Capítulo II

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Storytelling in simulated environments for the development of the English-speaking skills

Narración de cuentos en ambientes simulados para el desarrollo de la destreza de hablar inglés

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1. Introduction

Speaking skill is an important tool for learners of English to express a message or to communicate for different purposes effectively (Celce-Murcia, 2019). This skill is one of the most essential components in the English learning process since it allows users to interact in the same language. For that reason, the Ministry of Education (MINE-DUC), has included this subject in its national curriculum to enhance the language level established by the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR). The students who belong to the Bachillerato General Unificado level at the end of the second year must achieve the B1.2 level of English proficiency which allows learners to be able to have basic conversations and introduce themselves, and others.

The development of speaking skills is the biggest challenge in learning a second or foreign language. This happens because students usually do not feel encouraged at the moment of speaking. They rarely raise their hands to answer a question voluntarily so teachers most of the time force them to say something by asking straight away a determined student. What is more, when they have to speak, they feel very insecure about what they pretend to say. Many authors such as Doğan and Selcen (2021), and Marzuki et al., (2016), have found that students have problems with speaking skills due to physiological, or sociological effects on speaking caused by their anxiety of themselves at the moment of producing a message. For that reason, it has been considered to apply digital storytelling to improve students' speaking skills. Zuhriyah (2017) states clearly that "Storytelling can help to solve problems of the hesitation and weakness of speaking".

In order to face the gap in speaking skills, it has been established the following central research question: How does storytelling help learners improve speaking skills through simulated environments with students of Bachillerato General Unificado at a high school in Loja city? This general research has been derived into two sub-question: What is the effectiveness of storytelling on the development of English-speaking skills through simulated environments, and what are the students' perceptions about

the advantages of storytelling in developing students' speaking skills components through simulated environments?

In order to carry out this study, action research was planned. The researcher made a pre-test to determine the level of speaking that students had at the beginning of the proposal, and a post-test was conducted at the end of the study. It was also necessary to apply a questionnaire to know the students' perceptions about the experience of learning through storytelling in simulated environments. Therefore, it was possible to gather quantitative and qualitative data that helped to answer the research questions. The implementation of strategies for storytelling in simulated environments permitted students to face their difficulties in speaking skills. Likewise, it can be said that the present research work provided an important contribution since it implemented storytelling by using simulated environments to improve students' English-speaking skills. The biggest advantage of this research benefited both teachers for new methodological styles and learners for their improvement in this skill.

The following chapter contains seven parts, the first one is the abstract, which is a summary of what the chapter is about. The second one is the introduction, which is about the most relevant points about the variable under study. The third one is the methodology, which presents where, and how, the research was carried out. Next, the result expresses the main findings. After that, is the discussion, which contains an analysis of the findings related to other authors or previous studies. The conclusions section mentions what the researcher found and concludes. Then, the recommendations suggest or propose something derived from the findings. Finally, the references give reliability to this work and put it in context.

2. Literature review

To argue the development of this chapter, the conceptual and scientific foundations, theoretical bases, and their respective authors that are considered relevant to this research will be presented below.

Simulated Environments

Simulated Environments, also called Virtual Reality (VR), is a sophisticated simulation of an environment that slightly seems to be in that situation using technological equipment. Liu et al. (2017) affirm that the idea of Virtual reality is to create a fantasy of what people are watching. The purpose of virtual reality (VR) is to create those participants supposed to be in that virtual space and be part of what is happening (p.19). Likewise, Seidel & Paul (1997) defined virtual reality as "human immersion in a synthetic environment"; so that, farther from this fantasy, virtual reality is designed to be computerized, synchronously, and even controlled through body movements. Therefore, VR has been considered a tool to be implemented in the educational field. That is why VR provides multiple benefits that contribute to the improvement of students' learning.

Virtual Reality in Education

Currently, the advancement of technology and the teaching-learning process have been influenced by VR. This development has created a surround where students can have the opportunity to be immersed and explore the capabilities that VR has to gain students' attention. In that way, the students will demonstrate interest, develop their target skills in the target language, and will get meaningful learning. To support this claim, Kamenov (2017, par. 4) states in his paper that he affirms that the benefits of bringing VR to the educational field involve relevance, creativity, engagement, and participation. For that reason, VR is an innovative teaching tool that provides many ways to communicate, share, and interchange information, knowledge, and skills.

Simulated Environments in the Teaching Process

Simulation inside the teaching-learning process contains a wide variety of advantages. It adapts to students' needs, time, speeds, and knowledge. This technique promotes putting into practice what they know, and that helps students learn by themselves. Besides, VR through situations allows students to be creative and thoughtful. The

main problem with this explanation is that people tend to think that VR's purpose in this field is to offer diversion to students. However, there is an inconsistency with this argument because VR contributes to learners being integrated into this world. Virtual Reality allows being capable of solving problems, becoming talented children, and developing their metacognitive abilities. Although, Shaviniva (2013) differs in that innovation is an extremely important element in the educational process. Her theory is different from others in that innovation does not build innovators, but this is an alternative way of teaching, which helps students develop their talents, motivation, and critical thinking since students are not going to demonstrate an interest in it at all.

Blended Environments

Interestingly, blended learning is a kind of method that mixes both traditional with modern classrooms. Modern technological tools provide a wide, flexible space for teaching and learning. Storytelling immersed in blended learning environments develops the skills of participating interactively. It provokes in students the necessity of becoming self-aware of their knowledge to construct the ideas to then say them. In contrast, this method gives students the opportunity of learning at any time, in any place, since it helps their formative assessment.

