through the years; this statement supported the main gap in our project. Nonetheless, Manuel (2012) and Bintz, (1993, p. 613) once said that students do not lose interest in reading per se, they lose interest in the type of literature or stories they read. This research was interested in using short stories as a way to drive their attention towards reading, since they can contribute to the student's English proficiency in terms of many aspects such as vocabulary learning and grammar accuracy. In addition, it contributed to broadening students' horizons and making them knowledgeable, which increased their awareness about the target culture.

Three crucial concepts that guided this research were engagement, short stories, reading, and language development. Research suggested that when students were actively engaged in learning, they developed a greater sense of autonomy and motivation, leading to improved academic outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Short stories have been widely recognized as valuable resources for second language acquisition, as they provide meaningful and context-rich language exposure (Krashen, 2004). According to Bruner (1996) and Cummins (2001), storytelling plays a crucial role in cognitive and linguistic development, helping learners internalize grammar structures, expand vocabulary, and enhance reading, speaking, and listening skills. Regardless of age, short stories create an immersive and engaging learning experience that fosters language proficiency and literacy development in second-language learners. Through short stories, this research aimed to integrate written expression with reading comprehension to foster meaningful engagement in English for tenth-grade students. Lastly, this research sought to gather specific information. First, we sought to identify the types of short stories that were used in class according to their purpose. We aimed to interpret tenth graders' perceptions of short stories as an engagement strategy, we wanted to determine how short stories impacted the process of reading comprehension. These objectives helped us achieve our main goal: analyzing how teachers engaged tenth-grade students in reading, through the use of short stories in an EFL environment.

### **Literature Review**

Over time, institutions and schools have put aside the use of literature for the development of their classes. This can be evidenced to the extent that specific spaces are no longer set aside for reading, there are few books in the classroom, and school libraries have taken a back seat. Besides that, in the experiences that we have had, a reluctant attitude has been observed from teenagers to read, because nowadays reading is not something that

attracts the attention of many young people, they do not have enough stimulus to do it or they find reading as something foreign to their closest context, for these reasons the habit of reading has been lost over the years. Kelly Gallagher, a veteran classroom teacher, has coined the term 'readicide' to describe the 'systematic killing of the love of reading' for young people (Gallagher, 2009). This can be understood as the decrease of interest in literature or the failure to provide spaces where reading is encouraged. "Over the last years, in many countries worldwide, there has been a decline in the reading skills of upper secondary school students, and their ability to read and understand advanced literature" (Papadima-Sophocleous, 2009) which supports the statement that today the habit of reading has been lost.

However, other studies establish that "students do not lose interest in reading per se". (Manuel, 2012) (Bintz, 1993, p. 613) Rather, "they lose interest in the types of reading that are usually required of them in school, such as reading textbooks and certain texts selected by the teacher". For that reason, this research was interested in knowing and analyzing the teenagers (tenth grader's students) engagement in an EFL environment through the use of different short stories, what is the impact it has on the teaching-learning process and what is the students' perception about it.

The use of literature in the classroom is essential, since literature provides different qualities and strengthens communication skills. (Nur & Tez, 2021) said "It is important to understand literature, as well as the most efficient way to use it in teaching English" some of the benefits of using literature in the classroom are: Vocabulary improvement, cultural enrichment that means adds to the cultural grammar, as well as understanding of foreign cultures through storytelling and literary texts, enrichment of the language, personal involvement, among others. According to Zengin, Başal, & Yükselir, 2019 and Lazar, 1993) there are other benefits to using literature in language classes. First, it encourages language acquisition by providing meaningful and memorable contexts. Second, it motivates language learners since it serves as a bridge to connect classrooms and the real world. Third, it provides access for language learners to the cultural background of the target language. Fourth, it increases language awareness and also develops the interpretative capabilities of our learners. Using literature for English teaching provides the students a sort of access to different societies that come into existence through reading the literature of that language. Language, literature, and culture are all intertwined and play a role in shaping one another.

Language reflects the cultures, traditions, and beliefs of a society, and as such, the literary works of any language act as a reflection for the tenets of society in the period where those pieces were written (Permawardhena, 2005). The integration of literature allows the students to develop their critical thinking, and analytical skills, while also exposing them to different cultures, as well as how the language is used in different societies according to the period in which the piece was set (Nur & Tez, 2021) On the other hand, reading contributes to creativity, imagination and attention.

