

## **IMPROVING YOUNG LEARNERS' LISTENING SKILLS THROUGH STORYTELLING**

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*Dedicatória pessoal*

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## **Abstract**

**KEYWORDS:** English, primary school, listening skills, listening strategies, storytelling.

The present study aimed to verify the possible benefits of using storytelling as a means to help improve young learners' listening skills in English language learning by teaching them listening strategies they could apply during storytelling to better comprehend the stories they listened to. There was also the intent to apply the same listening strategies to other listening activities, such as listening tasks from their course books, with CDs. Data was collected through questionnaires, storytelling activity sheets and my teaching journal. Results concluded that teaching young learners specific listening strategies that they could apply when listening to stories or CDs in class might not necessarily help enhance their listening skills. The analysis of the several research tools used in this action research did not show any evidence that young learners had in fact used the listening strategies they were taught and encouraged to use when doing storytelling activity sheets. However, results suggested that children were more confident after the first two storytelling activity sheets after realizing there were strategies available for them to try and improve their listening skills. The main conclusion of this study is that it can be helpful to share and teach listening strategies to young learners as it can give them more confidence to try new ways to improve their listening skills.

# **APERFEIÇOAMENTO DAS COMPETÊNCIAS AUDITIVAS ATRAVÉS DE HISTÓRIAS**

**RUBINA SOARES SANTOS**

## **Resumo**

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Inglês, 1º ciclo, competências auditivas, estratégias de audição, histórias.

O presente estudo tinha como objetivo verificar os possíveis benefícios do uso de histórias na aprendizagem e ensino da língua inglesa de modo a aperfeiçoar as competências auditivas dos alunos no ensino primário, ensinando-lhes estratégias de audição para melhor compreender uma história. Havia também a intenção de averiguar se seria possível aplicar as mesmas estratégias de audição às atividades de compreensão auditiva do manual, em particular as atividades com CDs. A recolha de informação foi feita através de questionários, fichas de atividade sobre histórias e registos de informação do professor.

Os resultados mostram que, ensinar os alunos estratégias de audição pode não necessariamente ajudar a melhorar as suas habilidades de audição. A análise das diversas ferramentas de pesquisa usadas nesta pesquisa-ação não comprovou que os alunos tivessem de fato usado as estratégias de audição que foram ensinados e encorajados a usar nas fichas de atividade posteriores a ouvirem histórias. No entanto, os resultados sugeriram que as crianças estavam mais confiantes após as duas primeiras fichas de atividade depois de perceberem que havia estratégias disponíveis para melhorar as suas habilidades auditivas. A principal conclusão deste estudo é que pode ser útil partilhar e ensinar estratégias de audição aos alunos, pois poderá dar-lhes mais confiança e motivação para experimentar novas maneiras de melhorar as suas competências auditivas.

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# Introduction

## 1. Background to the study

Listening is a very important language skill, not only for communication purposes but also in the process of learning a second language. When people learn a foreign language, listening plays a key role to all effective communication. Without the ability to listen effectively, messages can be inaccurately received and interpreted in the communication process which can lessen their effectiveness and, consequently, lead to misunderstandings. Listening can also appear to be simple or even secondary when compared to more active language skills, perhaps due to the assumption that it is performed without conscious thought or as a response to a stimulus (Morley, 1972). However, when learning a foreign language, learners come to realize that listening is quite difficult and even stressful at times since they are often unable to understand the intended meaning of what they are listening to (Goh & Taib, 2006). Therefore, as listening is a vital skill for foreign language learning, teachers ought to dedicate more time to teach listening.

In the young learner classroom, listening is pivotal to learning a second language, although, quite often, learners are not taught how to listen properly in a foreign language owing to the fact that in many language classrooms, listening is ‘delivered’ rather than developed in its own right (Graham *et al.*, 2011). In other words, it should not be assumed that learners’ listening skills are being developed in class just due to the fact that they are exposed to the target language while listening to their teacher or listening to CDs.

From my teaching experience, listening skills are the most difficult to acquire for young learners in a foreign language lesson. I have yet to experience a class that does not struggle when listening to their teacher speak English or when being asked to do listening activities and tasks. Obviously, this could also depend on whether or not the teacher communicates in the target language in an adequate level to their students’ level of understanding, however, listening is rather difficult and teaching listening brings problems that are not always evident. According to Lund (1991), one of the problems in listening is that learners are forced to comprehend in real time what they are listening to without the support of a written text, for instance. Although, phonetic variations could

still prevent listening comprehension if learners are not able to recognize the words and attribute meaning to them.

In addition, learners' background knowledge of the target language plays an important role in listening (Anderson & Lynch, 2003) as it can prevent learners to understand the meaning behind the messages they listen to in specific contexts. Another difficulty young learners experience is that they are not able to attribute meaning to nonverbal communication (Hennings, 1992), which occurs when they listen to CDs in class, and cannot see the speaker's gestures and movement that could help them understand better what they listen to. Bearing in mind that young learners are still in the initial stage of acquiring a new foreign language, these factors can create unwanted anxiety in children as they are often asked to listen and remember, placing a great strain on their memory which tends not to develop their listening skills (Brewster, Ellis & Girard, 2002). Therefore, I believe it is our responsibility as language teachers to strive to improve young learners' listening skills and help them learn and develop strategies to be more effective listeners and better language learners overall to, ultimately, maximize their chances of acquiring a new language successfully. The main problem appears to be that listening is not seen as relevant in the acquisition of a new language as it is usually confused as a passive process when in reality it is a very active one, even though, nothing is being said. According to Hennings (1992) "To listen is not just to hear; it is the active construction of meaning from all the signals - verbal and nonverbal - a speaker is sending" (p.3). Therefore, teachers ought to make learners aware of the importance of being engaged while actively listening (Linse, 2005) and encourage them to actively develop their own listening skills (Goh & Taib, 2006). A solution to this is to share and teach them how to employ active listening strategies, reminding them that they are still involved in the learning process even when they are silent.