The teaching is no longer to pick up a pen and paper to write and memorize something. Instead, Abouchacra points out this statement.

> A blended model means that learning is no longer constrained by the timing and location of a traditional lecture. Instead, coupling face-to-face learning with online instruction can provide students and educators with more flexibility than the traditional classroom can. In this environment, students have access to supplementary course material such as readings or recorded lectures. This means students can choose when and where they study, as well as how often they access material to fully understand a concept. Blended learning also gives instructors additional flexibility. (2022, p. 7)

Storytelling

Storytelling is more than the art of telling something, it promotes communication and interaction at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. It can be told through games that inspire purposeful conversation. Friday (2014) Storytelling as the word itself describes it is the art of telling something with the purpose of, getting attention, and motivating those who are listening or reading to speak. The storytelling technique provides students with the chance to go through a story, express thoughts, and emotions, know more about a different culture, and be able to connect with that moment. It has a variety of materials to be implemented, and teachers can use them to create a new story. It can be represented by singing, showing pictures, gestures, or in a written way.

Recent studies have manifested that storytelling is an effective method to teach a foreign language, since it breaks the rule of traditional classes. From that point of view, it is easy to know how efficient storytelling is in the teaching-learning process. Likewise, it wakes up students' curiosity and reflection while they watch or listen to the story.

Types of Storytelling

Throughout history, telling stories has become an art. This art keeps preserving our culture, and in that way, there have been appearing different ways to tell stories, there are four types of storytelling which are described above

Oral Storytelling: It has become an important part of our society since the main purpose of oral storytelling is to pass information from one to another. One of the main characteristics is that oral storytelling seeks to entertain, reflex, and share life experiences or fantasy stories. There are many ways of storytelling to be expressed such as singing, reciting poetry, games, or telling jokes.

Visual Storytelling: This type of storytelling has been involved in the art field. It can be represented by paintings, drawings, photos, illustrations, or infographics. Currently,

modern technology has been modified through a screen using cartoons or another application to get the audience's attention.

Written Storytelling: Writing stories is another incredible and unique way to express feelings and emotions through different styles. These styles are designed for all kinds of people who are interested in romance, sci-fi, comedy, or love.

Digital storytelling: these days' technology has been the biggest tool for teaching since you can combine the previous type of storytelling with new digital elements even if it can add music, voices, and so on. On the internet, there are many options to create a story or just use one which has been already designed.

"Plotagon" Application

Some applications allow working with storytelling. The creator of this application Love says that "Plotagon" can produce animated movies of text dialogue (2013). The major objective of this platform is to potentiate critical thinking skills, enrich students' creativity, and enhance communication among students. Technically, this tool consists of two main sets of scenes and characters. The user has the chance to choose the sets, spaces, characters, kind of background, and dialogues, and give them a voice. The main choices why "Plotagon" needs to be immersed in the teaching-learning process are: it is an online free tool, and you have many amazing options for your scenes and a variety of characters for any situation. From the curricular point of view: It allows the expression of ideas and sharing of knowledge, during this part, students will be involved, and so they will participate actively and logically.

Learning by doing something is a great motivation for teachers as for students because the management of this tool develops the student's multiple intelligences. Its use will provide many solutions to today's students' problems with speaking skills. Giving them access to knowledge through the use of simple tools promotes them the opportunity to get meaningful and lifelong learning, especially in the skill focused.

Avatars

Avatars are another simulation of the real world such as people, animals, places, and so on. They have been created to be part of interaction in virtual spaces. Antonio (2019) One of the biggest advantages is that Avatars can be used according to what the tutor wants to present. Avatars offer students the opportunity to engage students inside an unreal, imaginary experience that occurred in the surroundings they are living. In other words, it is said that Avatars help those students who have problems interacting with others. So, avatars are not only technological toys, but also, allow students to communicate by expressing feelings, thoughts, and ideas. It changes the role of the tutor towards one sophisticated guide as well.

Speaking skills

Speaking skills is a fundamental skill that all foreign language learners need to achieve success and obtain a fruitful, clear conversation. To be clearer about the definition of this skill. Zuhriyah (2017) claims that communication is part of our daily life and is developed by speaking. This skill allows one to interact and express what a speaker means orally. In that way, Bahadorfar & Omidvar, (2014) argue that speaking skills are a crucial tool to communicate with each other.

Speaking is one of the productive skills of English language learning. Derakhshan, (2016) states that English contains four skills which are listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Inside those skills, speaking and writing belong to this category. They are said that they are the hardest to be developed for many factors such as their practice, knowledge of the language, and their influence in an English environment. Therefore, Derakhshan affirms that speaking skill is difficult to learn, so this skill should be acquired cooperatively.

During learning English Oradee (2012) indicates that speaking is the skill more important to be achieved. This skill allows pupils to interact and transmit what they think in a real situation. In order to interact, students have to use the language fluently and

effectively. To enrich the effective use of the language, students must get over some difficulties such as pronunciation, intonation, and coherence. Nevertheless. The same author reports that second English learners face some troubles at the moment of acquiring the language. The lack of students' self-confidence when they have the opportunity to communicate with a native speaker or even in the EFL classroom. In other words, students feel scared of making mistakes when they are using the language. As a result, communication sometimes tends to be weak or misunderstood.

Fortunately, many technological tools have been immersed in the classrooms to improve the learners' speaking skills. Teachers have adopted it to motivate and encourage students to speak as much as they can. Therefore, the presence of the internet and its advantages have gone hand in hand with the teaching process, especially in the teaching of speaking skills.