According to Paran (2008), the effectiveness of using literature for language learning mainly depends on the teacher's ability to design appropriate tasks and scaffolding provided by the teacher when necessary. This means that teachers must be careful when choosing the type of literature to use in their classes, as the success of this depends on the type, the language level of the students, their needs, the type of activities or tasks that are left in class and the goals for learning a language etc. Moreover, to develop a better sense of understanding the literature. According to (Nur & Tez, 2021) "it is recommended that teachers use authors from various backgrounds, preferably ones that can be relatable to the students, and use hybridity in their works, to provide the full picture of English in global literature rather than only American and British". This is important to the extent that teachers should use resources that are close to the real context of the students, emphasizing that learning English as a foreign language does not only happen or is located in a foreign environment or in other countries, real situations and contexts should be used, since, in this way, students will feel more engaged with the resources.

It is also important to mention that using literature in teaching English can have different difficulties, such as "students often find difficulty in understanding and absorbing the components of a foreign language. In addition, if both (Language combined with literature) are taught together, they can improve the level of understanding of other subjects" (Muhammed, 2013). Another difficulty could be teacher performance in using literature since it is important that when choosing a piece of literature, it is compatible with the students' four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, and most importantly comprehension. "When literature is being used, these skills cannot be neglected, and must be used in parallel with the teaching methods the teacher decides to use in class" (Nur & Tez, 2021). Therefore, it is necessary "to provide the students with a wide selection of literature that meets their

interests, as doing so will bring more engagement to the class and would motivate the students to learn about the subject matter” (Nur & Tez, 2021).

However, literature is a very broad concept that needs to be specified, since there are different types of literature and forms with which they can be used or developed in class. It is for this reason that this research focuses on short stories as an element of engagement. Prior studies suggest that "graphic stories, with their illustrated narrative, may have positive impacts on readers' engagement, memory, and conceptual learning" (Matuk, Diamond, & Uttal, 2009), and that "these benefits are most evident among novice learners".

According to (Zengin, Başıal, & Yükselir, 2019) Short stories and drama activities are wonderful for young learners. The stories paid attention to listening and drama activities willingly performed are always worked out. If the narration is carried out properly, the students are entranced. Using novels, poems, and short stories in language classes can contribute to the students' English proficiency in terms of many aspects such as vocabulary learning and grammar accuracy. In addition, it contributes to broadening students' horizons and making them knowledgeable, increasing their awareness about the target culture.

Teenagers read for a wide variety of purposes with personal 'tastes' in reading often well established by the time they reach secondary school (Hall & Coles, 1995; Manuel, 2012a, 2012b). They may, for instance, read for pleasure, escape, relaxation, affirmation, comfort, discovery, and information, to connect with others, to complete required school-based (and workplace, personal, and domestic) tasks, and to access, participate in (and ideally contribute to critique and shape) educational and broader cultural discourses (Manuel, 2012).

Adolescence is a time when young people need to develop a sense of agency and autonomy, in addition to honing the collaborative and group-work skills necessary for life within and beyond the school and family (Manuel, 2012); Therefore, it is important not to force students to read and to bring to the classroom authentic, real and close material, according to the students' interests.

So, based on what was previously researched literature is an important source of knowledge for students and teachers; however, few people use it although this tool brings a lot of dynamics, themes, topics, and different interests to the classroom and in that way, the students can feel even more motivated to face the class, to learn more and also engagement

can be improved thanks to the use of different types of literature. Besides, students who enjoy literature may develop an interest in writing and reading. Their imagination, focus, and creativity can also be improved in this way.

Literature and engagement have been two topics that have been discussed separately, there are not many articles that talk about both, nor about the use of literature as a form of engaging students in classrooms or in an EFL environment. So, the intention then with this research is to unite and explore them together, because our statement is related to this gap.

Engagement, on the other hand, refers to the level of participation, attention, interest, curiosity, and attitude that students show when they are learning. According to Zhou, Hiver, & Zheng (2022), "commitment is manifested not only in its behavioral aspect but also in demonstrations of action through the cognitive, social, emotional and agency dimensions of learning activities". Reeve and Jang (2022) said that student engagement includes four dimensions: behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and agency. Behavioral commitment is related to voluntary and effortful performance in the task and perseverance in learning activities; cognitive engagement is related to deliberate and sustained attention and critical strategic thinking; emotional engagement can be described as students' emotional connections and responses to learning activities and environment; Agent engagement occurs when students capitalize on their ability to learn proactively and constructively contribute to the flow of instruction.

In contrast, behavioral disengagement includes things such as avoidance behaviors (procrastination), indifferently going through the motions, and making no effort to complete learning tasks; cognitive disengagement is related to inattention and disorganized or inefficient use of mental strategies; emotional disengagement ranges from dwelling on negative affect, internalizing discouragement, being consumed with boredom, and detaching to cease caring about learning; agentic disengagement refers to students passively accepting the classroom environment as it is and refusing to be proactive (Jang et al. 2012, 2016).

