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**STĀSTI ANĢĻU VALODAS VĀRDU APGUVEI PIRMSSKOLAS
VECUMA BĒRNIEM**

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I declare that this study is my own and does not contain any unacknowledged work from any source.

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ABSTRACT

The Diploma Paper was written in order to explore how storytelling can be used to teach English vocabulary to very young learners (under 7). Teaching a foreign language to very young learners (VYL) has become more and more popular, but it is necessary to search for the appropriate ways how to teach them as this learners' category is specific because of their peculiarities and abilities.

Studying literature sources on teaching very young learners, the author of the Diploma Paper came to the conclusion that storytelling as a method could be one of the interesting and useful ways how a target language could be taught. Appropriate story and storytelling activities could encourage learners to participate actively in learning process and enjoy the process itself without noticing that they are learning.

To do a research, the author conducted a case study in the kindergarten "Buratino" in Valmiera for 2 months. 15 students aged 5-6 years took part in this research.

In order to collect data, the following data collection methods were used: questionnaire for parents in order to learn how VYL prefer to learn English; observations checklist in order to see how VYL learn new words during the lessons and tests for learners in order to find out new words they have learnt.

By analysing the questionnaires, the author found that children prefer to learn by asking parents to translate words or by watching cartoons. According to the observation checklists filled in by two observers, learners enjoyed the storytelling process and they used the target vocabulary as well. The analysis of the tests conducted before and after implementation of storytelling activities showed that learners were successful in learning vocabulary with the help of the particular storytelling activities.

The author of the Diploma Paper suggests foreign language teachers using storytelling in their lessons as it is an effective way how to teach vocabulary to very young learners.

ANOTĀCIJA

Diplomdarba mērķis ir izpētīt, kā stāstus var izmantot vārdu krājuma apguvei angļu valodas nodarbībās, strādājot ar pirmskolas vecuma bērniem (jaunākiem par 7 gadiem). Angļu valodas apguve pirmskolas vecumā ir kļuvusi ļoti populāra., tāpēc ir ļoti svarīgi meklēt piemērotus paņēmienus, kā ar bērniem strādāt, pamatojoties uz šī vecumposma īpatnībām un interesēm.

Izpētot literatūras avotus par mācībām pirmskolas vecumā, Diplomdarba autore secināja, ka stāsti kā metodiskais paņēmiens ir interesants un noderīgs veids, kā apgūt angļu valodu. Piemēroti stāsti un uzdevumi, kas ar tiem saistīti, mudina bērnus aktīvi līdzdarboties mācību procesā un apgūt valodu, pat nepamanot, kā notiek mācības.

Tika veikta atsevišķa gadījuma pētījums Valmieras bērnudārzā 'Buratīno'. Tas ilga divus mēnešus, tajā piedalījās 15 piecus un sešus gadus veci bērni

Pētījumā tika izmantotas šādas datu vākšanas metodes – *anketa* vecākiem, lai uzzinātu, kā viņu bērniem labāk patīk apgūt angļu valodu (mājās, ārpus nodarbībām); *novērojumu lapas* – lai redzētu, kā bērni nodarbību laikā mācās jaunos vārdiņus, kā arī divi *kontroldarbi*, lai noskaidrotu, kurus vārdus bērni ir iemācījušies.

Analizējot anketēšanas rezultātus, autore noskaidroja, ka bērni vislabprātāk apgūst valodu, jautājot vecākiem iztulkot vārdus va arī skatoties animācijas filmas. Novērojumu lapas, kuras aizpildīja divi novērotāji, parādīja, ka bērniem patika stāsta klausīšanās, kuras laikā viņi izmantoja apgūstamos vārdus. Kontroldarbu, kurus bērni pildīja pirms un pēc stāsta izmantošanas, analīze parādīja, ka bērni ir sekmīgi apguvuši vārdus.

Diplomdarba autore iesaka angļu valodas skolotājiem izmantot stāstus angļu valodas nodarbībās, jo tā pirmskolas vecuma bērniem tiek dota iespēja apgūt vārdu krājumu.

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INTRODUCTION

Children are introduced with a foreign language at early age around the world. Teaching English to very young learners has become very popular during the last years in Latvia as well, for example, five years ago there were English classes at two kindergartens in Valmiera, while this school year already six kindergartens from nine have them.

To teach English at kindergarten, it is necessary to have degree in education and knowledge of the target language. Only since 2010, the University of Latvia has been offering a special educational programme for preschool teachers to get a qualification to teach English at kindergarten. It is a step forward because when the author of the Paper started teaching English at kindergarten in 2009 there was not such a possibility in Latvia to get education in teaching English for very young learners. As teaching English to very young learners is not mandatory, there is not any official programme or standard to follow. Each teacher who wants to conduct English courses for very young learners has to write his/her own educational programme which is approved by State Service of Education Quality (*Izglitibas kvalitates valsts dienests*).

As to the author, it is a very big responsibility that requires pedagogic competence as well as usage-English to design one's own educational programme and she is not sure if 96 hours courses prepare teachers adequately for creating and conducting English course for very young learners. Therefore, a lot of work must be done by teachers themselves before starting teaching. Unfortunately, after the programme is designed and approved, no institution monitors the quality of the English lessons. It is a matter of a teacher's sense of duty and pedagogical mastery.

Teaching English to very young learners is very specific, in general. Children can not read and write at this age, but they are very keen to learning. Their learning of a foreign language is connected with meeting the language in different contexts and associations, mainly using oral way communication. These specifications call for discovering and implementing methods which are the most suitable and effective for teaching very young learners.

As concern decisions what to teach them, there are a few reasons why vocabulary is in the first place. It is the foundation of other language aspects. It is challenging to teach grammar when learners lack words. Speaking cannot be acquired if learner does not understand the meaning of the words. Pronunciation is also very closely connected with vocabulary. Therefore teaching vocabulary is very essential for very young learners. Knowing words means that learners are aware of their meaning, pronunciation and usage.

If they are aware of it, they are able to communicate and this is the aim of learning a foreign language.

Very young learners learn language in a holistic way where everything is connected (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, etc.). It is the best way for children to understand how the language works, very naturally, in context. One of the methods which could incorporate all these aspects could be storytelling.

The **aim** of the Diploma Paper is to find out how storytelling can be used for teaching English vocabulary to very young learners.

To achieve the aim, the following **objectives** are set:

- 1) to study the literature concerning teaching English vocabulary to very young learners (VYL) and storytelling;
- 2) to design and conduct questionnaire for parents to find out how VYL prefer to learn English;
- 3) to conduct a test to find out the words VYL knew before implementation of storytelling activities;
- 4) to select and work out activities to use storytelling in English lessons for VYL;
- 5) to carry out observation to see how VYL learn new words in lesson;
- 6) to give a test to VYL to find out new words they have learnt.

The **research questions** are:

- 1) what teaching vocabulary to very young learners means;
- 2) why and how storytelling should be used in English classes for very young learners;
- 3) how storytelling can facilitate English vocabulary learning.

The **hypothesis** of the Diploma paper is:

If stories are used in English classes with very young learners, they learn new words in context.

The chosen **method of research** is a case study. Fifteen very young learners (5-6 years old) participated in this case study in Valmiera. In order to collect data, the following **data collection methods** were used:

- questionnaire for parents in order to find out how VYL prefer to learn English;
- observations checklist in order to see how VYL learn new words in lesson;
- tests for VYL in order to find out which words they knew before implementation of storytelling activities and which new words they have learnt after implementation of storytelling activities.

The Diploma Paper consists of three chapters:

Chapter 1 outlines the main idea of the term “vocabulary” and the process of its teaching and learning.

Chapter 2 describes storytelling as a teaching method for a foreign language. It outlines the main activities of storytelling as well.

Chapter 3 is a case study done by the author of the Diploma Paper. It focuses on teaching vocabulary to very young learners by storytelling.

1. VOCABULARY

1.1 Overview on vocabulary and its importance in foreign language teaching

Learning and teaching a foreign language means developing the language and communication skills. When considering teaching English to very young learners, similarly as acquisition of the mother tongue, there is usually an emphasis on developing listening and speaking skills. Undoubtedly, the knowledge of vocabulary is the basis for developing these skills. Therefore learning vocabulary is one of the most significant aspects when beginning to learn a foreign language.

Before looking deeper at the specific place of vocabulary in foreign language teaching it is necessary to define what vocabulary is.

The term **Vocabulary** has more than one explanation in Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English It is described as:

- “all the words that someone knows or uses;
- all the words in a particular language:
- the words that are typically used when talking about a particular subject:
- the range of possible features, effects, actions etc, especially in a type of music or art;
- a list of words with explanations of their meanings, especially in a book for learning a foreign language” (<http://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/vocabulary>).

The explanation covers the meaning of vocabulary on the whole. The first point of the definition emphasizes the two aspects of vocabulary-usage and knowing. Understanding and using words are two different processes for which people use different cognitive and language skills. Pikulski and Templeton (2004) therefore distinguish different kinds of **vocabulary** basing on the language skills used:

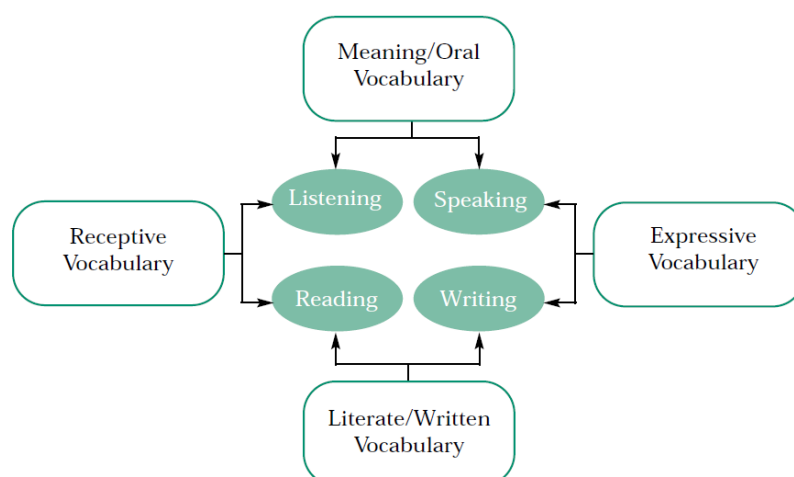


Figure 1. Vocabulary (Pikulski and Templeton 2004a: 2)

Very young learners acquire vocabulary by listening and speaking only because they are not able to read and write. They decode words hearing them in a context and afterwards they are able to use them in their speech. “Knowing the words” allows children to communicate. Therefore in the next paragraph the author will try to explain the importance of learning and teaching vocabulary.

(Thornbury 2002) and (Allen 1983) claim that great attention is paid to effective teaching vocabulary. Cameron (2001a: 74) for example states that “building up a useful vocabulary is central to the learning of a foreign language.” The author of the Paper can definitely agree with this statement, especially as concerns teaching very young learners. The most crucial for them is to know how different items are called and what kind of expressions people use for formulating their thoughts.

Allen (1983a: 5) clearly states that “communication stops when learners lack the necessary words.” It is true that people use also nonverbal communication, but it is only additional way to get information through.

According to Wilkins (in Thornbury 2002a: 13) “without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed.” Additionally Dellar and Hocking (in Thornbury 2002) claim that effectiveness of learning language is bigger from learning vocabulary than from learning grammar. The aim of learning languages is to communicate; therefore it seems very logical when the authors indicate that very little can be said with grammar, but a lot can be said with words.

The author of the Paper agrees with these statements because it is hard to develop any of the language skills without knowing at least a few items of vocabulary.

Consequently, there is an interrelation between vocabulary and grammar in language learning (Cameron 2001). As Reads (2007a: 85) says, “vocabulary is the foundation for leading children into using grammatical structures.” Especially in the case of young learners when learning separate words does not seem very useful. Teaching and learning words combined in the particular expressions or phrases are more effective. It means that separating vocabulary from grammar and vice versa is not really a useful distinction.

According to the above mentioned information before using a word, it is necessary to “decode it”, to know what information it carries. What does user really need to know about a word? Thornbury (2002a: 15) states that knowing a word at the most basic level involves knowing:

- “Its **form** (written or spoken);
- Its **meaning**.”

Nation (http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/sept_05_pn.pdf) adds one more category which can be seen in the table:

Meaning	Form and meaning Concept and referents Associations
Form	Spoken form Written form Word parts
Use	Grammatical functions Collocation Constraints on use

Figure 2. Learning words

As to very young learners meaning and form are very important. Development of the usage of a word depends on language in use. The more actively learners participate in communication, the more they understand different aspects of the word usage. Young learners have a special kind of ability which helps them to “catch” the language, its rules and the system on the whole.

Read (2007a: 84) adds that “although initial vocabulary learning in a foreign language appears straightforward, with an apparent one-to-one correspondence between words and objects or concepts that these refer to, it is in reality a very complex process, which develops gradually in a cyclical way over time.”

In the next subchapter, the author of the Paper will explain how teachers can help learners with this complex process.

1.2. Teaching vocabulary

Nation (http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/sept_05_pn.pdf) describes teaching vocabulary as a “process where knowledge is built over a series of varied meetings with the word.” This process is very complex and as requires using different techniques and skills to gain the aim, to “know a word” from both, teacher and the learners.

Teaching vocabulary to younger children is a specific for a few reasons:

- they are interested in the meaning and function of new language more holistically,

e.g. not separate lexical items out of structure;

- they are able to recognize vocabulary item without knowing the exact meaning;
- they have very concrete thinking;
- they have very short memory span;
- they are able to concentrate for a very short time;
- they use imagination a lot;
- they are not able to read and write (Pinter 2006).

There are many different approaches and methods to teach a foreign language, including vocabulary:

- Grammar translation method (students translate the words from a target language to native language). This method does not prepare students to use the target language.
- Direct method (no translation is allowed, teacher uses only target language). Positive effect of using this method is that students are motivated to communicate in target language. Explaining of a new vocabulary without translating is quite time consuming and sometimes with misunderstandings.
- The audio-lingual method (target language is taught to use it automatically without stopping to think). Very similar to Direct method.
- Suggestopedia (learning language with elimination of failure and establishing positive atmosphere). This method is a very effective because great amount of vocabulary can be acquired.
- The total physical respond method, TPR (students listen to and respond to the spoken target language commands of their teacher). This method is a very effective for teaching very young learners.
- The Communicative learning approach, CLA, (students learn to use a language appropriate to the given social context). Communicative competence is highly developed by this way (Larsen-Freeman 2003).