Accounting for what has been mentioned, to become a master in speaking skills it is important to know that some components must be learned which are pronunciation, accuracy, cohesion, grammar, and vocabulary. To enhance this skill in the EFL classroom, teachers have to offer a methodology that implements communication by using authentic materials or technology.

Components of Speaking

Regarding the basic components of English-speaking skills, Cameron (2001) points out that to correctly produce a language. It is mandatory to use the appropriate components, to transmit the message effectively and in an exact way. Puma (2016) corroborates that enriching speaking skills demand adequate use of these components such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation that need to be transmitted with accurate fluency at the moment of learning a second language.

Pronunciation

Every single language has its own dialect. Pronunciation is how a language is spoken. This component refers to the act or manner of pronouncing a series of words to produce specific sounds. It can involve physical acts, eye movements, facial expressions, and gestures. In other words, pronunciation contributes to the message or de intentions of the person who is talking will be clear, understandable, and direct.

> According to Gilbert (2008), pronunciation involves many challenges. The most important one is that the teacher does not normally have time to teach their students the sounds of the words, and when they do have time to teach them, they help them with the sounds of words, but sometimes they find some other challenges that hamper them from continue teaching pronunciation (p. 1).

Fluency, Accuracy, and Complexity

According to Goh & Burns (2012) "the effects of cognitive processing demands on learners' language use is that they may not have adequate cognitive resources to produce speech that is both fluent and adequate" (p. 42). Each of these components is measured together and shows a proficient domain of the language since they are so important at the moment of producing the target language. So, in this way, the authors gave meaning to each one of the components to have a clear understanding of them.

3. Methodology

Setting and Participants

This research work was conducted at a private high school in the city of Loja for students who belong to the second-year-high school level, during the 2022-2023 school year. It is located in a highland area in the south of Ecuador in South America, whose geographic coordinates are 3° 59' 35. 27" South, and 79° 12' 15.19"West.

The sampling group was selected by convenience, which is the process of taking the desired members for the study based on the accessibility that the researcher had (Gay et al., 2012). This students' group was naturally homogenous, which fits well with the research design. Finally, to collect the data, participants were provided with an anonymous code to comply with the ethical principle of privacy.

Method and Research Design

As previously mentioned, the research problem of this study was how storytelling helps to improve English-speaking skills through simulated environments among second-year students of BGU at a high school in Loja city, during the 2022-2023 school year. To figure out this issue, the researcher used an action research model with a mixed focus which combines both quantitative and qualitative collection of numerical and narrative data (Creswell, 2012; Gay et al., 2012).

Furthermore, this study used action research since its main goal was to investigate a specific situation that improves the practice (Creswell, 2012) and contributes to solving a problem in which the researcher is part of the problem and elaborated on a solution for this problem. This model has been suitable because this study utilized a sequence in the following stages suggested by Efrat and Ravid (2022). The authors assume that cyclical action research begins with a question and finishes with the implementation of enough knowledge which allows the execution of the research work focused on the research question.

This model of research has six important stages of cyclical research. The first one focused on identifying the main problem to be solved. The second step involved the process of gathering all the information available about the problem that the researcher decided to explore. In the third step, the researcher designed a plan for the methods to be used in the study. Therefore, in the fourth step, the researcher gathered all the data in the target group where the problem was found. The fifth step shows the interpretation of the information obtained. Finally, the sixth step is based on presenting the research analysis (Efrat and Ravid, 2022).

Data Collection

The testing technique was used with the instrument of pre-test, which allowed the collection of data before the intervention. This technique is used to examine people's knowledge to determine what that person knows or has learned. (Madsen, 1983). While the post-test helped to identify the effect that storytelling through simulated environments had on speaking skills. Moreover, there was a selection method used to score through the criterion-referenced scoring suggested by Gay et al. (2012). Likewise, the technique of survey with the instruments of a questionnaire was applied to gather information about students' perceptions of the influence of digital storytelling on the development of speaking skills. This survey included closed-ended and open-ended questions in order to argue the students' answers (Creswell, 2012).

Data Analysis

Considering the design of the study, it is important to mention that the researcher used descriptive statistics through the Microsoft Excel program, which was useful for analyzing the results gathered in the questionnaire. The data were categorized and analyzed with themes with the indicators (Creswell, 2012). The data helped to support the outcomes about the influence of digital storytelling on speaking skills. These data were analyzed based on the students' perceptions using an adaptation of the Likert scale that allowed the researcher to organize and set these results.

4. Results

Pre-test and Post-test

Objective 1: To identify the effectiveness of storytelling on the development of the speaking learning experience by using simulated environments among second-year students of high school.

The following segment shows the results obtained throughout the research. The pre-test was administered at the beginning of the intervention, and a post-test was applied at the end, respectively. These instruments allowed the researcher to measure students' speaking skills such as "pronunciation", "fluency", "accuracy", "vocabulary", and "coherence".

Figure 1

Pre-test results.

Results gathered from the Pretest of the Second year BGU students' speaking skills components.