Fredricks classified engagement into behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement, which could correspond with the complex language learning process. Behavioral engagement is usually a common and frequent criterion aspect. It refers to positive conduct and participation in learning tasks, such as adhering to classroom norms, attending classes, and doing homework. Cognitive engagement refers to the adoption of

learning strategies to acquire knowledge in the learning activity. Emotional engagement refers to the degree to which students enjoy and hold an affective attitude towards teachers, peers, the course, and their learning experience. On the other hand, he considers that there is also social engagement which refers to "enjoying/participating or withdrawing from collaboration or social interaction with peers and instructors".

Schneider concluded that autonomy is a strong catalyst for engagement in learning. The autonomy-supportive learning environment in educational settings leads to more active learning engagement and also higher levels of achievement. Meanwhile, Fang found that competence needed was the most influential factor in predicting learners' engagement in MOOCs. Besides, Olivier documented that for most students, especially girls, relatedness is crucial in explaining behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement. Relatedness was reported to provide online learners a feeling of connectedness, which encouraged learners to exchange opinions with peers, and thus social engagement was enhanced.

Engagement is action in service of learning (Oga-Baldwin 2019). Beyond merely what learners desire to achieve or the initial forces that energize them, engagement provides a tangible portrait of how a learner thinks, acts, and feels in classroom learning events.

Engagement links to important considerations of attention—a central concern in instructed L2 settings (Philp and Duchesne 2016). That is, deliberate and selective attention, learners' depth of processing, their mental elaboration, and retrieval of previously constructed knowledge, are all within the scope of what learners do when they engage. Also, student engagement, like other systems, is adaptive and dynamic (Henry 2019). It may change its structure and modify its function through self-organization—a process by which higher-level order emerges from the local interaction of components as the system adapts itself to the contingencies of its surroundings. Student engagement too emerges in the temporal context of the L2 classroom demonstrating that it is adaptive to changing circumstances. These observable manifestations of engagement emerge from the coordinative structure of parts-to-whole and whole-to-context (Papi and Hiver 2020).

Yet students' attention decrease (Hughes and Quinn, 2013) and Horgan (2003) reported that attention levels are high for the first fifteen to twenty minutes of class; however, this level decreases as the traditional lecture goes on. This type of passive learning may limit students' thinking, problem-solving abilities, and motivation for learning. The development of

innovative teaching methods enhances student thinking and problem-solving abilities (Jaarsma et al., 2008, Cavanagh, 2011)

Engagement indicates an umbrella term of behavioral participation and psychological involvement in a task that reflects student enjoyment, interest, motivation, attention, or self-regulation (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Moreover, compared to younger children, teenagers experience an increasing disassociation from parents and guardians. According to Mazzone, these distinct traits are also reflected in the way teenagers engage with PD projects. In comparison to younger children, teenagers have low motivation for engagement. Echoing Mazzone, Fitton emphasizes the need for more research on teenagers, especially studies of teenagers as informants or design partners.

### **Theoretical framework**

This framework acted as a foundational structure and provided a systematic approach to complex situations. This framework explored the key concepts and theories that shape our main research, engagement, short stories and reading. We explored these concepts focusing on the three main premises of research, methodological, epistemological, and theoretical.

#### **Engagement**

The concept of “engagement” is a broad and variously defined concept and collection of practices in school education. Therefore, the definition depends on the position one occupies in the educational system as well as one’s motivating interest. According to K.D’Mello (Sidney, 2021) “Engagement in learning has become a key objective of education “There are at least two reasons for that: (1) Engagement is a prerequisite to meaningful learning, which means that students are unlikely to learn much if they're not interested and involved in the learning process. (2) Managing engagement involves cognitive and socio-emotional skills that are learning objectives in themselves, engagement is not passive. It involves using your mind (cognitive skills) and managing your emotions (socio-emotional skills) to stay focused and motivated in the classroom” Therefore, education engagement acts as a powerful driver, influencing everything from student achievement to overall well-being. (Gibson, 1979; Norman, 2002), states that “when students are engaged, they're intrinsically motivated to learn” applying this kind of premise in our students, we can find the process interesting and rewarding, which fuels their desire to put in the effort required to master new skills and persevere through challenges.

Concerning the above, engagement will help us in our context to set an environment that is crucial for their language development and overall learning experience, leading students' engagement involves a dynamic interplay of instructional strategies such as scaffolding reading, literary elements exploration, predictive activities, etc. even taking into account student interests, and a supportive learning environment. An engaging EFL classroom can build a space where short stories may come alive, fostering curiosity and language.