There are different features from the above mentioned methods and approaches which are used in teaching vocabulary to very young learners. Teacher tries to use the target language as much as possible, therefore it is necessary to visualise the items of target language to children by using realia, pictures, demonstration (Direct method). Similarly to Audio-lingual method, teachers use different language “chunks” for repetition and memorizing. When establishing positive atmosphere in a class and breaking down the communicative barriers, teacher in fact follows the principles of Suggestopedia. Using principles of TPR seems one of the most popular (giving commands, changing activities, movement games,

etc). Teachers do not present vocabulary as the separate items, but they occur in some social context, similar to Communicative approach. Therefore they are meaningful and easier to remember and build up the networks. It is up to teachers which method and techniques they will use for teaching.

Another fundamental thing connected with teaching vocabulary is choosing vocabulary itself.

Choosing vocabulary

The selection of the words is the significant point in teaching vocabulary. When teaching very young learners, it is very important to teach the items which relate to the “here and now”. It means that vocabulary is connected with a current children's environment and their personal experience (Read 2007).

Teachers should start with the vocabulary which is closely connected a with student's personal life. As it was mentioned above, vocabulary cannot be presented in isolation of the context. The context can be presented as a topic. The authors of the *Teachers' Resource book. Methodology for Very Early Language Learning* (<http://www.zsangel.cz/vell/>) offer the following organisation of the topic:

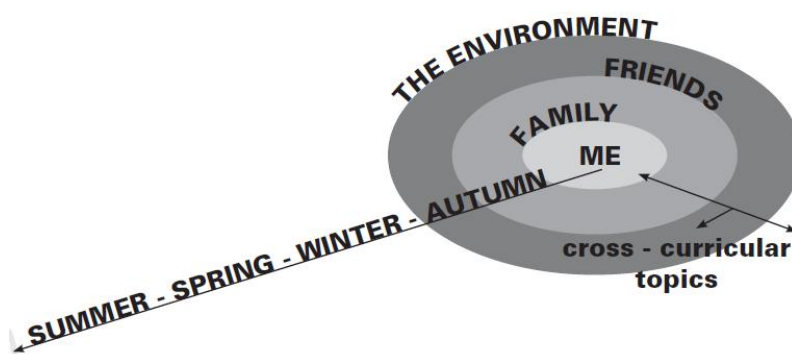


Figure 3. Vocabulary topics

Cameron (2001a: 87) offers broader organization of the vocabulary:

- “Thematic organisation of vocabulary: *shopping- shopping bank, change, pay the bill;*
- Organisation of vocabulary through relations of whole to parts: *body-arms, legs-toes;*
- Organisation of vocabulary in general to specific hierarchies: *food-vegetables-beans;*
- Organisation of vocabulary through words and antonyms: *hot-warm-cold;*
- Organising vocabulary in 'ad-hoc' categories: *things put together for a purpose”.*

During one lesson only a few vocabulary items can be taught; therefore teacher needs to think which items to choose. It is very helpful and essential to consider these factors:

- the **frequency** of the words-how often they are used by the speakers of a language. If the word has a low frequency it is not very useful for students to learn it. “In general, time should be spent on high frequency words or words that fill language need that the learners have” (Nation: http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/sept_05_pn.pdf).
- **familiarity** with the words-whether they are similar to native language or heard already;
- the **age**—if the words are understandable for this age level;
- learners' **capacity to remember** them;
- “**teachability**”- how easy the words can be demonstrate;
- how the words could be used for the **communicative purpose** (Thornbury 2002).

When a teacher has chosen and organised a target vocabulary it is time for its presentation.

Vocabulary presentation

“By presentation, we mean those pre-planned lesson stages in which learners are taught pre-selected vocabulary items” (Thornbury 2002a: 75).

The author of the Paper has already mentioned what needs to be basically taught about a word-form and meaning. Teacher can decide what to present first, whether form or meaning. Both approaches are acceptable (Thornbury 2002).

Here is the list of the basic techniques composed by Nation (http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/sept_05_pn.pdf) which can be use for explaining the meaning of the words:

- demonstration of pictures;
- using an object;
- using a cut-out figure;
- using gesture;
- performing an action;
- photographs;
- drawings or diagrams on the board;
- pictures from books;
- moving images—from TV, video, presentations;

By verbal explanation

- analytical definition;

- putting the new word in a defining context;
- translating into another language.

It is important to highlight that all techniques mentioned above demand the learners do some mental work to understand a meaning of a new word. Learners themselves are actively engaged in learning process. They create their own and for them understandable concept for each particular word. Another fact pointed out by (Pinter 2006a: 85) is that “the more learners have to think about a word and its meaning, the more likely they are to remember it.”

Using translation therefore is not a very effective way to teach a new word because learners are very passive and they are more likely to forget those words very fast. Translation “is suitable for dealing with incidental vocabulary that may crop up in a lesson” (Thornbury 2002a: 77).

Learners get a clear image about the form of the words whether by visual or auditory way or both. For very young learners, the spoken form should have priority; thus clear and correct pronunciation is very crucial. Children “copy” teacher's pronunciation perfectly; moreover, they will imitate all the teacher’s mistakes as well. Therefore it is very important for a teacher to check the pronunciation and spelling of the words before a lesson. Teacher should also remember that learners need to hear a “clear word” in isolation a few times to realise all the information it brings.

Written form of a word should be introduced later on when learners are literate in the foreign language or at least they are able to write and read (Pinter 2006). However, here occurs a question whether the written form of a word can be presented on the flashcards or pictures. The opinion of the author of the Paper is that it can be written there without paying special attention to it. Children can learn it incidentally. However, teacher should mention the fact that words are written and pronounced differently in English.

So far, when meaning and form are introduced, the learning process has begun. For getting a word into the long term memory, it is fundamental to practise a particular word as much as possible.

Vocabulary practice

The second stage in teaching vocabulary is practising it. This is the stage when “deliberate practice of words is used in order to commit the new language to the learners' memory and help them to automatise it so they can retrieve it quickly and efficiently when needed” (Pinter 2006a: 85).

Young learners can learn words very fast, but they can forget them very fast as well. Therefore they need to come across the particular word as many times as possible. Thornbury (2002) states that a word can be remembered in a case it has been met at least seven times over spaced intervals. Regular recycling of vocabulary is the way for remembering it. It is not effective to label the same pictures, things, situations. Children need to get opportunities to “meet the same vocabulary, embedded in different contexts, language and activity types, again and again” (Read 2007a: 85). It is logical that the more times students are exposed to a word, the stronger their understanding becomes. This is the way how they learn to remember and understand a word in a variety of situations. Practising new vocabulary in different situations helps learners to encourage memorisation strategies, agrees Pinter (2006).

There are many techniques which can be used to recycle vocabulary:

- vocabulary games;
- songs;
- rhymes;
- stories;
- drama;
- art and craft, etc.

Teachers can use any activity they like, although there is one essential criterion to follow—it needs to be meaningful for a learner. If the activity makes sense and is enjoyable for learners they will be really motivated and engaged to learn. It is essential to make recycling “fresh” and “fun” not only to repeat the activities from the last lesson.

Vocabulary production

At the stage before, learners have been given an opportunity to reproduce vocabulary in a controlled way. At the production stage they are given the opportunity to use vocabulary to express their own thoughts more freely (Pinter 2006).

In the beginning, students will be able to speak in one or two words, phrases. They will be able to use chunks which they have memorised before. Later on they will be able to say something about themselves and about the things around them. This is the chance for them to experiment with the language. They should be given the chance to communicate in a more-less real communication situations. The most important at this stage is that student can get information through.

Activities which can be used during this stage:

- answering questions;

- guessing games;
- picture description;
- miming, etc.

Accessing the practice stage is not obligatory during every lesson, but it is advisable because the aim of learning language (does not matter for which age category) is to communicate. Learners start to speak when they feel confident about what they are saying. At the beginning of learning even one word is a big achievement. It is the first step towards using language actively.

When learners are able to use words it means that they can remember them and they are familiar with the meanings of it. It is not an easy process. Teacher can give some ideas for students that make their learning process more efficient. Those strategies are described in the next paragraph.

Vocabulary learning strategies

“Vocabulary cannot be taught”, claims Rivers (cited in Thornbry 2002a: 144). As to the author, teacher can present vocabulary and give learners opportunities to meet words in different contexts and associations, but it is only up to a learner to learn it. Teacher’s task is to help students by offering them ideas how to learn. The actions which are taken by learners to help themselves to understand and remember vocabulary are called vocabulary learning strategies (Cameron 2001). Read (2007) agrees that young learners need to be stimulated to build up independent, personalised learning strategies because they help them to learn new words and enlarge their vocabulary. They need to learn how to organise and mark vocabulary items systematically in a logical way. This is the beginning of their way for being autonomous learners.

Vocabulary learning strategies are especially essential for very young learners as they are not equipped with any or maybe with one of them. They learn very incidentally, but if they are led accurately they can learn very effectively.

There are different classifications of learning strategies. The author of the Paper has chosen the classification which to her mind is the most appropriate for teaching very young learners:

- Social and affective strategies (developing awareness about affective factors which can influence learning);
- Strategies related to raising awareness about what language learning is (to develop general understanding about what language learning means);
- Metacognitive strategies (to introduce and develop the continuing process of

reflection);

- Direct of cognitive strategies (to develop students' ability to deal with linguistic information in as effective way) Pinter (2006).

The author of the Paper has chosen this categorisation because she would like to emphasise that working only on vocabulary learning strategies is not enough in case of very young learners. They learn in a holistic way and therefore it is fundamental to work incidentally on strategies which are connected with different learning aspects. For example, it is not meaningful to teach them how to guess the meaning of a word if they are shy or afraid of speaking. Working on positive learning environment and a rising self-esteem is fundamental. Pinter (2006a: 101) emphasises that “the younger children are, the more important these consideration become.”

The following activities can be done to introduce and develop learning strategies with very young learners:

- Asking children’s opinions about the English lessons and their own progress;
- Drawing up class rules together;
- Talking about general expectations in learning languages;
- Motivating children to listen each other and listen to the teacher;
- Thinking and decide which activities they would like to do;
- Thinking about the favourite activity and give a reason for it;
- Predicting during the storytelling;
- Giving clues when something is forgotten to help to remember;
- Using word cards or pictures dictionaries;
- Using mime and gestures;
- Guessing meanings by using all the information available in a picture or text;
- Noticing grammatical information about words from the way;
- Noticing links to similar words in the first language;
- Remembering where a word has been encountered before and how that helps with its form and meaning (Pinter 2006), Cameron (2001), Thornbury (2002).

Learners use particular learning strategies to learn according to their needs and characteristics. Learning words is a process which is never finished, but the earlier the learners start the more successful they can be.

2 STORYTELLING

2.1 Overview on storytelling

Very young children learn in a holistic way. It means that their learning process takes place taking into consideration a person as a whole—with their cognitive, affective and psychomotor processes. In terms of learning a language, “they learn about the meaning in an integrated, meaningful, multi sensory context” (the authors of the *Teachers' Resource book. Methodology for Very Early Language Learning* 2011: <http://www.zsangel.cz/vell/>). Pinter (2006a: 87), as concerns the holistic approaches in teaching English, points out that stories are an excellent vehicle to teach language; stories and storytelling has been an essential educational tool for ages.

“Storytelling is the vivid description of ideas, beliefs, personal experiences, and life lessons through stories or narratives that evoke powerful emotions and insights” (Serrat 2008: <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article>). The authors of the *Teachers' Resource book. Methodology for Very Early Language Learning* (2009) praise storytelling as an ideal technique to teach language because it encourages active listening, concentration and extends vocabulary.

Read (2007a: 114), Ellis and Brewster (2002a: 1) point out different reasons for using storytelling in teaching foreign language for very young learners:

- 1) “It is a natural way how to discover language. Stories help learners to become aware of sound, language items and sentence constructions of the foreign language.
- 2) It is motivating, challenging and fun. Learners enjoy listening to stories and so they build positive attitude toward the foreign language.
- 3) It encourages learners' imagination. Being personally involved in a story helps learners to develop their own creative powers.
- 4) It develops language skills in a holistic way. Stories often naturally lead to the use of all four language skills and in related activities.
- 5) It is appropriate for learners with different intelligences and learning styles. The richness of storybooks and variety of activities for working with a story support different types of intelligences and learning styles.
- 6) It helps to form learners' attitudes, values, and social skills. Stories help learners to understand the unwritten “rules” of social life and they develop emotional intelligence as well.
- 7) It is a way how very young learners can develop their skills to learn. Storytelling gives an opportunity to develop such learning strategies as predicting, hypothesising, guessing and listening for general meaning.

- 8) It has cross curricular links. Carefully selected stories can be used to develop knowledge of other subjects of the curriculum.”

Storytelling is a very appropriate way to teach a language for very young learners. It should be noted that such well-respected authors as Thornbury (2002), Allen (1983) and Harmer (2010) who are experts in teaching English as a foreign language do not pay a special attention to storytelling as a technique to teach vocabulary. One of the reasons for this could be that their focus is general EFL, they have neglected young learners.

The author of the Paper agrees that there are many advantages of using storytelling to teach the vocabulary. Another reason which has not been mentioned but it is quite essential is that storytelling is inexpensive. Storyteller can tell a story whenever and wherever. It requires only listeners. In the case of very young learners it is advisable to use some visual aids but it is not obligatory.

One of the advantages of using storytelling is that the concept of storytelling is cross-curricular and reinforces learners' autonomy. Vale (1995) states that there are three main dimension in which stories can be added to learning in the whole curriculum:

1. Stories can be used to reinforce conceptual development in children (for example colours size, shape, time, cause and effect, etc.).
2. Stories are a means of developing learning to learn. This major category covers:
 - Reinforcing thinking strategies (comparing, classifying, predicting, problem solving, hypothesising, planning, etc.).
 - Developing strategies for learning English (guessing the meaning of new words, training the memory, self-testing, etc.).
 - Developing study skills (making, understanding, interpreting charts and graphs, making and learning to use dictionaries, organizing work, etc.).
3. Carefully selected stories can also be used to develop knowledge of the other subjects in the curriculum, in particular:
 - mathematics—telling the time, numbers, counting, measuring;
 - science- animals, outer space;
 - geography and the Environment-the weather and climates around the world, cultural studies;
 - art and Craft- drawing, making puppets, collages;
 - music and drama—singing song, dancing, miming.