Grading scale (2/2) Frequency (F)	Pronunciation		Fluency		Accuracy		Vocabulary		Coherence	
	F	(%)	F	(%)	F	(%)	F	(%)	F	(%)
Grades (0–0,5)	3	10	4	13	5	17	6	20	5	17
Grades (0,6–1)	7	23	8	27	7	23	6	20	3	10
Grades (1,01–1,5)	8	27	6	20	9	30	9	30	9	30
Grades (1,6–2)	12	40	12	40	9	30	9	30	13	43
Total of Students	30	100%	30	100%	30	100%	30	100%	30	100%
MEAN	**1,48**		**1,43**		**1,37**		**1,21**		**1,46**	
TOTAL OF MEAN = 6,91										

What is it interesting in the data in Table 1, is that students presented many deficiencies in their speaking skills. Therefore, they were not able to attain the average set by the national grading scale (7/10). For that reason, it was crucially necessary to plan and carry out an intervention plan that empowers the skill under study. This table, shows the number of students and the percentage of scores acquired in the pre-test between 0-0,5; 0,6-1; 1,1-1,5; and 1,6-2 per component, such as "pronunciation", "fluency, "accuracy", "vocabulary", and "coherence". These skills were evaluated

before the intervention to identify the effect of implementing digital storytelling with the Plotagon Application.

Regarding the "pronunciation" component, with a mean of (1,48/2). 40% of students had a score of 1,6-2, which means students did not have problems producing a message. It is followed by 27% who got a grade between 1,01-1,5 which is almost good pronunciation. 23% obtained a grade between 0,6-1, showing some trouble in pronunciation, and 10% got a score of 0-0,5 because their speech was unintelligible, they made mispronunciations and hesitation which caused a misinterpretation of the message and reduced clarity at times.

Similarly, in the "fluency" component, with a mean of (1.43/2), 40% of the students scored 1,6-2, as they found it easy to speak faster and with confidence. Likewise, 20% accomplished a grade of 1,01-1,5 which means that their fluency was not the best but not unsatisfactory. On the other hand, 27% reached a score of 0,6-1 which reflected the students' difficulties using suitable words at the moment of speaking. Additionally, in 13% with a 0-0,6 score, the students had complications speaking quickly due to their limited vocabulary and filler words which made the message difficult to understand.

As for the "accuracy" component with a mean of (1,37/2), 30% of students with a score of 1,6-2 did not make mistakes in relation to grammar structures, and the message was understood. The 1,01-1,5 score with 30% of students showed that they faced some obstacles to be direct and precise. Unlike the last grade, 23% of students obtained a score of 0,6-1, which meant that students dealt with the organization of their ideas. Unfortunately, 17% of students got a score of 0-0,5 because they could not manage this component at all. Their responses were not clear at all and the sentences were weak with deficient utterances.

With reference to the "vocabulary" component, the result was not as satisfactory as expected, with an average of (1.21/2). 30% of the students scored 1,6-2 which means that the students had a wide knowledge of words that allowed them to describe anything. In this sense, the other 30% that achieved a score of 1,01-1,5 presented minimum problems remembering some words to describe something or telling

information. Lamentably, 20% with a grade of 0,6-1 demonstrated that they lack enough vocabulary to express ideas. However, the last 20% scored 0-0.5, which shows that when the students had to describe an image, they found it impossible to convey an adequate and accurate description.

Concerning the "coherence" component, with a mean of (1.46/2), 43% of the students with a score of 1,6-2 successfully passed this component, as they had no problems linking their ideas. Apart from this, 30% of students got a score of 1,01-1,5 since they express roughly great and clear ideas. On the contrary, 10% with a grade of 0,6-1 showed that making coherent sentences was such hard work. 17% of the students with a score of 0-0.5 were not able to handle the linker to create sentences and express precise ideas. They knew the linkers but used them inadequately, which did not allow them to express a complete thought and broke the sequence of the message, with the consequent loss of coherence.

In a nutshell, students' lowest performance was reflected in the "vocabulary" component, which refers to the suitable use of expressions, or words to convey clear ideas about the topic to be talked about. Unlike that, the highest performance was seen in the "pronunciation" component, which stands for the flexible understanding and intonation throughout the message. Nevertheless, fluency, accuracy, and coherence were also some of the main focuses for the researcher to improve during the intervention proposal.

Figure 2

Post-test results

Results gathered from the Post-test of the Second year BGU students' speaking skills components.

Grading scale (2/2) Frecuency (F)	Pronunciation		Fluency		Accuracy		Vocabulary		Coherence	
	F	(%)	F	(%)	F	(%)	F	(%)	F	(%)
Grades (0–0,5)	1	3	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0
Grades (0,6–1)	4	13	10	33	9	30	1	3	3	10
Grades (1,01–1,5)	10	33	7	23	10	33	8	27	6	20
Grades (1,6–2)	15	50	13	43	10	33	21	70	21	70
Total of students	30	100%	30	100%	30	100%	30	100%	30	100%
MEAN		1,65		1,55		1,48		1,88		1,86
TOTAL OF MEAN = 8,38										

Table 2, illustrates the number of students and the percentage of scores obtained during the post-test between 0-0,5; 0,6-1; 1,1-1,5; and 1,6-2 per component, such as "pronunciation", "fluency, "accuracy", "vocabulary", and "coherence". This was evaluated after 40 hours of intervention to identify the effect of implementing digital storytelling with the Plotagon Application.

Regarding the "pronunciation" component, with a mean obtained of (1,65/2). 50% of the students had a score of 1,6-2 improved significantly since students could pronounce almost many words without a second thought. This reflected not only the students´ engagement but also the teacher's competence in teaching basic phonetic sounds .33% with a grade of 1,01.1,5 accomplished improving their pronunciation even though they make some pronunciation mistakes. With a score of 0,6-1,

13% of students kept struggling with the phonetic sounds. On the other hand, 3% of the students got a score of 0-0,5 due to their no-attendance or because they did not pay attention and learned some basic phonetic sounds.