### **Reading Comprehension**

“Reading comprehension is a complex process in itself, but it also depends upon other important lower-level processes. It is a critical foundation for later academic learning, many employment skills, and life satisfaction” (Kirby, 2007) that is, reading comprehension is a complete process but it also needs other actions or strategies that can improve and provide other skills in its development. It is also a process that has benefits for the human being, which go beyond an academic environment, as it can also have positive implications in daily life and development in society. In this research where the intention is to use short stories to engage students, this cannot be seen apart from other forms of interaction, such as activities before, during, and after reading, to make a complete reading comprehension process, which can enhance the engagement of students in the English class.

In addition, according to Kirby “(2007) “reading comprehension is not something for which our brains have evolved. Whereas oral comprehension seems to develop “naturally” with minimal deliberate intervention, reading comprehension is more challenging and requires deliberate instruction” For this we seek to have the perspective and preferences of the students in terms of reading, to generate motivation when starting to read and that they have the intention to do so.

Moreover, there are two types of processing in reading comprehension: “bottom-up” and “top-down”. Bottom-up occurs when people first try to understand the words or the sound of the words in a text (grammar) and then move on to understanding the text completely. On the other hand, top-down is the process by which we try to predict the meaning of the text, first using prior information or collecting possible ideas and expectations of what is going to be read. In the research, we pretend to stimulate the reading process in adolescents using both types of processing, where they not only understand grammatically

what is meant but also go further in the comprehension of what is being read. (National Reading Panel, 2000, chapter 4). Dole et al. (1991) establish some strategies that are associated with improved reading comprehension: determining importance, summarizing information, drawing inferences, generating questions, and monitoring comprehension.

Regarding the above, it is important to understand that using reading as a way to engage students in an EFL environment, will not happen magically. It is essential to understand that it is a process that takes time and that the willingness and intention of those who participate in it are necessary. On the other hand, this research also seeks to ensure that these reading habits are not lost over the years and that they can continue to be used as strategies to generate knowledge, engagement, and motivation. Also, as mentioned above, it is important to see this process as a whole, which will work more effectively if other skills or strategies are integrated, and observation and careful and consistent assessment are among them.

### **Short stories**

Short stories have been used to teach and learn a second language in different stages of life. Some pedagogists and psychologists such as Jerome Bruner have stated that reading short stories eases the learning process in children, young adults and adults, helping develop skills and abilities related to cognitive development. “Linguistically, literature can help students master the vocabulary and grammar of the language as well as activate the four language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.” (Celce-Murcia 1991). “Extensive reading is a practice that has received significant attention in the field of English language teaching for non-native speakers. This is partly due to the benefits proposed by its theory, which would essentially provide English learners with the opportunity to practice reading for pleasure.” (Pozo, 2020).

Short stories help students get familiar with English. Through literature, they are going to be able to open up the doors of contexts, usage of vocabulary, grammar, and such different ways that lead the student through an open field of learning in which the limit will be imposed by teachers and students themselves. Koutsompou, Violetta-Irene. (2015). Use of Literature in the Language Classroom: Methods and Aims. *International Journal of Information and Education Technology*, 5(1), 74-79. In this way, we will take advantage of it by creating an environment tied to literature in which students can learn a second language.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

Participants in this research were tenth grade students from a public high school located in Medellín, they were between the ages of 15 and 16 years old, and their economical strata differ from 1 to 3 (low to medium-low). The target of this study was to analyze how teachers engage tenth grade students in reading promotion through the use of short stories in an EFL environment, since students enjoyed reading but some aspects have been found that interfered their interest on it, the purpose was to find the kinds of texts students enjoyed and were interested, so the teacher could promote them taking into account what they wanted and liked. In the selected group there were 35 students who had been studying since childhood, however they had not accomplished the expected English level required for the respective grade they were coursing. Nevertheless, approximately 34.29% of the group was attentive and showed interest in the activities proposed for the class, and their willingness to learn was more noticeable as they had been more active in class activities without the teacher's asking, unlike the other 65.71% of the students that hardly showed participation were a little more scattered in the classroom. These percentages came from the observation and the intervention of the teacher that was developed during the last 3 months of 2024.

### **Procedures**

During August, September and October of 2024 the team of researchers collected data and carried out the observation process in the first two months, as well as the intervention with the participants, who were minors and whose parents or representatives gave their consent to participate in the study.