Children need to learn in a natural and brain friendly way to be motivated to learn. Storytelling has been used for ages as a natural way for getting to know the life's secrets

and knowledge. Pinter (2003: 7) emphasises that “in using stories in language teaching we are using something bigger and more important than language teaching itself.”

2.2 Stories for very young learners

Story is a fundamental material for storytelling therefore the teacher needs to pay special attention to choosing a story. Very much of what learners will gain and develop is based on the story itself.

Ellis (2002a: 11) describes criteria for selecting storybooks based on five major objectives in language teaching (linguistic, psychological, cognitive, social, cultural):

- **Level** (vocabulary, structures and functions). Is the level accessible?
- **Literacy devices** (repetition, humour, dialogue, rhyme, rhythm, predictability, etc). How will these devices help learners to understand the story, participate in the storytelling and improve pronunciation and memorisation?
- **Content** (relevant, interesting, memorable, length, values). Will the story engage learners? Do we agree with values it provides?
- **Illustrations** (usage layout, size). Do they support text and help to understand the story? Will they develop learners' visual literacy? Are they attractive?
- **Educational potential** (learning to learn, cross-curricular links). How it develops learners' learning strategies? What can children learn about the world and other cultures? Is it suitable for different learning styles?
- **Motivation** (enjoyment, experience, desire to continue learning). Will be story motivating? Does it touch learners' personal experience?
- **Values** (cooperation, emotional development). Will it offer opportunities to work together, share, take turns?
- **Global issues** (multicultural education, citizenship education). Does the story offer a wider view of the world?
- **Language content** (authentic, appropriate). Is the language representative of the variety spoken in the target culture?
- **Potential for follow-up work**. Is it a good starting point for related activities?

To the author, the criteria mentioned above do not include one important aspect—the teacher. It is important that the teacher likes the story as well because it motivates him/her to work with it. Another indicator to keep in mind - if the story gets learners' interest after the first few sentences it is a good story to continue with (Wright 1995).

Teachers can choose a storybook from rich sources such as graded readers, story websites, and authentic books originally written for English native speakers. Teachers can work with stories which are adapted especially for ELT or with the “real” books which have not been modified and offer a rich source of authentic input and challenge (Read 2007).

When using storytelling, it is necessary to consider **the audience** it is focused on. There are different factors to be taken into account when working with young learners, teenagers or adults. In the next paragraph, the preschool audience is described.

Preschool audiences deserve performers who respect them for who they are and what they can teach. They need people who value them as an audience, and truly want to be there (Talbert 2001).

Telling a story to very young learners is special because of age group characteristics. This group is sensitive to a story itself because they may not really make a distinction between fantasy and the reality. They may continue to „live” with the story and the story effect can make a very strong influence on them. Therefore when planning storytelling, teachers should take into account these factors:

- Good should win over bad;
- Make sure that learners know a bad character from a story has gone and will never come back. They need to feel safe;
- Show more than tell, as much as you can—for better understanding;
- Names of the story need to be easy to remember and repeated a lot- learners should not be confused about the characters;
- Nothing should be too scary or too loud—learners need to feel confident and safe while listening;
- Get children to join you in the story as often as possible (move, speak, sing,, etc.);
- Children are very perceptive—storyteller should be really involved in the process otherwise he/she may lose the attention of the audience;
- The more straightforward, the easier for children to understand a story—do not make story very complicated;
- Be ready for interruption—the more they like a story, the more they interrupt. teacher needs to be ready to continue;
- Children’s understanding of the world is different but not the less important—never say “No” if someone respond differently than you have expected;
- Do not be afraid to go back up with a story if learners seem to be confused (Talbert 2001: <http://www.youthstorytelling.com/toolbox/PreschoolAudiences.pdf>).

Preschool audience is the unique one because teacher can never know what to expect. They can laugh, or cry, or yawn. They immediately express what they think and how they feel about the story. Some teachers are very afraid of getting such real feedback and therefore they better avoid working with this age group. It is a real challenge to make very young learners involved in a story and keep their attention, but it is possible. On the other hand, very young learners are such an emotional and warm-hearted audience that they can even hug and kiss a teacher if they like what he/she did.

2.3 Preparation for telling stories

Before a teacher starts with storytelling it is advisable to prepare a plan how to do it while taking into account all possible factors which may influence the process. When preparing for storytelling teacher should consider the following questions:

- 1) **Deciding whether to tell or read the story.** Both ways have some advantages and disadvantages for using. Reading is maybe less stressful for teacher than telling a story but, on the other hand, when telling a story teacher has a better contact with listeners which is crucial when working with very young learners.
- 2) **Learning the story for telling**—there are varieties of techniques which help to remember a story and each teacher needs to find the most suitable one. It is not necessary to learn it word by word. The most important is to get the thoughts through.
- 3) **Creating readiness**—it is good to set up every time the same conditions before storytelling. It helps learners to get ready for listening.
- 4) **Using voice and body.** These are the most important tools for storyteller and teacher needs to learn how to use them to express different characters, situations and actions. It is very good to practise a story aloud before a lesson to understand what to change emphasise or remove. Listening to the story by native speakers can also help to precise pronunciation and boost teacher's confidence (Pinter 2006).

Teachers need to be familiar with the story. It means that they need to know the content very well and details which are going to be pointed out as well. Organisation of listeners also plays very important role therefore it is necessary to set up seats so that everybody can hear and see a storyteller. Listeners need to have time for “getting“ a clue; therefore it is advisable to pause from time to time to give them time to think, especially when observing the illustrations.

Telling or reading stories aloud is not an easy job. Storytelling is an art form and some people who do it professionally spend a lot of time to become the real “artists”. Teachers have in their hands a beautiful piece of art and they need to learn how to make it “alive” for learners. They need to feel it and find something special in each story. Similarly to any piece of art there is some message hidden behind it. Teachers’ task is to discover it and pass it on by storytelling.

Storytelling is a process which requires serious preparation. It is not enough to come and start with reading or telling a story immediately. Different authors offer different strategies for successful storytelling.

Pedersen (<http://www.teslontario.net/phe/PHESpring07Newsletter.pdf>) claims that there need to be 3P's for successful storytelling:

- **“Preparation**—teacher should become well acquainted with a story and introduce learners with new vocabulary;
- **Presentation**—includes prediction, “wh” questions and activities which keep the audience interested;
- **Practice**—activities addressing the four language skills.”

This author focuses his attention to four language skills which should be developed during the practice stage. Cameron (2001) provides different view on the activities during the last stage. She divided storytelling process very similarly to Pedersen into the three stages (preparation activity, core activity and follow- up activity), but she emphasises the vocabulary learning during the last stage.

Ellis and Brewster (2002a: 15) offer the following three-stage model for story-based work:

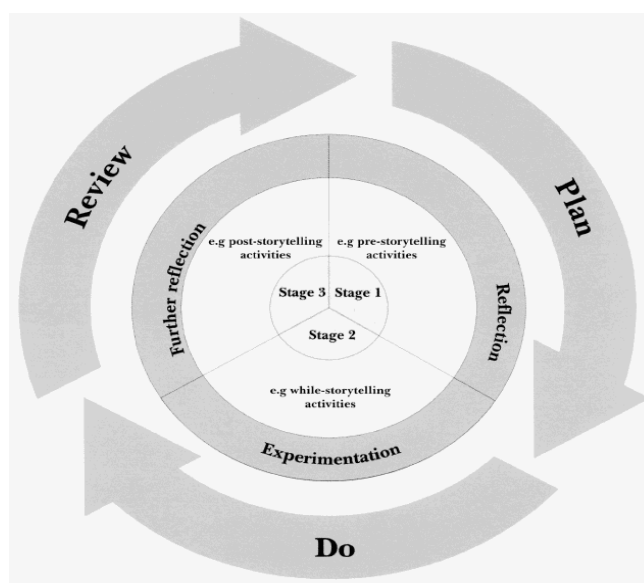


Figure 4. Model for story-based work

These authors (2002a: 15) state that “the **Plan-Do-Review** framework provides a structure which enables children to perceive a clear progression of work in the form of a concrete outcome.”

The author of the Paper has decided to follow story-based lesson planning according to Read (2007). It consists of the three stages (similar to other listening activities) **before, while and after** storytelling activities.

2.4 Activities before the story

“Half the success of a story depends on what you do before you begin” (Wright, 1995a: 130).

According to the author of the paper, **getting learners' interest** is the most important task at the beginning of a lesson. A teacher needs to know learners well enough to know how to motivate them for being actively involved in the process of learning. Teacher can get their attention by managing familiar “storytelling” settings, having a small conversation about a topic or by giving some clues what they will be listening about. According to the author's experience, using short videos, puzzles and riddles is especially effective for very young learners. The aim of these activities is to raise children's interest.

When learners are motivated, teacher can start with the activities which help learners to understand a story. Teacher's task is to **elicit key vocabulary** or language structures. The amount of these activities depends on learners' familiarity with a story and their previous knowledge of the vocabulary. It can last from a few minutes until a few lessons.

New words can be introduced by pictures, objects, miming. There are words which should be elicited before a story because of their importance for understanding. They are called key or blocking vocabulary. There are also words which are understandable from context itself and do not need to be introduced before. This stage can sometimes take one lesson or more because understanding of a word is not the same as “knowing” a word (Wright 1995). Familiarising learners with vocabulary is essential for activities after storytelling when children are required to actively use the given words and structures. There is a plenty of ways how to establish new words. According to the author's experience, different vocabulary games described in Vernon (2009) are very effective.

When the vocabulary is elicited teacher can continue with focusing on the subject and with **predicting** what the story might be about (Wright 1995). If the teacher is using a book, the front cover can be showed to the learners and teacher can ask what a book might be about. The illustrations of a book can help to discover more about the story as well.

Teacher can go further and ask children to guess the main characters of the forthcoming story and its plot as well.

The **discussion about the topic** can help learners to relate the story to their own experiences and feelings. This discussion can be in the mother tongue and teacher can introduce some expressions in English which will occur in the story (Paran and Wats: 2003).

To the author's mind, teacher needs to keep in mind that the story itself is the main point in storytelling. Therefore the time spent on preparation should be adequate and not too long to get learners bored. The chosen activities should be designed so that learners are looking forward to listening to the story.

2.5 Activites during the story

„I believe that just listening to a story is a highly active activity.....not passive” (Wright in Amos and Watts 2003a: 10). Ellis and Brewster (2002) add that listeners are actively involved in the listening process because they observe storyteller's face, gestures and mime. They notice how the voice is changing according to the situation. The pictures and objects help them to build up their own pictures in their heads. They predict what can happen and they build up attitudes towards different characters of the story. It is an emotional process when story “speaks” to the listeners through a storyteller. Teacher has an essential role in this process because the final effect very much depends on a good preparation. Teacher should carefully think about how to work with her/his voice, which illustrations or vocabulary will be underlined, where to break up and which skills will be developed.

When learners listen to the story for the first time, it should be without any interrupting. It is the first meeting with a story which should not be disturbed by paying attention to the other features. “Sometimes the best activity for the children is to sit and listen (Wright 1995).

Additional activities can be added during the second or third storytelling. These activities help children to focus their attention and avoid boredom. Ellis and Brewster (2002) offer specific while- listening tasks for storytelling:

- Listen and repeat—children can join a storyteller when a particular phrase is repeated;
- Listen and discriminate—listeners can be asked to listen out for words and stand up when they hear them;
- Listen and perform action/follow instructions—this activity is used with action

songs and rhymes.

- Listen and draw/colour—learners draw or complete a picture as they are listening;
- Listen and label—learners listen to the description and to label key parts of an animal, place or person;
- Listen and guess—learners listen to the description and try to guess the identity or an object;
- Listen and predict—learners are asked to predict what will happen next;
- Listen and match—learners match pictures to spoken words in games such as *Bingo*;
- Listen and sequence—learners sequence the picture in right order while listening;
- Listen and classify—learners listen to the descriptions and sort pictures into different sets.

Teacher's aim during this stage is to invite and encourage children's personal response. Very young learners respond to a story as whole personalities; therefore it is advisable to involve every aspect of their personalities—cognitive, emotional, social and kinaesthetic.

2.6 Activities after telling the story

“Follow-up activities should provide opportunities to extend and consolidate language or topics introduced through a story” (Ellis and Brewster 2002a: 17).

Wright (1995a) describes the following characteristics of the follow-up activities:

- Consolidation of language or topics introduced through a story;
- Final product or collective event-making something, organizing something, researching a topic;
- Integrated skill work - developing all the language skills;
- Independent learning- children are encouraged to show their own interests;
- Enjoyment- activities are focused on getting positive learning experience;
- Creativity- learners are asked for realizing their own ideas.

These activities help learners to move from the general understanding of the story to the usage of the language and topic it contains. All four language skills can be developed during this stage. As to very young learners, the author of the Paper will focus on listening and speaking activities as very young learners are not able to read and write.

After listening to a story, learners should have an opportunity **to express their feelings about it**. Very young learners are very emotional and they are not afraid to share their feelings and thoughts. They can use simple phrases “I like it because” or “I don't like it because”. Word “because” is very important here to avoid one-word answers and develop

argumentation skills. Learners can speak in English or in their mother tongue. Teacher should encourage each child to respond to the story because each child's opinion needs to be taken in account. If there are children who are shy to speak they can use for example evaluation cards or other non-verbal tools for assessment.

Teacher can start with the activities which check learners' **understanding**. They can answer the “W” or comprehension questions: Who? What? Where? Why? When? Which? How? (Sue Black 2012). Learners can fill-in information gap, find the mistakes, arrange the sequences of the story, describe or draw different characters or situations from the story (Wright 1995).