With regard to the "fluency" component, the mean obtained was (1,55/2), interestingly, 43% of students' speech improved even though there was not the highest level of fluency, but the message was captured and understandable to the listeners. Likewise, 23% of the students with a grade of 1,01-1,5 had almost a fast way of telling and conveying their intentions even though they paused rarely. Whereas the 0,5-1 score had a 33% which means that students took time to think, and sometimes they used filler words, but finally, the message was logical.

Talking about the "accuracy" component the mean obtained was (1,48/2), 33% of students obtained a score of 1,6-2 because students' production was clearer and as direct as expected. While, 33% with a score of 1,01-1,5, and 30% with a score of 0,6-1 make reference to students who had almost few grammatical mistakes at the moment of speaking. Although 3% of students produced rare mistakes in sentences they were occasional, this allowed students to immediately provide themselves with a self-correction.

As for the "vocabulary" component with an of (1,84/2), the result was surprisingly unexpected since 70% of students got a score of 1,6-2 the contents taught, the stories, and the creation of morals promoted new useful and suitable vocabulary to strengthen sentences and convey information. Followed by 27% with a score of 1,01-1,5 which means students got to extend their lexis, However, 3% still struggle with this component since they could not remember the exact vocabulary for what they were talking about.

Regarding the "coherence" component with a mean of (1,86/2), in the 1,6-2 score 70% of students' English production changed notably in their performance at the moment of speaking since they learnt deeply how to use correctly the connectors for contrasting or adding information without losing the sequence of the message. Unlike, in the pre-test grade of 1,01-1,5 went down 10%, which means that students started using

the connectors accurately. Whereas, 10% of students with a grade of 0,5-1 showed some difficulties in strengthening sentences by using appropriate connectors.

Figure 3

Comparison between Pre-test and Post-test results

Mean avarages comparison obtained in the Pretest and Postted
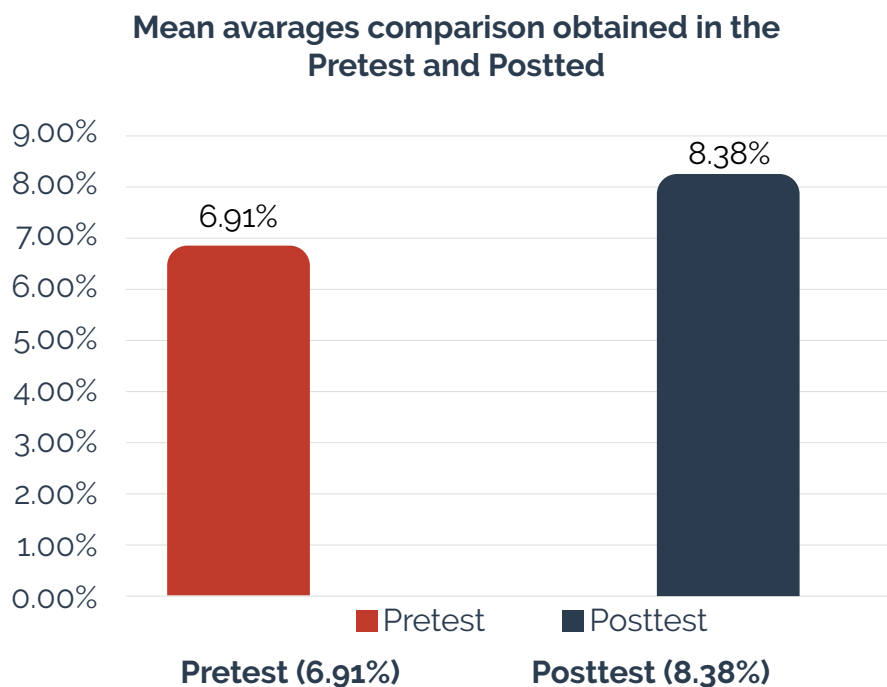
It is satisfactory to say that the results obtained in the post-test showed that there was a significant improvement in students' speaking skills, after the application of storytelling through simulated environments during the English learning process. The results are noticeable, the average of the pre-test 100% of students got a score of 6,91/10 while in the post-test it increased to 8,39/10. It can be said that the students' average reached a higher level of improvement that belongs to the satisfactory range between 8 and 9 according to the Ministry of Education scale.

Questionnaire

Objective 2: To describe the students' perceptions about storytelling on developing speaking skills among second-year students of high school.

Furthermore, the researcher decided to apply a questionnaire to corroborate and know students' perceptions of the advantages of storytelling in a simulated environment and how this has influenced their speaking skills development.

Figure 1

Students' responses about how often stories caught their attention

Adaptation from Likert's scale
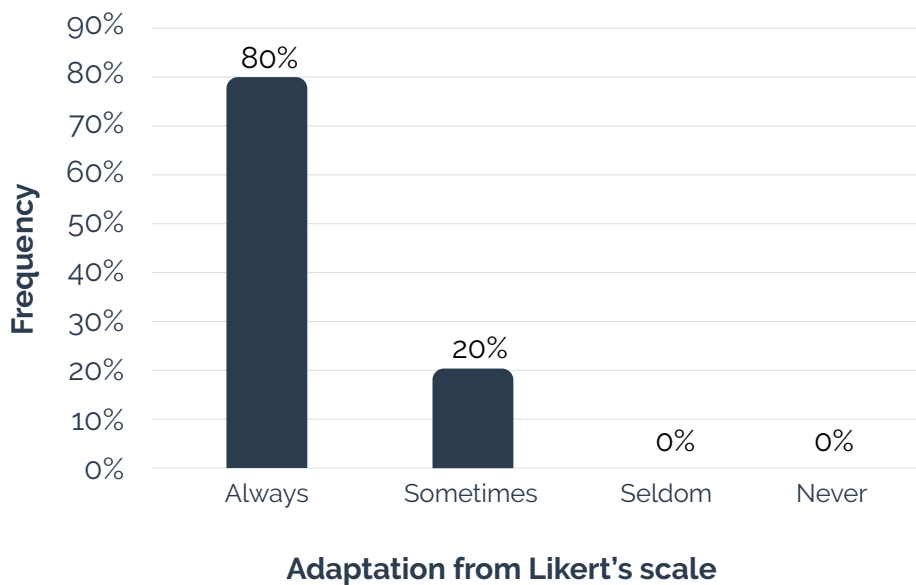
When students were asked about how often the stories in simulated environments caught their attention, 80% of the students answered that the digital stories caught their attention, and sometimes were catchy for them. From the open-ended questions, students provided extra information for this selection. They said it was catchy because it is like a film but with questions at the end to know that they have understood, besides learning new vocabulary and pronunciation. On the other hand, 20%