As a first stage, teachers offered several stories to the students with the intention that they could choose the most interesting for them and at the end it was "The Tell Tale Heart" by Edgar Allan Poe. Teachers also proposed different reading activities with this story, such as reading aloud and creating an alternative ending. So, for the next sessions teachers took the students' opinions into account for the stories.

Teachers held a focus group with 10 students at the end of the sessions, where they were asked different questions about the development of the classes, taking into account the short stories and their perception, some of these questions were "What is your opinion about

the use of short stories in your learning process? What do you think about the connection in the English class after using short stories? How do you feel at the moment of developing the activities regarding short stories? Why?"

### **Instruments**

We implemented an observation journal for the data collection, and a focus group, which helped us gather information about the participants' perception regarding the activities with the short stories chosen by the students.

Teachers found the journal to be a useful tool, and through it, they accounted for every moment of the class, such as students' reactions, responses, analysis by the teacher and observations. To develop the journal, teachers took into account intervention and observation for every student, differing from the focus group that was developed with a total of 10 students who were chosen by the teacher, the first five were chosen due to their abilities and interest on the class, however, the other five were chosen due to the weak process they had along the classes.

Teachers asked a total of 5 questions during the focus group at the end of these sessions with the purpose of knowing how students with different perspectives internalized the activities and the learning process.

### **Findings**

The findings suggested that using appealing literature genres boosted student engagement and comprehension, while the misuse of digital tools hampered their English learning, and students' positive perception of short stories helped teachers adapt and improve their pedagogical strategies.

**The use of appealing literature genres enhances the students' attention in class which fosters their knowledge acquisition and reading comprehension.**

From the journals and the intervention that was carried out in the last few weeks of the project's implementation, it can be said that students are most engaged when the literary genre being worked on is appealing and interesting to them; for example, horror stories.

Using literature focused on their likes and interests, allowed to achieve progress in the linguistic development of students, their knowledge acquisition strengthened their reading comprehension, due to the fact that they felt comfortable, motivated and active at the time of developing the activities. It is important to mention that through creative activities where they could imagine and create alternatives for short stories, it was possible to enhance not only their linguistic and communicative skills, but also their creativity, leadership, group work and critical thinking. One of the students' comments was, "Profe, me ha gustado, porque nos ha ayudado a saber en qué somos buenos, en qué palabras se nos hace más fácil o cuales nos da mayor dificultad" ["Teacher, I liked it, because it helped us to know what we are good at, which words are easier for us or which ones give us more difficulty" Participant 2, Focus Group, October 28th, 2024]. This was strongly connected to their capacity of critical thinking and self-assessment. Through the activities carried out, the students identified their strengths and the areas where they needed to work a little more. As researchers, we concluded that, in terms of participation and enthusiasm, the students' response was positive, as they showed interest in the activities proposed and developed in the intervention. The mixture of literary analysis and content creation stimulated the students' imagination and allowed them to explore the narrative in a creative way.

**The misuse of digital tools to accomplish activities in the classroom hinders students' English understanding by decreasing the efforts they have to make to properly complete tasks.**

With technological advances and new digital tools, it has become evident that students make use of the translator and artificial intelligence (AI) to carry out their work and understand the proposed texts. Besides this, there is also a lack of engagement or a rejection of English. This was evidenced in the development of some reading comprehension activities and in some comments made during them, some of the comments were: "Profe, no, en inglés no", "Profe, ¿podemos hacerlo en español?" "Profe, el inglés es muy difícil" ["Teacher, no, in English no", "Teacher, can we do it in Spanish?", "Teacher, English is very hard" Participants

4,7 and 10, during the class development, August, 2024.] This posed a challenge when it came to achieving meaningful learning in the students and in the planning of the activities regarding short stories. Additionally, the rejection of English meant a decrease in the engagement at the time of carrying out the proposed activities, since most of the students forgot to complete them or did not have the desire to do them. As researchers we found it interesting to note how, despite the difficulty, most students were actively engaged in the classes. This suggests that, although there is a preference for reading and writing in Spanish, there is a genuine interest in practicing English when given the opportunity and confidence.

**Students' perception of short stories as a strategy to learn a foreign language allows teachers to adapt and improve their pedagogical strategies within the teaching process.**

By implementing short stories in English classes, the outdated way of teaching the language was broken, the students' preferences were taken into account and a different strategy for teaching English was proposed. One of the students mentioned, “Me gustan este tipo de actividades porque sólo nos enseñan gramática o a hacer frases en inglés y español, y con estas actividades salimos un poco de la rutina y hacemos cosas nuevas.” [“I like these types of activities because they only teach us grammar or how to make sentences in English and Spanish, and with these activities we get out of the routine and do new things” Participant 9, Focus Group, October 28th, 2024.] During the research, the comments, suggestions and perceptions of the students were taken into account in order to make changes, adapt and improve the planning and pedagogical strategies carried out by the teacher. This was done with the intention of creating meaningful learning in the students and to be in constant reflection and improvement of the teaching practice. As researchers and teachers, during the development of this research a journal was conducted where teacher reflection was the main focus. There, thanks to the intervention and the comments, perceptions and opinions of the students, new strategies to apply, suggestions for future research and steps to follow in the teaching practice were established.