When they have showed their understanding, learners can try to **retell the story** by moving pictures or by acting. Pictures serve as a necessary memory aid here. There are also other tools which can help learners with retelling the story - going cross a story path, stepping stone pictures, drawing a flowchart, passing the picture and telling the story, etc. (Wright 1995). Role play or dramatisation provides an excellent opportunity to practise the language which has been presented in a story. Being “somebody else” helps some children to break down speaking barrier as well. Teacher's help is essential here because learners are keen on performing, but their ability to speak is very limited; therefore teacher can demonstrate language which can be used and stimulates speaking.

The next step can be **story analysis** in a very simple and appropriate way. Learners can evaluate and compare characters and different part of the story (Wright 1995). The author of the Paper suggests using children’s creativity as much as possible and to allow them to insert their own details, characters, even to change a plot if they are able to do it.

Pedestren (2007) suggests that some **visual art activities** can be used during this stage as well. Learners can prepare posters, illustrations, crafts, collages, books etc.

Each activity which has been chosen should be meaningful and lead toward the set learning goals. Even though, storytelling should be primarily a joyful process which can be used as a teaching technique at the same time. Therefore it is good if teachers explain learners what they expect from them and what the outcomes of their work are. It is necessary for their confidence and motivation to participate.

As it was explained above, the follow-up activities depend very much on learners' own initiative. Teacher can offer different activities, but it mostly depends on students whether and how they will participate. If there is a positive learning environment in the classroom, it is possible that learners will come up with their own ideas what to do. These ideas should be highly appreciated and supported by the teacher. Teacher should let students lead the activity to raise their interest, triggered by the storytelling itself. The process when learners are involved is the real learning process and teacher should catch that “teachable” moment.

Brown (<http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Brown-ChildrensLit.html>) adds that "the best way to teach is not to impose teaching, but to allow the listener to become so involved in hearing a story that his 'defenses' are no longer active." The author of the Paper would like to add that this statement should be taken into account when planning every simple storytelling activity. Teachers need to think at first about how to get learners involved - intellectually, aesthetically and emotionally.

Storytelling and activities connected with it provide these opportunities. Learning English with enjoyment and excitement is the best advantage of using storytelling. Teacher's role is to find out and push that magic button which makes learners free and open for learning. This is the way how to teach language without noticing that learning takes place.

The author of the Paper will explore the effect of using storytelling in teaching English vocabulary to very young learners in the following part- case study.

3 CASE STUDY OF USING STORYTELLING TO TEACH ENGLISH VOCABULARY TO VERY YOUNG LEARNERS

Stories are used for different purposes—to inform, to explain, to educate, to entertain. Sometimes it is hard to accent only one of these aspects because very often they go hand in hand with each other. As to the author, exactly the combining of all of these aspects is the advantage of using stories for teaching English to very young learners. Language learning in the case of very young learners is a process which touches the personality as a whole—its cognitive, affective and social part. Therefore, according to the author, this is the reason why storytelling can be used as one of the appropriate ways to teach English to very young learners. Hendrickson (in Fitzgibbon and Wilhelm 2012: <https://docs.google.com/viewer>) claims as well that “stories are values as providing comprehensible input that facilitates language acquisition.” A story contains a lot of inputs to get the success from. The author has focused on using storytelling to teach English vocabulary to very young learners as learning words is the basic for using language in use.

The **aim** of the case study was to find out how storytelling can be used for teaching English vocabulary to very young learners (age 5-6). The research was carried out at kindergarten “Buratino” in Valmiera, during the period of 2 months of the 2011/2012 academic year. Fifteen learners were involved in the case study—7 girls and 8 boys. Learners were learning English for the first year.

The terms “young learners” and “very young learners” are interpreted differently in different sources. The term “young learners” used to describe children from their first year of formal schooling (usually between 5-7 years old) until 11-12 years old when they move to secondary school (Read 2001: <http://carolread.wordpress.com/2011/07/25/y-is-for-young-learners/>). As in Latvia, children start attending formal school from the age of 7, learners in kindergarten are considered as very young learners.

Age plays a crucial role in decisions about how we teach and what we teach, since a young learners class is different from the adult or a teenager class in terms of the language learners' needs, the language competences emphasised, and cognitive skills addressed. The characteristics of this group of learners are:

- They respond to meaning even if they do not understand individual words.
- They often learn indirectly rather than directly.
- Their understanding comes from “VAKOG” (they understand what they can see, smell, touch, hear and manipulate with).
- They find abstract concepts difficult to understand.

- They are enthusiastic and curious learners.
- They respond well to learning about themselves (Harmer, 2007).

The case study consisted of the following steps:

- 1) Questionnaire for parents to find out how very young learners prefer to learn English
- 2) Testing very young learners to find out which words they know before the storytelling activities;
- 3) Selecting and designing activities to use storytelling in English lessons for very young learners;
- 4) Observing very young learners during the lesson to find out how they learn new words;
- 5) Testing very young learners to find out which words they have learnt after the storytelling activities.

The author of the Diploma Paper designed a questionnaire for parents (Appendix 1 and 2) and distributed it to 14 parents of very young learners. The first two questions were about usage English at home. Next four questions were about children's desire to learn English. The rest of the questions were aimed to find out parents' habits of reading English storybooks to their children. One of the aims of the questionnaire was also to involve the children's parents into learning process.

It turned out that children used English at home or outside the kindergarten classes. Parents wrote that in general they repeated what their children had learnt during the lessons as well as worked on their worksheets from the lessons. Parents commented that children rather used simple words than some phrases. Thus it can be concluded that they can better remember separate words or songs than phrases.

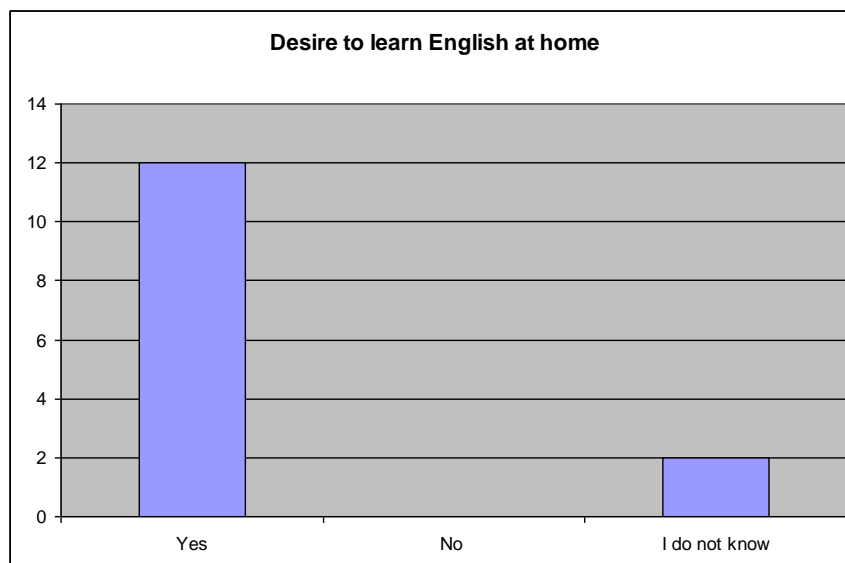


Figure 5. Learners' desire to learn English at home after classes

According to the data, almost all parents (85%) answered that their children were keen on learning English at home. Most of all they learnt by watching cartoons or occasionally by asking parents to translate. These two ways of learning are the easiest and most available if compared with the other variants (using picture dictionaries, speaking with foreigners, listening to the songs, etc.). Parents claimed that their children asked for their help with learning English.

The answers about the ways how they learnt together were very similar to those about the learning ways children preferred the most. Parents wrote they translated what children asked, they watched cartoons together and helped to fill in worksheets from the lessons. It seems that parents liked to help their children's learning process rather than offering some different way of teaching by themselves. Parents of these very young learners take active part in developing their children's English language knowledge and skills. It is very important for children to see that their English language classes are important for their parents.

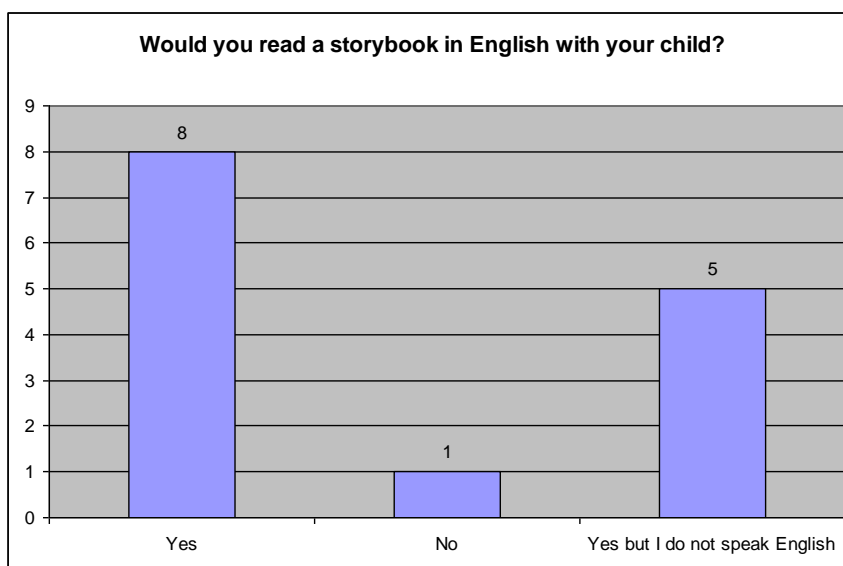


Figure 6. Parents desire to help their children to learn English at home

Findings about reading English books were very encouraging. Almost all the respondents (92%) answered that if they had such a book at home they would read it. The reasons why they were not able to do it were due to their poor knowledge of English or due to lack of English storybooks at home. It is understandable and changeable. Parents can be offered to get some books advised by a teacher if they wish so.

According to the collected data, parents were ready to spend some time to develop their child's English knowledge. Learning with parents could be an effective and supportive way of learning the target language outside the kindergarten classes. The author of the Paper thinks that parents could be offered suggestions what to do at home for parents who wish to

cooperate. There were two parents who did not know if their child wanted to learn English at home. It might mean that they had not yet thought about it or they had not had time to observe such a desire. Working collaborately with parents is a very important part of teaching very young learners and it should definitely be elaborated.

The author of the Paper would like to add that British Council has already started working on cooperation with parents and there are materials available (also in Latvian) published especially for parents who want to help their children with learning English as well as the web page exactly made with this purpose (<http://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/parents>). Unfortunately, the information on the web page is only in English and therefore, according to the data gained by the questionnaire, hardly understandable for parents. Latvian version of this web page does not include a special column for parents at all and it contains information in English mostly. As to the author, translation would encourage more parents to participate in teaching English to their children.

Analysis of the test before the storytelling activities

The next step of the case study was to design tests for the learners. The author's designed test consisted of two parts—listening and speaking part (Appendix 3 and 7). The aim of the Test was to measure the learners' success in learning the vocabulary based on the particular storytelling activities. The test was designed focusing on the vocabulary of the story, namely, names of animals and colours. The title of the story is *What colour are your knickers?* written by Sam Lloyd. The test was conducted twice - before implementation of the storytelling activities and after it. It obtained the relevant data for the author to measure the learners' achievement in learning story based vocabulary.

The author of the Diploma Paper would like to highlight that very young learners needed to be prepared for testing as this procedure was completely new for them. They were trained in doing similar tasks before to get to know what to do. Mother tongue was used as well as it made them more confident about completing the tasks. The test was done individually with every child. Learners were motivated to fill in the test by receiving the stars according their results.

The aim of conducting the test before the storytelling activities was to find out if learners were aware of vocabulary items which would be used in the following storytelling, namely, names of animals and colours before the teaching process. These data were very important as on the base of them, the teacher planned the storytelling activities with focusing more on the less known animals.

There were three tasks in the **listening part** of the test:

Task 1 Listen and circle:

It is a picture-cued task with a multiple-choice format. Learners were required to listen and circle the correct pictures. The specific objective being testing here is the ability to identify particular vocabulary item.

Task 2 Listen and colour:

It is a picture-cued task as well. Learners were required to listen and colour the picture in appropriate colour. The task is designed to check the learners' knowledge of colours.

Task 3 Listen and colour

It is a task where learners were required to colour animal's knickers with the appropriate colour. The task is designed to check the learners' ability to recognize an animal and colour.

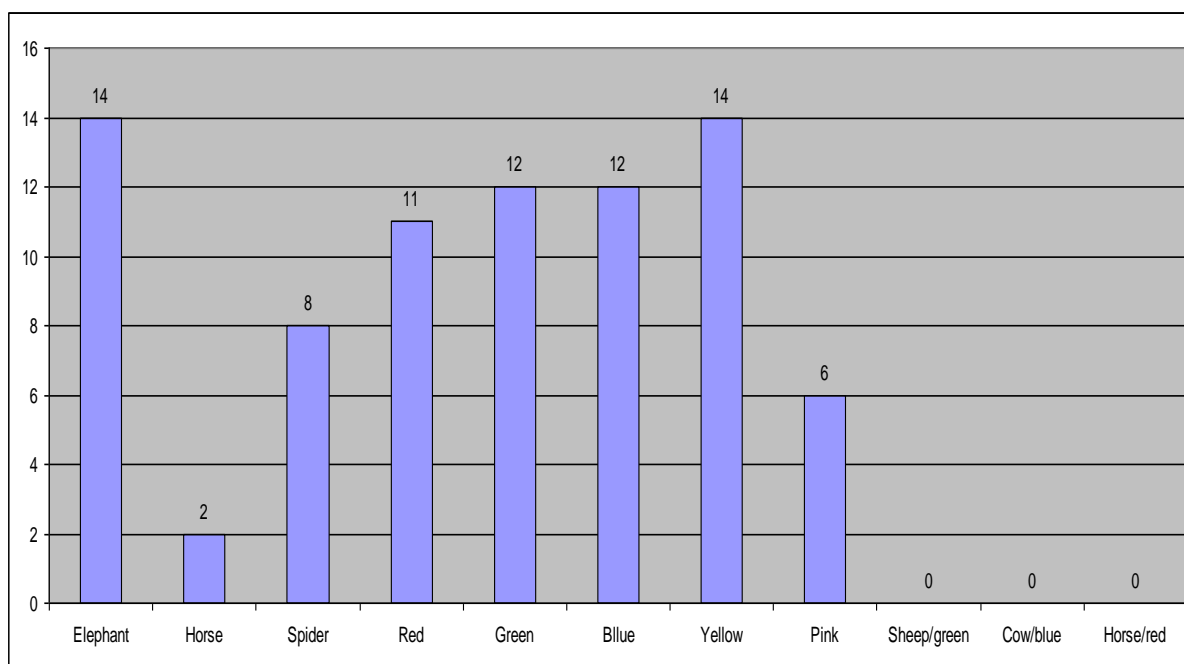


Figure 7. Distribution curve and analysis of the listening part

According to the data depicted in Figure 7, students had knowledge of the names of the animals in English before the storytelling activities even they had not learnt these words in the kindergarten before. The data show that 14 students (93%) knew an elephant. It was the most known word from the all. Eight students (53%) knew a spider and 2 could identify a horse. They commented on it as well. They could recognize a spider because of the association with Spiderman while an elephant and horse are characters in cartoons or parents had told the words to them. No one knew the English names of the animals such a sheep or a cow so they were not able to manage the third task. The distribution curve as

well shows that more than a half of the learners knew basic colours (blue, red, yellow, green). It is explainable as they had learnt them before during the lessons. Six of them (mostly girls) could recognize pink colour as well.