commented that sometimes they lost due to the unknown words in the story. From the researcher's point of view, as it was observed, students felt that the stories were interesting since they were interactive for the questions at the end, moreover, it encouraged them to pay attention.
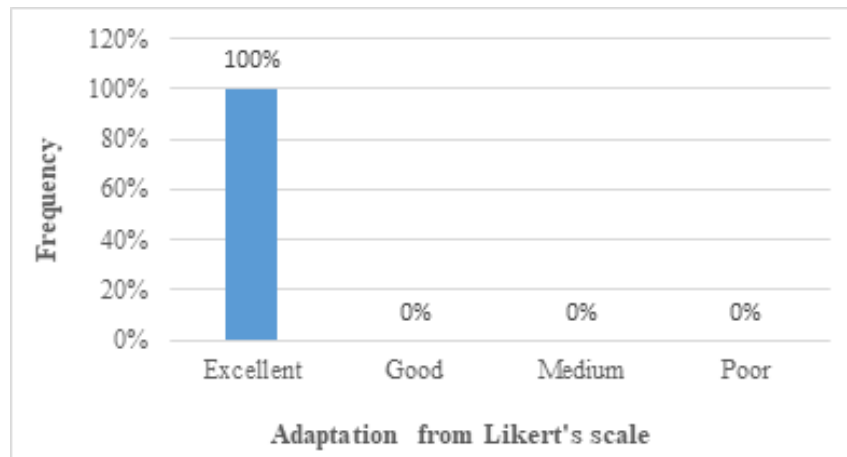
Figure 2

*Students' responses about the application arise their curiosity*
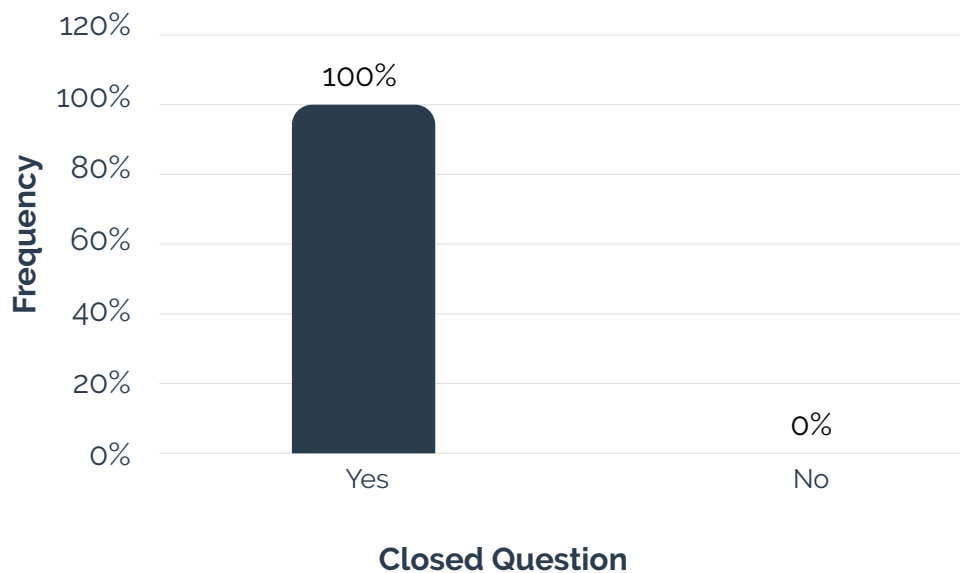
Closed Question

Likewise, 100% of the students interestingly selected the Plotagon application to arouse their curiosity. From the open-ended questions, the researcher was satisfied with the students' engaging comments, they said that this application could be used to make funny stories, and it can be used for other subjects since the way of handling it was easy and the stories can be elaborated in a short period of time. From the researcher's perspective, this opinion can be confirmed because the students were involved in the story process, and in the scene organization.