The findings of this study showed the positive impact of short stories aligned to the students' interest and likes on their attention, knowledge acquisition and reading comprehension. The creative activities associated with their literature interest not only enhanced their communicative skills but also their social abilities. Besides this, short stories as a new strategy for teaching English offered a refreshing break from traditional methods

and allowed for the creation of a more dynamic classroom environment, especially for tenth graders. Likewise, students' perception and feedback helped researchers to improve their teaching practice and pedagogical strategies. Nevertheless, the misuse of some technological tools can hinder the development of some activities by students, since they represent a challenge when it comes to understanding English by themselves. Moreover, it was also a challenge for language teachers, as it hinders teaching, planning and learning.

### **Discussion**

This study showed that short stories in class had a great impact on reading comprehension and the development of communication skills, when they are aligned to the interests and likes of the students. For us, it was important to take into account students' perceptions and likes because the base of this research was to facilitate resources that really matched their interests and see how it works with each learning process which is related to the study by Nur & Tez (2021) who established that "To provide the students with a wide selection of literature that meets their interests, as doing so will bring more engagement to the class and would motivate the students to learn about the subject matter." Furthermore, this is aligned with K.D'Mello (2021) who said that engagement in learning must be a key objective in education because it is a way in which teachers can create meaningful learning and develop students' communicative skills and cognitive skills such as, critical thinking, creativity, etc. That said, this study succeeded in maintaining attention in class and strengthening the reading comprehension of tenth grade students, since the positive response of the students to the stories they liked the most and the activities carried out.

The analysis of the students' perception of the use of short stories showed a positive reception in their learning process of a foreign language such as English, specifically in the ability of reading comprehension, this was evidenced in the feedback of the students and the progress they had in their process. The high level of engagement they had in activities where after reading they had to create alternative endings or practice reading strategies, was one of the aspects to consider in the reception of this strategy to engage students in the classroom. According to Paran (2008), the effectiveness of using literature for language learning mainly depends on the teacher's ability to design appropriate tasks and scaffolding provided by the teacher when necessary. This is related to this study, since the teacher was the one who tried to carry out different activities where the students felt comfortable and confident to express themselves. It is also a challenge for teachers to create a safe environment where students feel

free to choose literature according to their interests and have the confidence to share their experiences and learning.

Notwithstanding, this research revealed a challenge for future researchers and teachers, which is the misuse of technological tools in the classroom and the specific case of this research combined with the rejection of English. Similarly to what Muhammed (2013) said about that students often find difficulty in understanding and absorbing the components of a foreign language. Muhammed stated that students often encounter significant difficulties in understanding and absorbing the components of a foreign language due to various challenges, including lack of motivation, insufficient exposure to meaningful language practice and the overwhelming nature of new linguistic structures and also highlighted that these obstacles can lead to frustration and disengagement in the learning process, which is further compounded by the ineffective use of technological tools or resources that do not align with the students' learning needs.

The focus group discussions provided insight into the experiences and perceptions of the participants. As a first moment the students expressed their emotions and opinions about short stories as a way to improve their English and their reading comprehension, there they highlighted positive opinions about the environment and the dynamism of the class. As a second moment, students provided important information on the improvement of their reading comprehension, since they stated that after the activities carried out their way of perceiving reading is different, which has also influenced the improvement of their critical thinking.

Short stories as an engagement strategy in the process of reading comprehension has had a significant impact not only on the linguistic skills of students, but also on their cognitive skills, since through these students strengthened their critical thinking and their ability to self-evaluate. Gutiérrez Fresneda & Planelles Iváñez (2022) point out that reading comprehension involves the participation of several levels of cognitive complexity that intervene interactively to integrate graphic, semantic, syntactic, pragmatic and interpretative information. Some examples of these skills developed by the students were: Through vocabulary in context students used their semantic function to develop the proposed activities. When interpreting the proposed text, the students made alternative endings and changes at the narrative level, etc.