In the **speaking part** of the test there were five tasks:

Task 1 Name the animal you see

Learners were given 7 pictures of the animals. The task tests the learners' ability to use the vocabulary they have learnt. They were required to identify animals in different pictures by naming it in response to questions such as:

- *What animal can you see?*
- *What animal is it?*

Task 2 Answer Yes/No

Learners were given 3 pictures of the animals. They were asked to answer Yes/No question about each picture. The task checks learners' ability to recognise an animal and answer Yes/No question about a picture in response to the question:

- *Is it a(crocodile, tortoise, cow)?*

Task 3 Name the animal you like the best.

Learners were given a question—*Which from these animals (from the task 1) do you like the best?* The task tests the learners' ability to use vocabulary they have learnt. They were required to answer *I like....*

Task 4 Name colour you see

Learners were given 6 coloured circles. The task tests the learners' ability to use the vocabulary they have learnt. They were required to identify colours in different pictures by naming them in response to questions such as:

- *What colour is it?*
- *What colour can you see?*

Task 5 Answer the question: *What colour are your knickers.....?*

Learners were provided with 3 pictures and required to answer the question according to the given pictures. The task is designed to check learners' ability to understand and answer questions with short answers. Test takers responded to the question connected with the story: *What colour are your knickers (sheep, cow, horse)?*

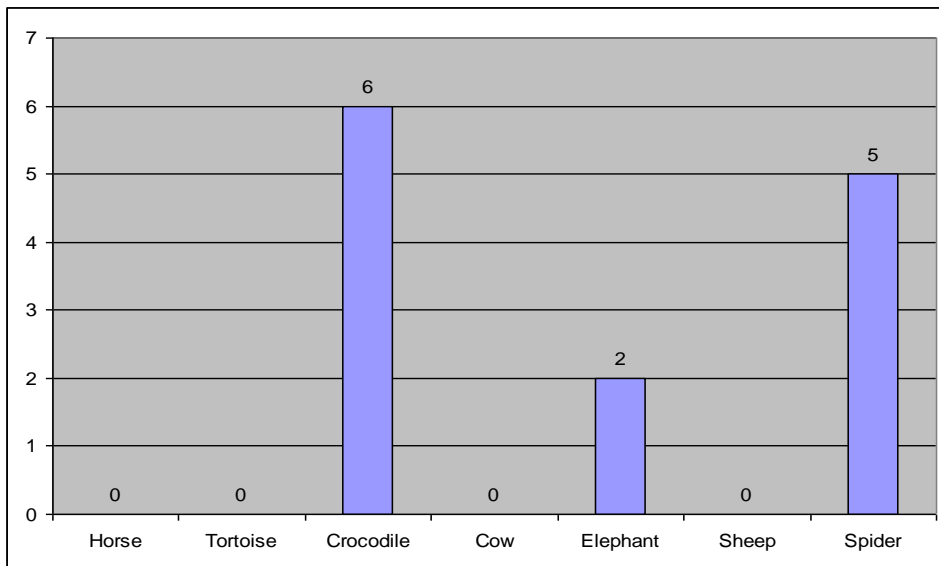


Figure 8. Distribution curve and analysis of the speaking part - animals

Speaking part of the test was done individually; the same fifteen learners took part in it. As Figure 8 shows, 6 learners named a crocodile, 5 learners demonstrated the knowledge of the word spider, while 2 learners could name an elephant. The crocodile was the most known name of animal probably because of its similarity to Latvian. It is evident here that even though 14 learners could identify an elephant in the listening test, only two of them were able to name it in the speaking test. It is similar in the case of spider as well. Possible explanation of this could be that learners had mostly seen those animals in the cartoons or movies when somebody else called them like this so they could identify them easily but they were never asked to name the animals themselves. They had never practised to pronounce their names so they were not confident and able to do it.

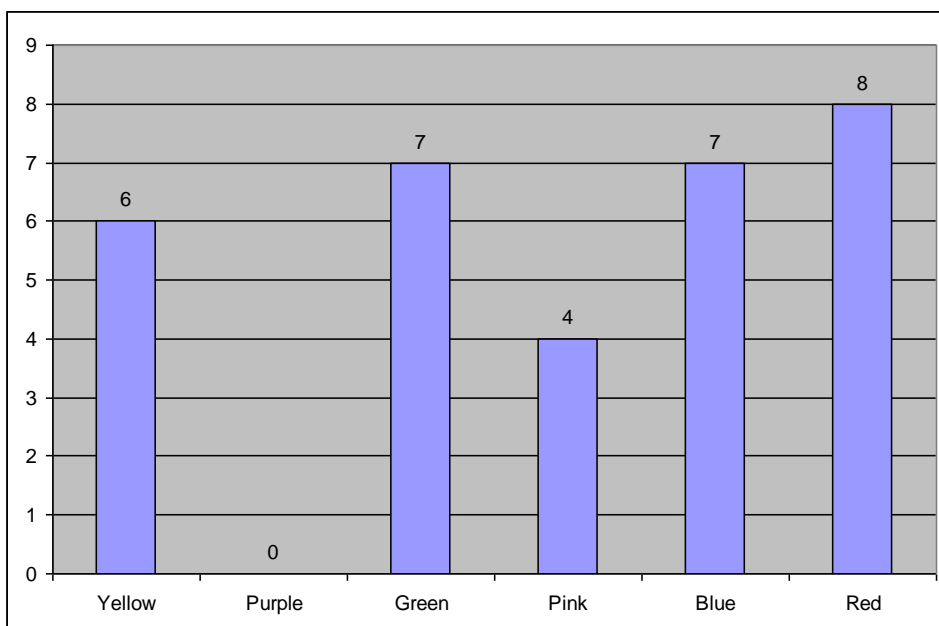


Figure 9. Distribution curve and analysis of the speaking part - colours

Figure 9 shows children's usage of the names of colours before implementation of storytelling activities. According to the data, less than a half of the learners could name basic colours (red, green, yellow, blue) even they could identify them in the listening test. Probably they needed more speaking practise to be able to do it. While yellow colour is the most identified in the listening part, it is the most unused in the speaking part. It could be because of its more difficult pronunciation. Three learners could name pink, while no one named purple.

The results of the both tests show that learners were aware of basic colours and knew English names of three animals—crocodile, elephant and spider. The author of the Paper took these results into account when planning pre-teaching vocabulary activities connected with the storytelling.

Selecting and implementing activities of storytelling

The next stage of the case study was to select an appropriate storybook and design a set of the storytelling activities. The first important step was to choose an appropriate storybook to work with as the activities to be implemented depended on the selected book.

The storybook was selected at the beginning of the research. The author of the Diploma Paper had decided to work with the book *What Colour Are Your Knickers?* written by S. Lloyd. It is a story aimed at helping to learn animals and colours with a simple rhyming text. Each animal is wearing a different coloured pair of knickers which are hidden under the flap. Each animal is associated with a colour that rhymes with its name. It is appropriate for introducing or revising colours and animals. The story contains repetitive patterns and it is based on the question/answer structure providing the opportunity to repeat the same question: *What colour are your knickers [Tommy Turtle]?* and the answer *They are [purple]*.

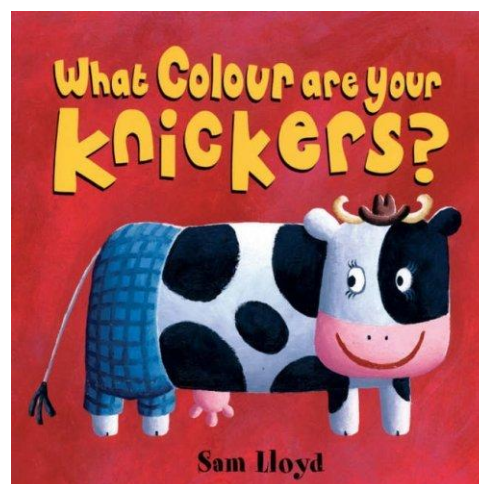


Figure 10. Cover of the book *What Colours Are Your Knickers*

The **criteria of selecting this particular book** are following:

- The book is authentic; it is written without the aim to learn English. Children might feel the sense of success as they understand a real English book.
- Its language is easy, understandable for very young learners, yet authentic. It facilitates learners to acquire the target language in natural context without difficulties.
- The content of the book is clear, easy and motivating. It allows learners to join in storytelling spontaneously.
- Vocabulary areas presented in the book (animals and colours) represent a good teaching material.
- Repetitive discourse patterns help learners to develop their awareness of stress, intonation and pronunciation in generally.
- The book is colourful and contains rewarding illustrations which allow learners to predict the story.
- There are mystery elements (lift-the flap features) in the book which motivate children to listen to the story.
- Text rhymes and learners have a reasonable chance of guessing an appropriate answer from the rhyme.

The next step was to create a **plan of the activities**. It was designed basing on the three stages of the Plan-Do-Review framework for story-based work (Ellis and Brewster 2002) and the results of the tests made before the storytelling activities were taken into account as well. The author decided to use the story in an extended way over several lessons. The story was divided into three stages and planned to be covered in six lessons.

Lessons are conducted twice a week and they are conducted in the afternoon at the kindergarten's hall. One lesson with very young learners lasts for 25 minutes. Learners sit in a circle next to each other. No desks are used. There are 15 learners in a group. The teacher uses only self-designed or adapted teaching materials for teaching very young learners. Detailed lesson plans are added in Appendix 11 and 12.

The following table shows briefly particular stages and the aims for each of them.

Table 1. Story based syllabus**Story based syllabus**

Stage	Lesson	Aim	Procedure
Pre- storytelling activities	1	To recognise, practise and memorise the key vocabulary of the story (<i>tortoise, horse, cow, sheep</i>).	Flashcard vocabulary activities TPR activities
Pre- storytelling activities	2	To recognise, practise and memorise the key vocabulary of the story - animals (<i>elephant, spider, cow</i>) and colours (<i>pink and purple</i>).	Flashcard vocabulary activities TPR activities Worksheet
While-storytelling activities	3	To use the front and back covers of the book to engage learners' interest and attention in the story. To encourage learners to listen and follow the story.	Book introduction Initial and second reading
While-storytelling activities	4	To encourage learners to engage and participate in the book story in a variety of ways. To develop concentration skills.	Book reading in different ways Worksheet
Post-storytelling activities	5	To be reminded of the story through listening actively and acting out the story.	Memory game Acting out the story Singing a song
Post-storytelling activities	6	To be reminded of the story through making own book. To express the personal opinion about the story.	Drawing a book

Main outcomes:

- To make a class book;
- To make an exhibition of the knickers learners have designed for an elephant.

Linguistic objectives, skills:

- Demonstrate the knowledge of and ability to use the names of the animals and colours.
- Demonstrate the ability to listen for general understanding and for specific information.
- Show the ability to listen to a relatively short stretch of language in order to make an equally short response.
- Demonstrate the ability to follow instructions;

- Practise different learning strategies and skills.

Personal development objectives:

- Practise verbal and nonverbal support;
- Practise describing feeling when appropriate;
- Practise waiting for a turn.

Vocabulary:

- Animals- *horse, crocodile, tortoise, cow, sheep, spider, elephant;*
- Colours- *blue, yellow, red, green, pink, purple.*

Pronunciation:

- Sentence stress: What colour are **your** knickers...?
- Falling intonation in the question: *What colour are your knickers?* Ellis and Brewster (2002).

During the **first stage** of the storytelling activities, the teacher motivated the children to learn new animals by explaining them that they were going to read a very interesting book about animals but at first they needed to know which animals would be there. The first two lessons were planned for **pre-teaching and revising vocabulary** which allowed the learners to participate in the story during the following stages. The teacher started with animals which were unknown to the learners (according to the tests) as it required more time to remember them. The other animals and colours were pre-taught and revised during the second lesson. For remembering and practising the word effectively, learners were given a worksheet to fill in at home (Appendix 15). The phrase *What colour are your knickers?* was explained as well.

To introduce the word “knickers”, the teacher used pictures of pairs of knickers in different colours. Learners reacted with smiles and asked for an explanation. The teacher explained that it would be clear when she would bring the book. It was also necessary to remind the children that this was only a joking and that they were not allowed to show their knickers to anyone as it is a very private and intimate issue. As the key language was elicited, the initial reading could take a place during the next lesson (**the second stage**).

As learners were used to sitting in a circle, it was not necessary to change the setting of the room. The teacher started the lesson inviting the learners to guess all the animals and colours she had hidden in a bag. When they had done it she put all the pictures back into one bag and asked for help to make a trick. Everybody together pronounced the magic words “*Abacadabra*” and a book appeared. The teacher introduced the cover of the book and asked for **prediction** what the book could be about. Learners told their predictions and

the teacher continued to check if their predictions were correct. While reading, the learners were amused by the beautiful illustrations and highly motivated by lift-the-flap features which supported their ability to predict which animal would be next. The last page was a big surprise for them and they all started laughing.