Figure 3

Students' responses about how the strategy helped them to summarize a story

Figure 4

*Students' responses about how creating a new ending fostered their fluency in speaking*
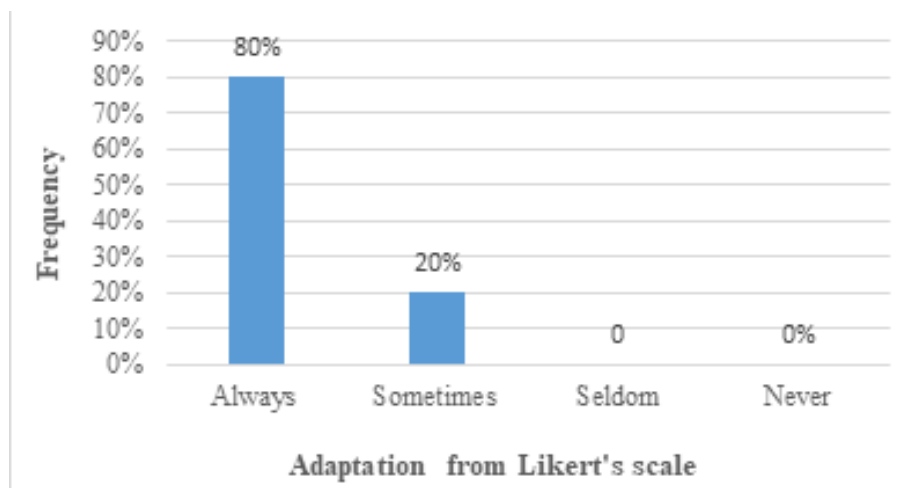
In relation to the Someone, Wanted, But, So, Then (SWBST) strategy for summarizing a story, 100% of the students surprisingly opted for selecting that this strategy was

"excellent" to summarize a story because through it, they were able to sequence and say the story in a few words. From the open-ended questions, one of the students said "This strategy allowed us to get a short but precise summary of any story, it doesn't matter how large the story could be" (Student 06). From the researcher's viewpoint, it is said that students easily master, domain, and identify the critical elements from the stories worked on in class and the stories that they already wrote.

The results show that 80% of the students answered that creating an ending in a story helped them to foster their fluency in speaking skills, but 20% selected that sometimes it helped them to gain fluency in speaking. In the open-ended questions, students said that creating a new ending for the stories supported them not only with their fluency but also helped to develop their creativity taking into account the contents taught. While others argued that only sometimes it fostered their fluency since they have a limited vocabulary or did not have the ability to organize their ideas quickly. The researcher's opinion shows that this thought process was ratified because most of the students used the grammar and vocabulary learned previously when they had to create a new ending in a story. Previous knowledge was used to express what they wanted to say using their imagination.

Figure 5

Students' answers about the best genre of the stories
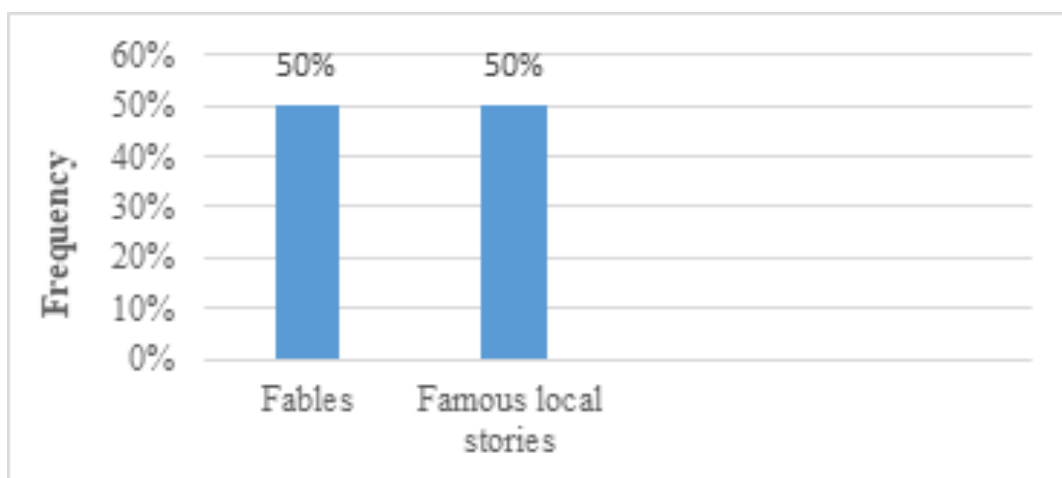
Regarding what type of stories students liked the most, 50% of the students answered that the fables and famous local stories were more entertaining. In the open-ended questions, students argued that they liked both because fables and famous local stories have a kind of moral or message which makes them more exciting. According to one of the students, "Fables are good since they provide information through morale in the story, and this also increases my vocabulary" (Student 02). Likewise, the other 50% commented that famous local stories are also good since they are well-known and can relate Spanish words to English ones. From the researcher's point of view, it is corroborated that students were very interested in these two types of stories.