### **Implications**

The findings of this research highlight the importance of short stories as an engagement strategy when teaching a foreign language such as English, thus strengthening the reading comprehension of tenth grade students. These findings allow the creation of new teaching strategies regarding literature in public schools and taking into account the likes, interests, opinions and perceptions of the students. The effectiveness of these strategies will depend on the ability of teachers to integrate reading in the classroom, to create spaces where students feel comfortable and safe to develop the proposed activities, the ability to constantly reflect on teaching practice in order to provide meaningful learning to students and the ability to adapt to new technological tools, making them an ally in the training process.

Additionally, in countries like Colombia where English is not the mother tongue, a rejection of a foreign language can be observed, so it will be important for future researchers to deal with motivation and engagement in this type of contexts and situations.

### **Limitations**

This research was conducted in a public school in Medellín, Colombia. The English levels of the students were very different, so the development of the research was delayed due to comprehension problems. Besides that, the period in which it was carried out was 9 weeks, which was considered a short period to obtain more accurate and significant findings. It is important that, for future research, a longer period of time be taken into account and that it can be developed in other academic contexts such as universities, private schools or rural areas.

## **Conclutions**

This research demonstrated that using short stories as an engagement strategy effectively increased tenth-grade students's interest, participation, and reading comprehension in learning English as a foreign language. The students showed greater motivation and became more actively involved in classroom activities, despite initial challenges such as language anxiety and creating a comfortable and stimulating environment, where students felt confident to explore literature in foreign languages. It also pointed out that teachers needed to adapt their teaching methods by integrating technology and student-centered approaches. The findings indicated that short stories could serve as a valuable tool to foster motivation, cultural awareness, and language skills among adolescents, especially in context where there is often rejection or disinterest towards learning a foreign language. Furthermore, it emphasized the need for educators to adapt their pedagogical practices by incorporating technological tools and student-centered approaches to foster meaningful learning experiences. Given the cultural and linguistic context of Colombia, where rejection of a foreign language was prevalent, these strategies proved to be particularly valuable in promoting motivation and active engagement. Overall, the utilization of short stories was a promising methodological approach that contributed to improved language proficiency and a more enriching educational experience for adolescents.

## References

- Bintz, W. P. (1993). Resistant readers in secondary education: Some insights and implications. *Journal of Reading, 36*(8), 604–615.
- Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, J. (1996). *The culture of education*. Harvard University Press.
- Carr, N. (2010). *The shallows: What the Internet is doing to our brains*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Cavanagh, M. (2011). Students' experiences of active engagement through cooperative learning activities in lectures. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 12*(1), 23–33. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787410387724>
- Celce-Murcia, M. (1991). *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (2nd ed.). Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Cummins, J. (2001). *Language, power and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Multilingual Matters.
- Dole, J. A., Duffy, G. G., Roehler, L. R., & Pearson, P. D. (1991). Moving from the old to the new: Research on reading comprehension instruction. *Review of Educational Research, 61*(2), 239–264. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543061002239>
- Finn, J. D., & Zimmer, K. S. (2012). Student engagement: What is it? Why does it matter? In S. L. Christenson, A. L. Reschly, & C. Wylie (Eds.), *Handbook of research on student engagement* (pp. 97–131). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-2018-7\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-2018-7_5)
- Fitton, D., Read, J. C., & Horton, M. (2013). The challenge of working with teens as participants in interaction design. *Proceedings of IDC '13: Interaction Design and Children, 67–75*. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2485760.2485767>
- Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research, 74*(1), 59–109.

- Gallagher, K. (2009). *Readicide: How schools are killing reading and what you can do about it*. Stenhouse Publishers.
- Gibson, J. J. (1979). *The ecological approach to visual perception*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Gutiérrez Fresneda, R., & Planelles Iváñez, A. (2022). Comprensión lectora: procesos, estrategias y niveles de complejidad cognitiva. *Revista Electrónica Educare*, 26(3), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.15359/ree.26-3.22>
- Guthrie, J. T., & Wigfield, A. (2000). Engagement and motivation in reading. In M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, P. D. Pearson & R. Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (Vol. 3, pp. 403–422). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hall, C., & Coles, M. (1995). *Children reading and talking: The making of meaning*. Open University Press.
- Henry, A. (2019). L2 motivation and multilingual identities. *The Modern Language Journal*, 103(3), 639–655. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12588>
- Horgan, J. (2003). Active learning and student engagement. *Education Today*.
- Hughes, G., & Quinn, F. M. (2013). The impact of lecturing on student learning. In *Education for Nurses: Theory and Practice*. Routledge.
- Jaarsma, T. A., Baars, J. W., & Scherpbier, A. J. (2008). Medical students' preparation for the transition to clinical training: A review of the literature. *Teaching and Learning in Medicine*, 20(2), 100–105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10401330801991503>
- Jang, H., Reeve, J., & Deci, E. L. (2010). Engaging students in learning activities: It is not autonomy support or structure but autonomy support and structure. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102(3), 588–600. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019682>
- K. D'Mello, S. (2021). Engagement in learning. In R. Azevedo & V. Alevén (Eds.), *International handbook of the learning sciences* (pp. 273–284). Routledge.
- Kirby, J. R. (2007). Reading comprehension: Its nature and development. In A. Farstrup & S. J. Samuels (Eds.), *What research has to say about reading instruction* (3rd ed., pp. 40–64). International Reading Association.