After **initial reading** the teacher asked how they liked it and they answered to read once again immediately. The second reading was even more joyful and humorous. Children were very interested in and they liked it very much. Some of them could already name the colour of the knickers before the reading. Reading was followed by the comprehension questions, speaking and TPR activity. One more lesson was conducted at this stage. The teacher read the book again and learners needed to listen actively and respond according to the given task (correct mistakes, miming, displaying pictures, filling the gaps).

The **third stage** was focused on acting out the story and vocabulary consolidation by using different vocabulary games. Even though the learner's pronunciation was not so clear, they were keen on performing and acting with enthusiasm. The learners had learnt a song about the animals too.

This stage involved them as well in the creation of their own **class book**. Even though it was planned to make only one book, learners suggested creating the second one as well. The first book was based on the *What colour are your knickers?* structure by including more animals of their own choice. They decided which animal was not mentioned in the book and made kind of “continuation” of the book they had read. They drew an animal with the coloured knickers on. The teacher suggested putting down the name of the animal in English as well as some more information about it so they could learn not only the name of the animal in English but also something more about the animal—what it ate, where it lived, etc. it also encouraged children to learn in a cross-curricular way as learners also found information related to biology and geography. This book could be used as a picture dictionary as well. The second book was about the elephant John (a character from the original book which forgot to put his knickers on). Learners decided to colour the shape of the elephant already wearing his knickers on.

The teacher is satisfied with the children’s participation during the storytelling activities and claimed that the main outcomes and linguistic objectives were achieved even if they differed for each learner.

Although working with the particular storybook was planned for six lessons; the teacher found out that there are possibilities to continue working with this book. The teacher used this book to teach vocabulary items of clothes and food as well.

Observation analysis

During the second stage, observation was conducted by two observers. The author chose to use observation data as they offered the researcher the opportunity to get live data from a live situation. It helped the author to get more precise information about the learner's reactions and learning process as the author herself was actively involved in the process and could miss some details. After the observation the observers filled out the observation checklist and made some field notes (Appendix 13 and 14). The author asked not to fill the observation checklist during the observation as it was the lesson when the initial reading took place and making notes by observers could be a disturbing factor for learners' listening and concentration. The teacher was in doubt if the observers themselves would not be a disturbing factor for the learners, but they were not. The teacher introduced them at the beginning of the lesson and learners could ask them what they wanted. After that they did not pay a special attention to them.

The main aim of the observation was focused on learners' ability to follow the story and participate in the storytelling activities. The observers were asked to check how learners:

- demonstrate global understanding;
- predict what comes next;
- follow the instructions;
- understand classroom language;
- react to what happens in the story;
- use target vocabulary, etc.

They observed that learners were able to focus their attention to the teacher and the book and they participated willingly. After some twenty minutes a few of them started to “switch off”. It agrees with their age description and therefore the teacher used a TPR activity to “refresh” them. Some of the learners were quite loud when answering questions while some were speaking more to themselves. They, in general showed positive emotions— they were smiling, even laughing loudly. Classroom language was understandable for the learners and they could participate in all the activities. The mother tongue was used in a few occasions only. The learners used the target vocabulary and tried to remember the words from the book without paying attention to the rhymes. It was such a game for them.

After implementation of storytelling activities, the tests were repeated to get to know which words the learners have learnt. The test was modified to suit the purpose better after its evaluation after the first conducting. Concrete changes are described further on. The same 15 learners participated in this part of research.

Analysis of the listening part of the test after implementation of storytelling activities

The learners were required to fill in the listening part of the test, which aimed to check their listening for words (colours and animals) and knowledge of vocabulary gained during the storytelling activities. The listening part consisted of three tasks and lasted for approximately 8 minutes. It was done individually with each student.

The listening part of the test was slightly modified. The third task of the test was changed because of its similarity to the second task (compare Appendix 3 and Appendix 5). The author changed the instructions of how to perform the task. During the first test, the learners were required to listen and colour. After the change they were required to listen and match. So colouring task was transformed into matching task. To the author's mind, using different testing techniques allows learners to practise different cognitive processes and it helped the teacher to check whether learners are able to use the vocabulary in this case as well. The rest of the tasks were the same.

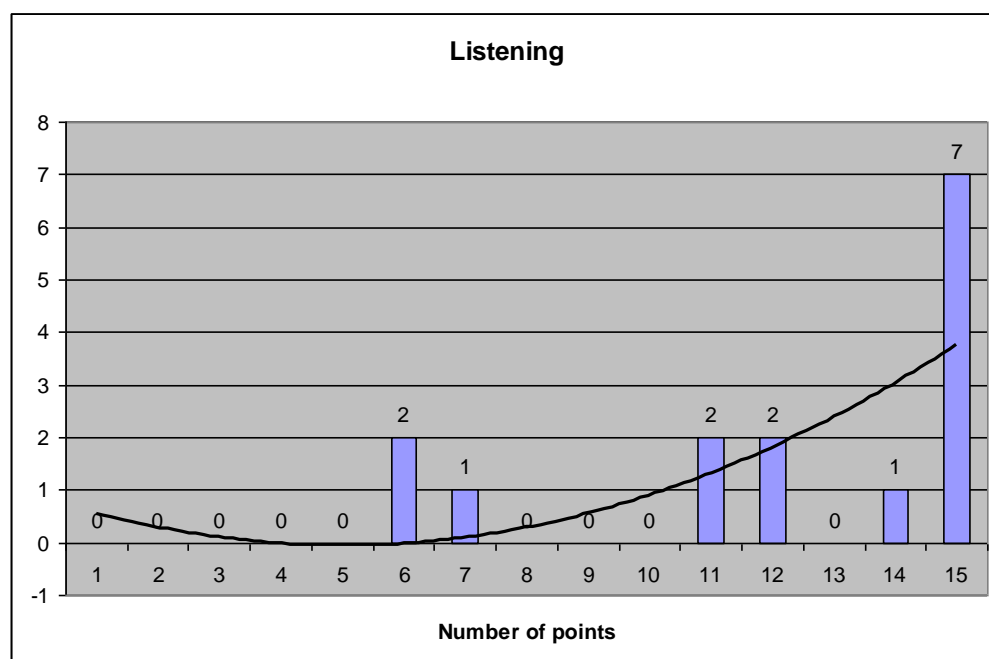


Figure 11. Distribution curve and analysis of the listening part

The distribution curve for listening part indicates that there are two distinctive groups of learners—3 in the middle and 12 with high results. The results show that learners generally obtained higher scores. It indicates that the listening part of the test was rather easy as 7 learners (47%) got maximum points. The author of the Paper is satisfied with the overall results of the listening part of the test, because majority of the learners showed that they had learned the story based vocabulary items as they accomplished this part of the test with high results. The analysis of the particular tasks and vocabulary items learnt by learners after implementation of storytelling activities are explained below.

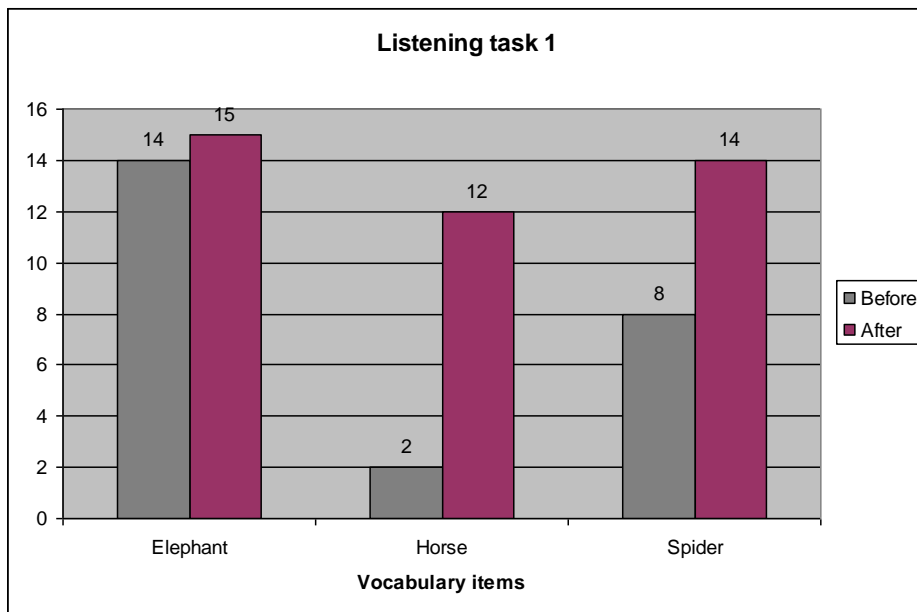


Figure 12. Distribution curve of the listening task 1

In the first task the learners were asked to circle the animal they heard. Figure 12 displays particular vocabulary items learners could identify before and after implementation of storytelling activities. Learners proved that they knew concrete vocabulary items by identifying and circling them. The biggest learning progress was made in the case of *horse* as it was the most unknown word before. According to the data, 10 learners have learnt what horse is, 6 learners have learnt the word spider and one has learnt what elephant is. According to the distribution curve, the greatest part of the learners could recognize all the animals (15 for an elephant, 12 for a horse and 14 for a spider).

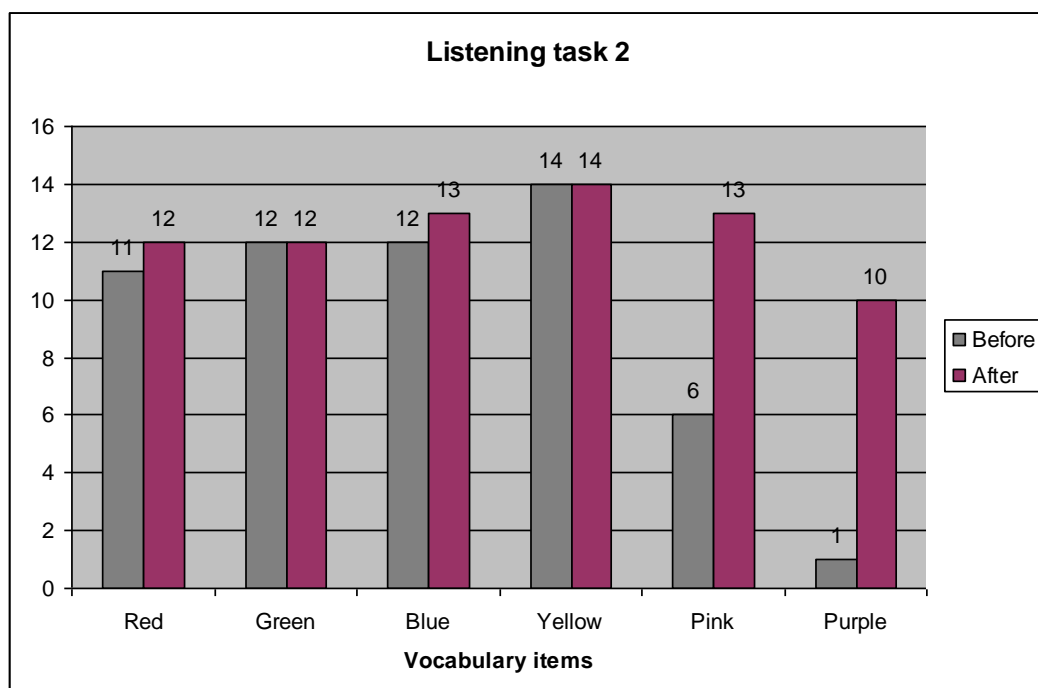


Figure 13. Distribution curve of the listening task 2

The analysis of the results of the second task indicates that bigger learning progress is evident in case of pink and purple colours as those were not taught before. Even though, the most unknown colour is purple and it could be explained by its rare appearance in general. Distribution curve also shows that learners did not learn basic colours much better as the results did not change much. It seems that they focused their attention to new colours more than for those they have learnt before. The distribution curve indicates that more than a half of the learners could identify all the colours after implementation of storytelling activities.

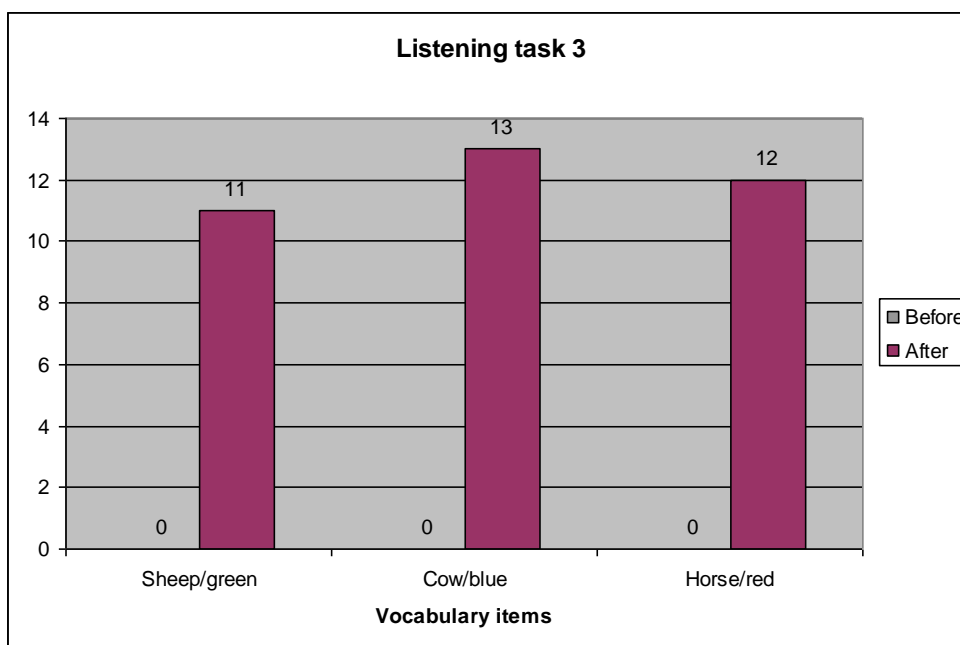


Figure 14. Distribution curve of the listening task 3

The distribution curve of the listening task 3 displays the biggest progress in learning story based vocabulary from all of the tasks. Before implementation of the activities, there was no learner who could identify (colour or match) particular animals and colours. If they were able to identify the colour, they were not able to identify an animal or vice versa. Although the present task is more challenging than the previous two tasks, as the participants were required to demonstrate knowledge of animals and colours, the scores were very high. According to the distribution curve, the knowledge of animals and colours is very similar (11 for Sheep/green, 13 for Cow/blue and 12 for Horse/red) and does not distinct between each other very much. According to the author's observation during the filling the test, very helpful, for some of the learners with good visual memory was the fact that they could remember the combination of the animal and colour from the story.