Figure 6

Students' responses about the morale in stories promoted their critical thinking
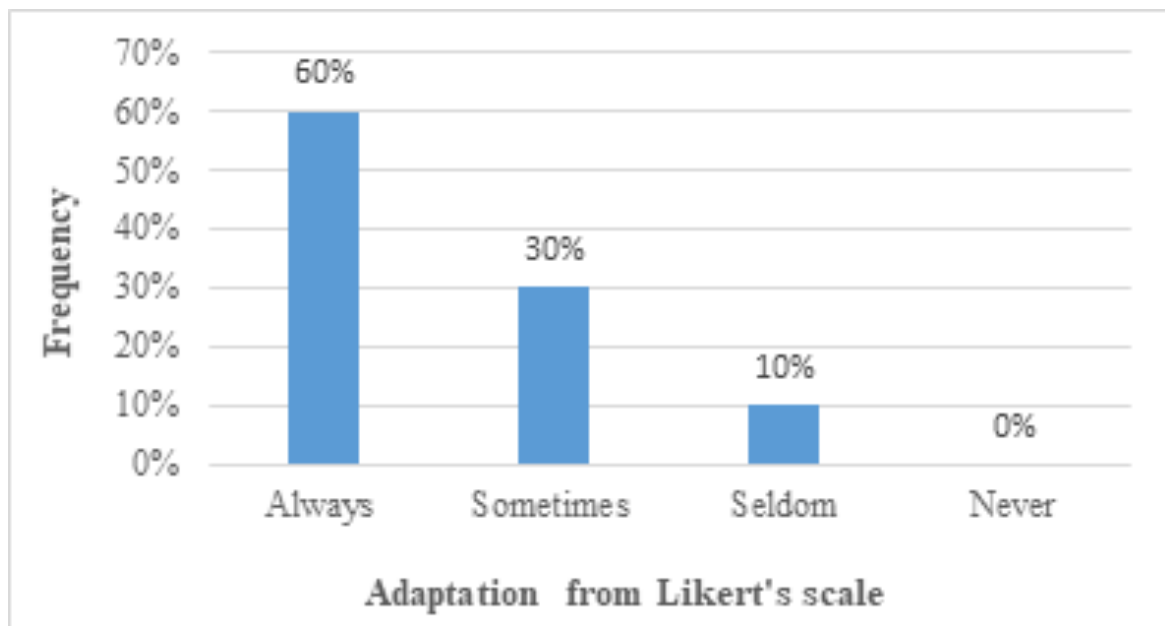
When students were asked about how the creation of a moral in the stories promoted their critical thinking, 60% of the students selected "always", 30% pointed out "sometimes", and 10% of them chose seldom. The open-ended questions mentioned the creation of morale allowed them to develop their critical thinking because

they had to think and rethink deeply the message of the story. In accordance with (Student 20) "writing a morale was so important because it helped us to be humbler with the others, and being respectful". The students who selected "sometimes" were those who had difficulties expressing ideas clearly. The ones who answered seldom mentioned that vocabulary was the main obstacle to carrying out this activity. From the researcher's point of view, it is clearly expressed that most students had to work on a deep analysis to create the morale of a story, which definitely is a process of developing critical thinking.

5. Discussion

This research work was conducted to improve English-speaking skills through simulated environments among second-year students of bachillerato at a high school in Loja city, School year 2022-2023. Therefore, based on this main objective, two subsequent questions were settled down.

The first question sought to determine "What is the effectiveness of storytelling on the development of English-speaking skills through simulated environments?". A pretest with a score of 6,91 and a post-test with a score of 8,38 results showed that there was a significant statistical difference of 1,47 between both instruments applied. It leads me to think that there was positive and productive effectiveness in their speaking skills after having applied storytelling through simulated environments. This outcome is supported by Salama (2019) who found that applying Digital storytelling as a pedagogy helped students to develop their speaking skills components such as pronunciation, fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, and coherence. Likewise, this is corroborated by Schank (1990) who states that storytelling has positive, significant, and demonstrable value in teaching. Therefore, it can be said that the outcomes obtained agree with the results of the previous studies which showed that digital storytelling is a good resource for teaching and improving English-speaking skills and it is recommended to carry out further research on this topic.

What are the students' perceptions about storytelling on developing English-spea-king skills through simulated environments? To give qualitative support to this ques-tion a questionnaire was designed in which interestingly 100% of students agreed that the SWBST strategy through the use of fables, and local famous stories genres help to become creatives, critical thinkers, and motivated to participate in class when the avatars asked them. Likewise, 100% of the students interestingly selected the Plotagon application enriched their curiosity, allowing them to be involved during the lesson which improves their fluency, pronunciation, and accuracy. This finding is consistent with those of Salama (2019) who found that applying digital storytelling as a pedagogy strategy helped students to develop their speaking skills.

Likewise, another interesting result is that 80% of the students indicated that both types of stories captured their attention, as the vocabulary was familiar to them and the stories were entertaining. This result is similar to what was observed by Syafr-yadin et al. (2019), the variety of genres in stories helped to effectively develop oral skills. It is corroborated by 80% of the respondents, who mentioned that creating new morals or creating new endings for local fables and stories fostered their fluency. Although some students had difficulties with the language and the organization of their ideas, it can be said that it was not as difficult as it seemed, as they struggled to choose the best connector. Therefore, it can be mentioned that the limitations of this study were, the limited 40 hours of intervention, students' no-attendance, and that students were only exposed to the target language in English classes.

6. Conclusions

The implementation of storytelling in simulated environments was effective in teaching and improving students' speaking skills. This enabled the students to adequately enrich the main components of speaking such as vocabulary and coherence, on a minor scale, it supported students to improve their pronunciation, fluency, and accuracy, even though the 40 hours of intervention were not enough to master all these components.

It is concluded that students had positive perceptions towards the application of storytelling with the support of simulated environments. The results showed that the use of the Plotagon application in simulated environments helped students to become critical thinkers, and more creative, awaken their curiosity, and feel motivated to participate by the questions asked by the avatars. Therefore, it can be said that the advantages of storytelling in simulated environments provided remarkable improvement in students' speaking skills during the English learning process.

The Someone, Wanted, But, So, Then (SWBST) strategy was useful for telling a story in a short summary, which helped students to become more specific in narrating a story. This strategy supported the development of speaking sub-skills such as summarizing a story in a few words, fluency while telling the story, and sequencing the events on it.

It is recommended for teachers of English as a Foreign Language to use and incorporate storytelling by using simulated environments in the classroom because they offer diverse contexts and genres in a story that are engaging and motivating for students. There are many technological applications to teach through storytelling not only to improve students' speaking skills but also other skills in the English language teaching-learning process, and they can be a source for further research.

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