Koutsompou, V.-I. (2015). The use of literature in the language classroom: Methods and aims. *International Journal of Information and Education Technology*, 5(1), 74–79. <https://doi.org/10.7763/IJJET.2015.V5.479>

Krashen, S. D. (2004). *The power of reading: Insights from the research* (2nd ed.). Libraries Unlimited.

Lazar, G. (1993). *Literature and language teaching: A guide for teachers and trainers*. Cambridge University Press.

Manuel, J. (2012a). Adolescent boys, literacies and school English. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 35(1), 31–44.

Manuel, J. (2012b). Teenagers and reading: Factors that shape the quality of their reading lives. *English in Australia*, 47(2), 45–57.

Matuk, C., Diamond, J., & Uttal, D. (2009). Visual representations and science understanding: The impact of graphic novels on student engagement and comprehension. *Journal of Science Education and Technology*, 18(4), 305–320. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10956-009-9150-5>

Muhammed, A. A. (2013). The effect of using literature in teaching English language. *International Journal of English and Literature*, 4(6), 127–133. <https://doi.org/10.5897/IJEL12.144>

Muhammed, A. A. (2013). Using literature as a technique for teaching vocabulary in ESL context. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 5(4), 134–146. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v5i4.3990>

National Reading Panel. (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pubs/nrp/Documents/report.pdf>

Norman, D. A. (2002). *The design of everyday things*. Basic Books. (Original work published 1988)

Nur, H., & Tez, S. (2021). The role of literature in English language teaching: Benefits and challenges. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 9(2), 151–157. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.9n.2p.151>

Nur, S., & Tez, N. (2021). The role of literature in teaching English as a foreign language: A practical study. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 9(1), 88–94. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.9n.1p.88>

Nussbaum, M. C. (2010). *Not for profit: Why democracy needs the humanities*. Princeton University Press.

Oga-Baldwin, W. L. Q. (2019). Acting, thinking, feeling, making, collaborating: The engagement process in foreign language learning. *Foreign Language Annals*, 52(4), 855–872. <https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12433>

Papadima-Sophocleous, S. (2009). Reading: The skills of upper secondary school students. *Proceedings of the EDULEARN09 Conference*, 108–115.

Papi, M., & Hiver, P. (2020). Language learning motivation as a complex dynamic system: A global perspective of truth, control, and value. *The Modern Language Journal*, 104(1), 209–232. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12626>

Paran, A. (2008). The role of literature in instructed foreign language learning and teaching: An evidence-based survey. *Language Teaching*, 41(4), 465–496. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026144480800520X>

Permawardhena, I. S. (2005). Integrating literature into foreign language teaching: A Sri Lankan perspective. *Novitas-Royal*, 1(2), 92–97.

Pozo, R. (2020). Extensive reading in English as a foreign language: Benefits and implications for teaching. *Revista de Estudios en Educación*, 2(3), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.17979/redu.2020.3.2.6955>

Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants. *On the Horizon*, 9(5), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10748120110424816>

Reeve, J., & Jang, H. (2022). What teachers say and do to support students' autonomy during a learning activity. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 114*(1), 1–15.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000515>

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. Guilford Press.

Schneider, M. (2019). Autonomy as a predictor of student engagement: The moderating role of self-regulation. *Learning and Individual Differences, 70*, 76–87.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2019.01.007>

Sidney, K. (2021). Engagement in education: Why it matters and how to foster it. In K. D'Mello (Ed.), *Educational psychology perspectives* (pp. 105–122). Academic Press.

Wolf, M. (2007). *Proust and the squid: The story and science of the reading brain*. Harper.

Zengin, B., Başal, A., & Yükselir, C. (2019). Investigation into the perceptions of students towards using literature in language education. *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction, 11*(1), 125–142.

Zhou, M., Hiver, P., & Zheng, X. (2022). Student engagement in second language learning: Definition, measurement, and pedagogical implications. *System, 106*,

102759. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2022.102759>