Analysis of speaking part of the test after implementation of storytelling activities

Fifteen learners participated in the speaking part of the test. They were required to show their ability to understand and answer spoken questions about the pictures while using story based vocabulary. The listening part contained four tasks and lasted for approximately seven minutes. It was done individually with each student.

The author modified the listening part of the test. The third task of the test was omitted because it did not actually check vocabulary the learners have learnt, but it was focused more on checking understanding and using of the superlative form in English. (compare Appendix 7 and Appendix 9).

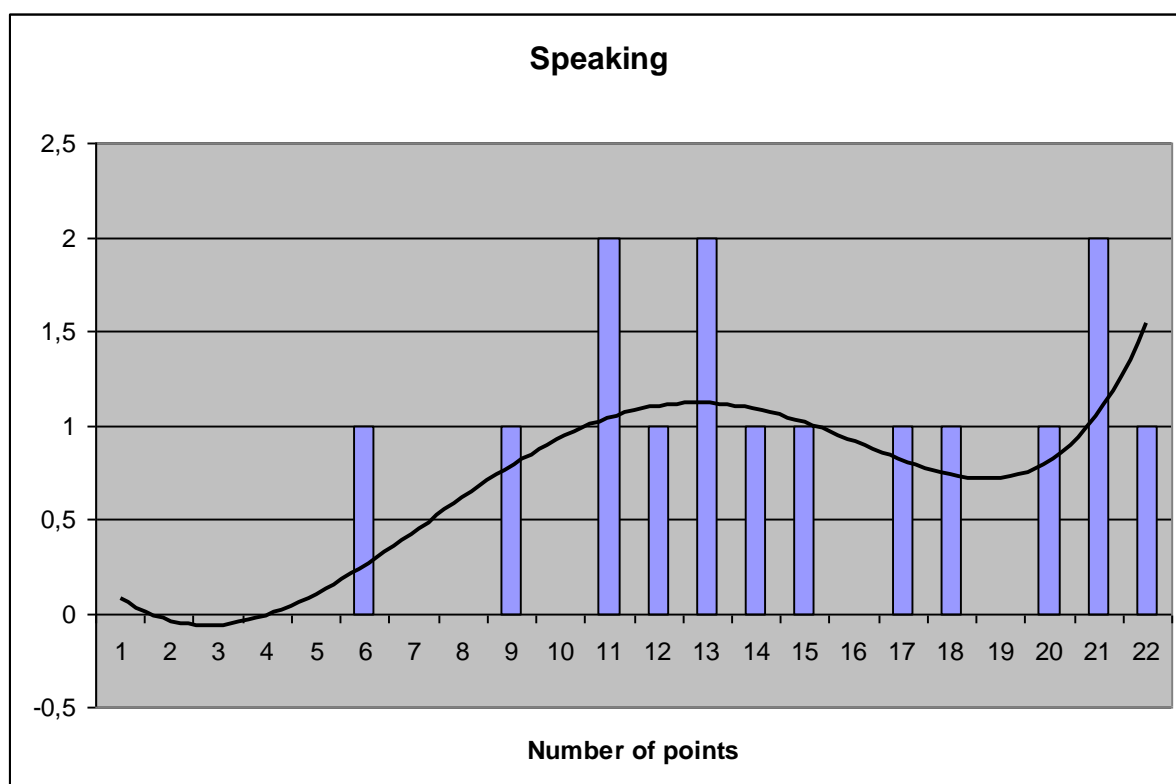


Figure 15. Distribution curve and analysis of the speaking part

The distribution curve of the speaking part after implementation of the storytelling activities indicates that the learners' ability to use story based vocabulary differs very much for each student. While in the speaking part of the test most of the learners gained higher scores, in speaking part they did not get so many points. It indicates that speaking part of the test was more difficult than listening part of the test. The author would like to add that it agrees with her own experience—that to speak is more complicated than to listen and understand. The analysis of the particular tasks and vocabulary items learnt by learners after implementation of storytelling activities are explained below.

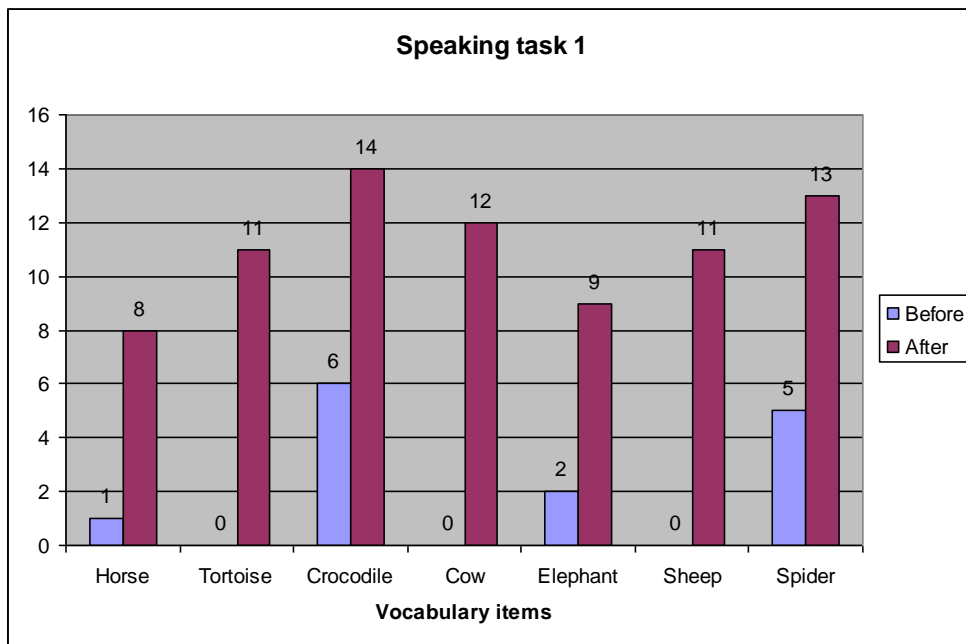


Figure 16. Distribution curve of the speaking Task 1

In this task, the learners were required to name the animals they saw. According to the distribution curve, the most known animal was crocodile. It is probably because of its very similar name in children’s mother tongue. Because of this fact, children very often pronounce it incorrectly in English and teacher needs to pay more attention to its pronunciation. The second most known animal was spider and the author of the test supposes it is because of the popular film Spiderman or comic strip of the same title. Big learning progress can be observed in this particular task. More than a half of the learners could name all the animals from the story. The author of the test is very satisfied with such results as to her, active usage of the vocabulary is basis of communication.

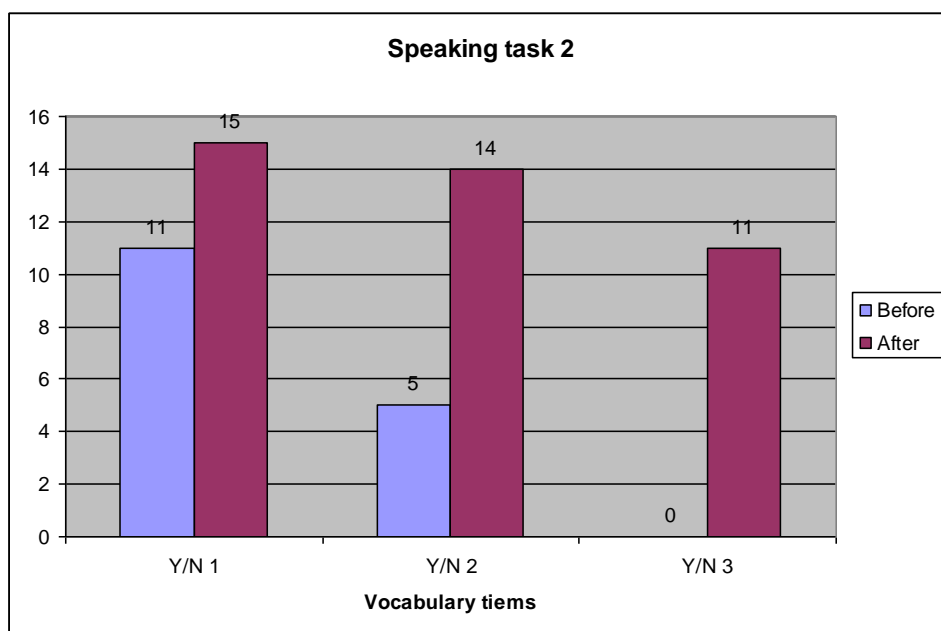


Figure 17. Distribution curve of the speaking task 2

In this task, the learners were required to answer three Yes/No question about the animals. Almost all of the learners were able to answer all three questions. To the author's mind, it is a very good result. As Figure 17 shows, the easiest question to answer was the first question about a crocodile. It corresponds with the results of the previous task where a crocodile was the most frequently identified animal from all. The most difficult for the learners was to answer the third question. It might be because the question was about a cow and a sheep which are not so frequently used as the animals form the first two questions.

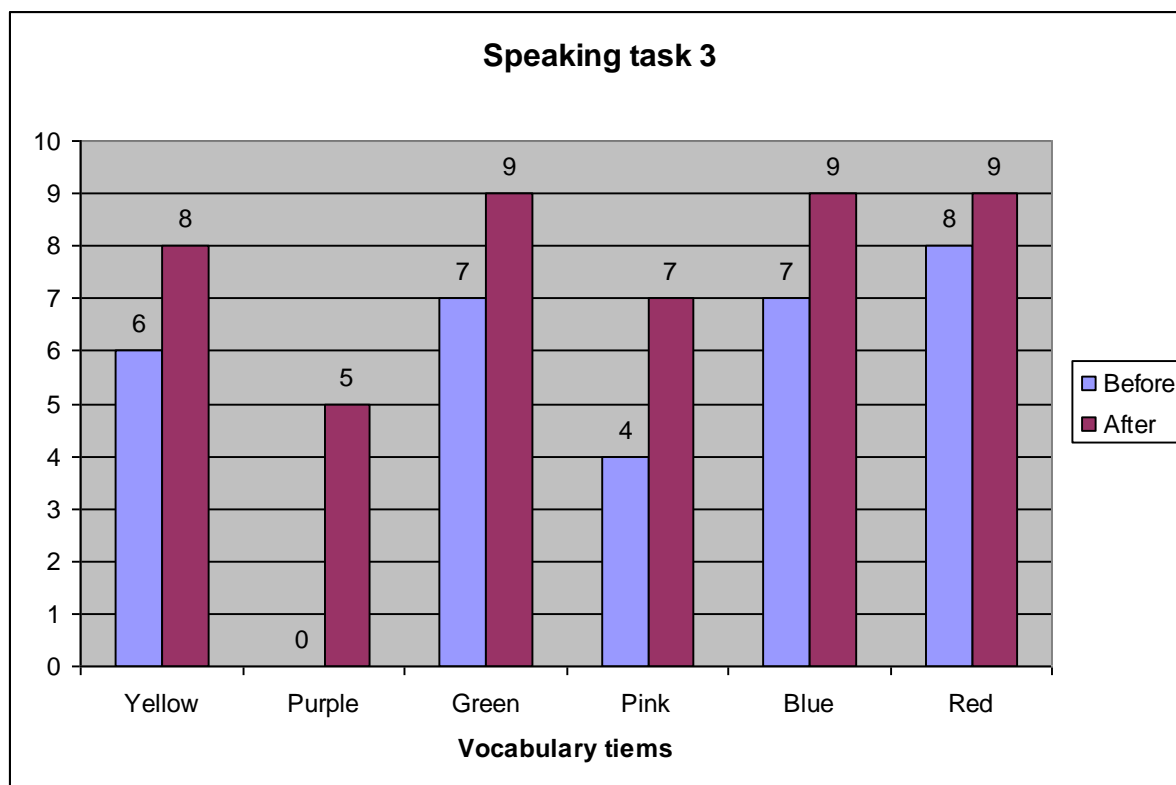


Figure 18. Distribution curve of the speaking task 3

In this task, the learners were required to name colours they saw. The distribution curve shows that the particular task, in comparison with the other tasks in this part of the test, is more difficult for the learners to perform as they could not name colours as successfully as animals, for example. According to Figure 18, learners could name mostly basic colours (green, blue, red, yellow), probably because they had learnt it before. The result for purple in speaking task corresponds with the result in the listening part of the test. It is the most unknown and unused colour. The learning progress is not as evident here. The author of the Paper is not very satisfied with the results, as to her, learners could perform better in this task, especially when naming basic colours. The author proposes to encourage learners in different speaking situations to develop their speaking skills.

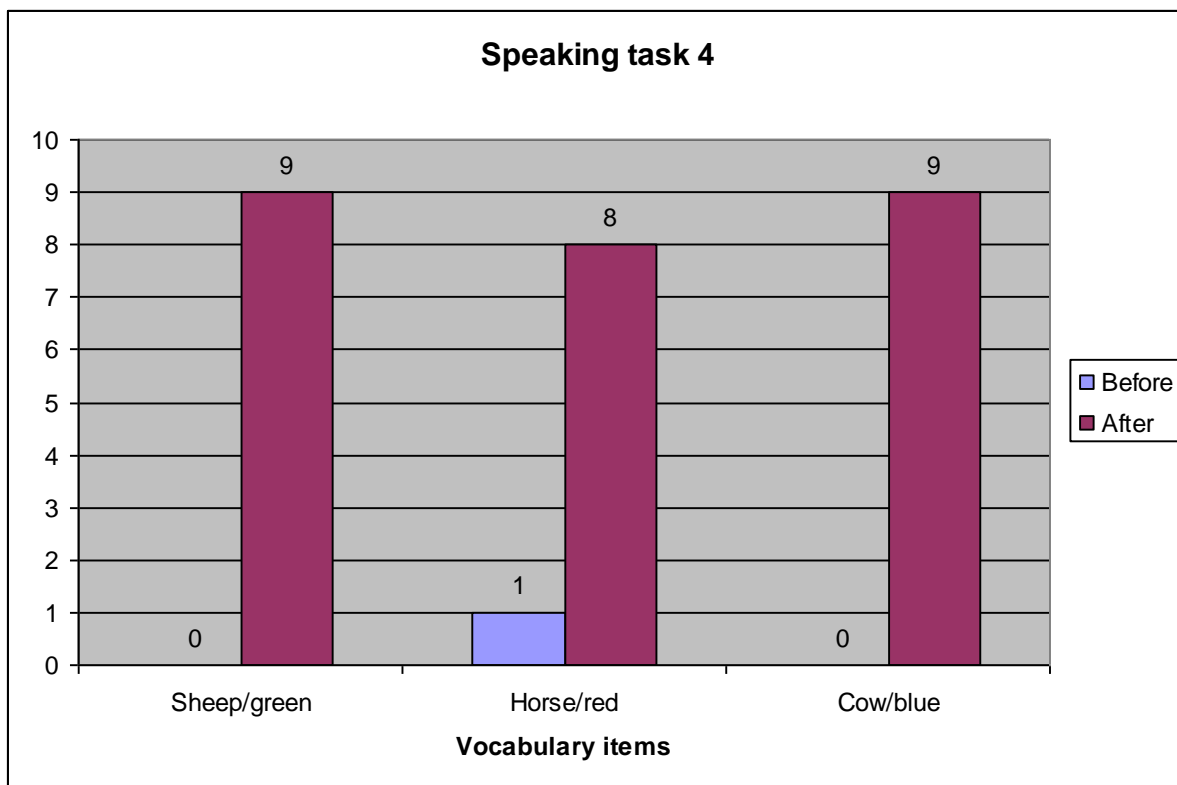


Figure 19. Distribution curve of the speaking task 4

In this task, the learners were required to answer the question: *What colour are your knickers...?* This question was practised during the storytelling activities many times. The author of the Paper would like to explain that this task is connected with the story much more than the previous tasks as it contains the vocabulary of the animals, colours and the exact question from the story; therefore it is understandable why the data before the implementation of storytelling activities are so low. The learning progress is evident here as well. It is not very high, but as this task was the difficult one, the author is satisfied with the results. According to the distribution curve, knowledge of both animals and colours is very similar (9 for Sheep/green, 8 for Cow/blue and 9 for Horse/red).

**The overall analysis of listening part of the test before and after implementation of
storytelling activities**

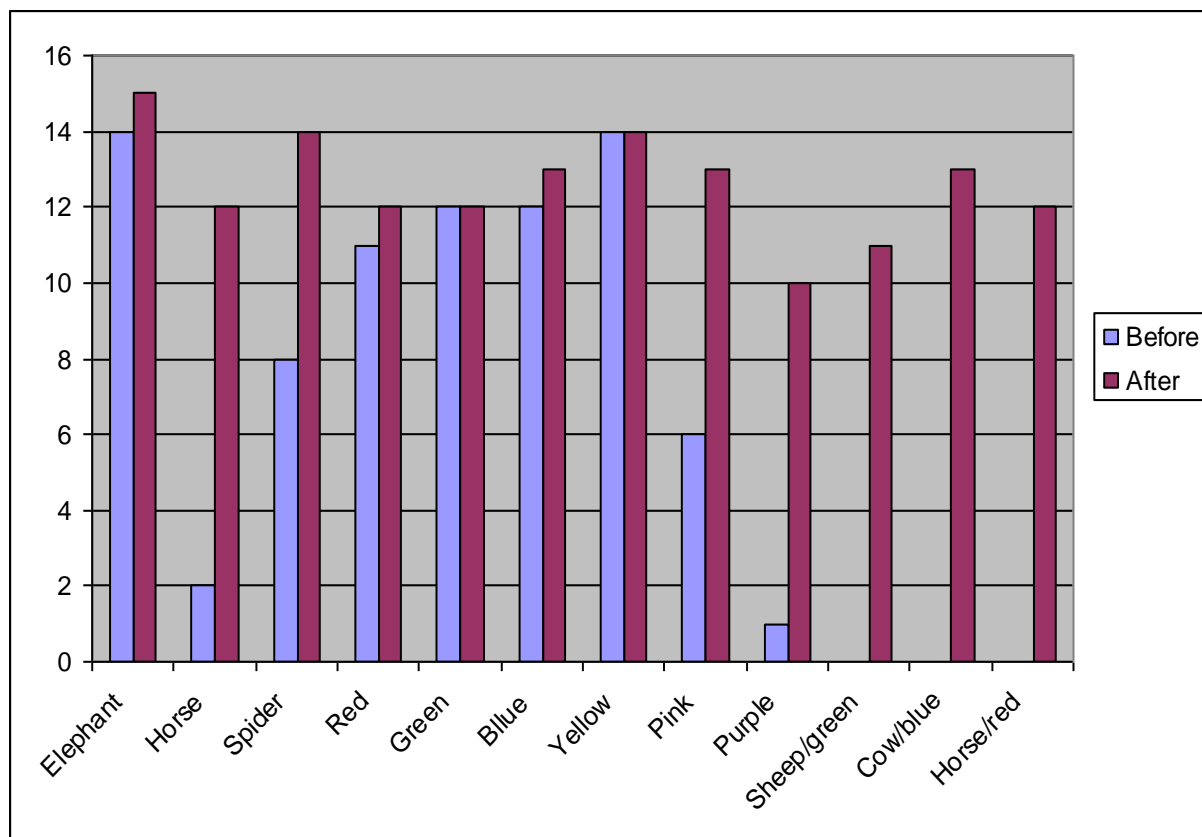


Figure 20. Listening before and after storytelling activities

The distribution curve shows the vocabulary items that learners could identify in the listening part of the test before and after implementation of storytelling activities. It clearly proves that the learners have made progress in learning new words; improved their knowledge of vocabulary of animals and colours. According to figure 20, more than a half of the learners were able to identify all the colours and animals after the activities. The biggest progress was observed in case of the most unknown items—a horse from the animal and purple from colours and in the case where the learners had to prove their knowledge of animals and colours in one task. The number of the learners who knew some vocabulary items before the activities did not change much. It indicates that they paid more attention to the new ones. The overall results of the listening part of the test show that implementing storytelling activities in learning process encouraged vocabulary learning.

The overall analysis of speaking part of the test before and after implementation of storytelling activities

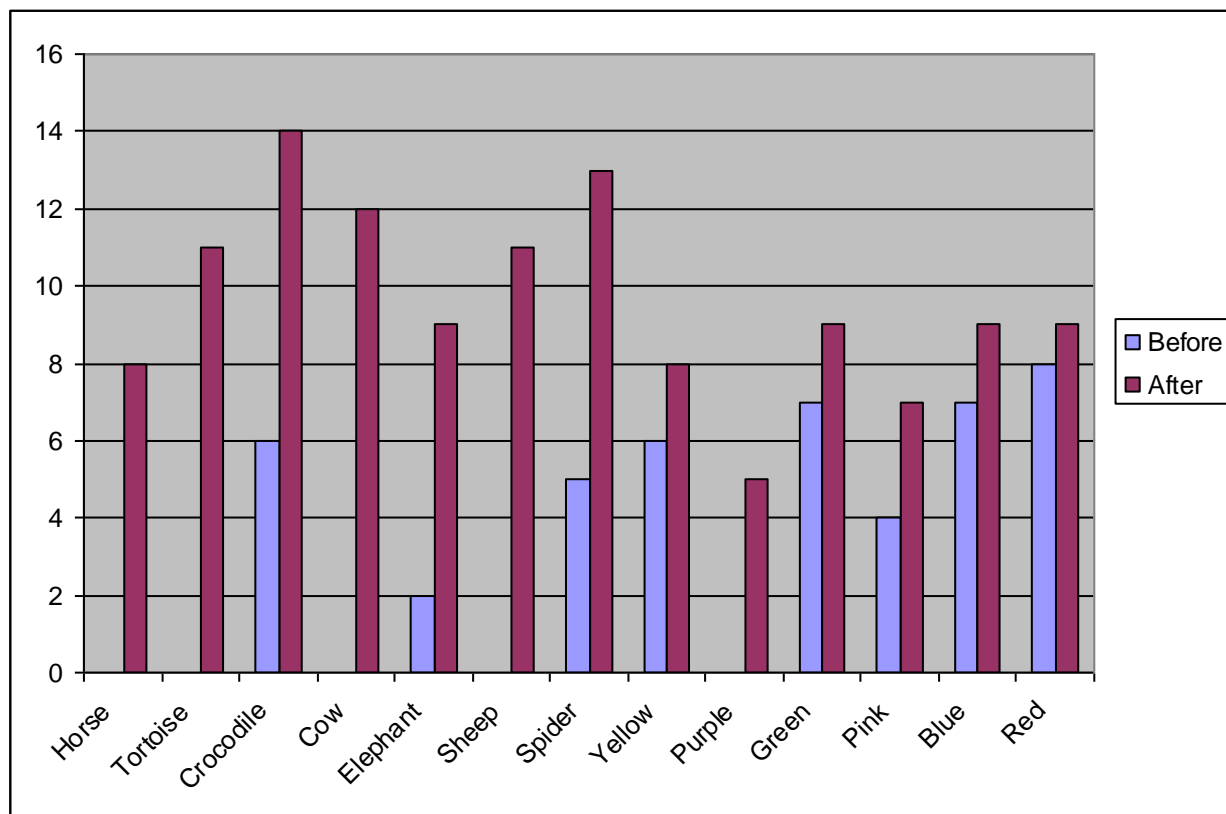


Figure 21. Speaking before and after storytelling activities

Figure 21 shows the vocabulary items that learners used in the speaking part of the test before and after implementation of the storytelling activities. The data indicate that the learners have made big progress in the speaking part of the test. Before implementation of storytelling activities, most of them were not able to name the animals such as horse, tortoise, cow, sheep and purple colour. After the activities, their ability to use story based vocabulary had improved. They developed their speaking skills and extended their knowledge of vocabulary of animals and colours. The author of the Paper is satisfied with the overall results of this part of the test.

The overall results of listening and speaking tests proved that storytelling activities had a progressive impact on student's learning the vocabulary of colours and animals. Each child has improved his/her knowledge of story based vocabulary items.

CONCLUSION

The Diploma Paper deals with using storytelling activities to teach vocabulary.

In order to implement storytelling activities in English classes at kindergarten, the author of the Diploma Paper has studied the views and opinions of authors such as Wright (1995), Ellis and Brewster (2002), Pinter (2006), Cameron (2001).

The author used different techniques in the case study to find out how storytelling can be used for teaching English vocabulary to very young learners. After the evaluation of all the implemented techniques, the author of the Paper claims that **storytelling is an effective way how to teach English vocabulary in context to very young learners**. Storytelling is the original form of teaching. When using storytelling, a teacher presents language in its natural appearance, understandable to learners. Listening to a story in a foreign language contributes to developing listening skills and enhances learners' concentration. When they listen to a story, they get an accurate model for pronunciation and grammar structures of the words and expressions. Re-telling a story is an opportunity to practise speaking skills and memory functions. Stories entertain and educate children. The more interesting and understandable a teacher works with a story, the more learners can gain.

The author of the Diploma Paper designed a questionnaire for parents to get to know how VYL prefer to learn English at home. Parents answered that they learn by watching cartoons or occasionally by asking parents to translate. The author also found out that parents are, in generally, ready to help their children to learn English but they are not confident about their English or they lack story books in English. The author of the Diploma Paper suggests preparing a list of appropriate titles to read with children and distribute it among the parents at the beginning of a school year. Creating a **library of story books** could be another step to encourage using story books. To make them more confident about reading in English, the author would offer them some online links where those stories are read by native speakers. To the author, the most useful would be to make her own **web page** where parents could find also more sources for helping their children with learning English.

The author has designed and conducted tests to get to know which words the learners knew before and after implementation of storytelling activities. Testing very young learners is very specific and therefore the author was a bit afraid of it. It turned out that a suitable motivation is the key for a successful testing. They were not worried about filling the tasks because they did not have the feeling that the teacher was checking them. They were enjoying the process of collecting the stars. They could see (according to the number of

stars) that some of them were more successful, some of them less. They needed to be taught and be aware that they were not the same and that their success depended only on themselves. The author claims that the overall **“backwash” effect** of the testing was positive because the learners were keen on filling the test and they were proud of getting stars as the prove of their success.

The author evaluates using storytelling activities for teaching vocabulary to very young learners as successful. This conclusion was made on the basis of the data received from testing and observing. Teaching is effective only when the learners are involved. During these activities they were really involved, especially emotionally. They knew what and why they were learning and they liked the story book itself very much. The process was conducted according to the plan but there was a space for learners to “lead” as well. They could choose, change, and negotiate. Their opinion was taken into account and they appreciated it.

During the working on this Diploma Paper other issues concerning storytelling appeared. As to the author, it would be useful to explore how storytelling can be used to develop learning strategies or how storytelling can be used to develop cross-curricular educational links.

All the facts mentioned above prove that using storytelling in learning process can be beneficial for the learners. The aims and objectives set in the introduction were achieved and the hypothesis verified.

Even it requires much work while preparing, the author of the Diploma Paper suggests using story-based model to work with very young learners.

THESES

- Vocabulary is basis of language learning as it is complicated for learners to communicate if they lack the necessary words.
- Teaching vocabulary consists of three stages—presentation, practice, production.
- “Storytelling is the vivid description of ideas, beliefs, personal experiences, and life lessons through stories or narratives that evoke powerful emotions and insights” (Serrat 2008: <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article>).
- As very young are not able to read and write, but they are active learners who still “believe in magic”, storytelling is a useful means of teaching vocabulary for them.
- According to their aims, story-based activities can be classified in pre-storytelling activities, while storytelling activities and after storytelling activities.
- Storytelling activities helped learners to visualise vocabulary of colours and animals and keep it in long-term memory;
- It was found out that testing very young learners is possible if they are motivated to perform the tasks.
- Learners got sense of achievement as they were given opportunity to demonstrate how much they had learnt.

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