## **2. Purpose of the research**

Having had different teaching and learning experiences so far, both as a teacher and a student myself, I notice that our school system seems to have the tendency to prioritize course books and listening activities through CDs rather than providing teachers with alternative teaching tools that appeal more to their students' interest. Not to say that it is ineffective to have learners listen to a text or conversation through CDs. However, in this way listening becomes a test of comprehension, with the focus on specific details

rather than the overall meaning of the message conveyed which, as noted by Field (2008), is unlikely to develop learners' listening skills effectively.

Having said this, even though I feel that as teachers we already carry a heavy load that comes with the responsibility of being a role model and passing on knowledge, I also consider that we must always reinvent ourselves as professionals and try different and creative approaches for the purpose of becoming better teachers for our students.

Due to this fact, I started wondering if it would be possible to select a teaching tool that is engaging for learners, such as storytelling, since it is known to promote receptive language development, namely, listening comprehension skills (Peck, 1989), and test if, providing them with specific listening strategies, would actually help them improve their listening skills.

Ellis and Brewster (2014) claim that listening to stories requires active listening as learners process all the information they hear with the visuals they get from the storyteller's gestures and the illustrations they have in the book. Therefore, in order for children to follow a story effectively and listen with understanding, learners ought to be encouraged to use guesswork, which can be achieved by teaching them important listening strategies such as *predicting, inferring opinions or attitudes* and *working out meaning from context*.

The purpose of this action research was to verify if it was possible to help improve young learners' listening skills through storytelling, sharing and teaching them how to apply specific listening strategies in order to enhance learners' listening in English overall. The second objective was to find out how to apply the same listening strategies used in storytelling to listening activities from learners' course book.

Therefore, I formulated the following research questions:

1. How can teaching listening strategies such as predicting, inferring opinions or attitudes and working out meaning from context, help improve learners listening for gist and listening for specific information skills using storytelling?
2. How can I apply the same listening strategies used in storytelling to listening activities from the learners' course book?

# **Chapter I: Literature review**

## **I. 1. Introduction**

This literature review is organized in two main ideas. The first clarifies the nature of listening and describes the importance of developing listening skills and teaching listening strategies to young learners in order to develop listening skills. The second one highlights storytelling as a teaching tool for language learning and how it can be used to enhance learners' listening in English. It also suggests how to apply the same listening strategies used in storytelling in other listening tasks and activities done in class.

## **I. 2. The nature of listening**

Listening is the selection and assignment of meaning to sound. When we listen we attempt to give importance to what we recognize and what we want to hear. In other words, we select what information is important to listen to, in order to try to be able to understand the message someone is giving us in order to respond (Brewster, Ellis & Girard, 2002). According to Rivers (1981), listening is a creative skill. The creative part of it occurs when you know what action (or non-action) to take to support what you hear, meaning that listeners should have an active role when listening in order to meet a specific purpose. Lindsay and Knight (2006) claim that people have different purposes when they listen. To learn a new language, for instance, it is important to define what listening purpose you have – listening for specific details, listening for general meaning or idea – to help learners organize their thoughts and use intelligent guesswork to ensure learners meet your listening purpose. Therefore, for this study the focus was on developing listening for gist and listening for specific information skills.

Listening is the major skill that enables learners to use their other skills. If a learner is able to comprehend what they hear they will have less difficulty speaking, as Rost (1994) mentions, because listening is absolutely necessary since it provides input for the learner. Furthermore, if learners do not understand the input they receive, the learning process simply cannot begin. Language learning depends greatly on listening due to the fact that it is the skill that provides the primary impulse that initiates first, second and foreign language learning that sustains the learning process (Morris & Leavey, 2006). In addition, more than three quarters of what children learn in school happens through listening in the classroom (Hunsaker, 1990).

### **I. 3. The difficulty of listening**

It is necessary to acknowledge that listening can be quite challenging, especially for young learners. When presented with a new language, learners try to understand it in terms of cues of their first language (Cameron, 2001), which is still in a developing process itself. As people are not always communicating face-to-face listeners cannot predict the communication because there is no visual support, nor can they ask someone to repeat or try to explain it differently, for instance, when you listen to a CD. Thus, listening is regarded as one of the most difficult skills to learn and consequently to teach (Field, 2008) due to the fact that listening is quite complex and requires an active process of interpretation in which listeners must try to understand the messages they hear with the use of the knowledge they already possess (Rost, 2002). In addition, they cannot control the choice of vocabulary, structure or rate of delivery of the speakers.

As language teachers we should also make sure that children are aware that despite their best effort, at times, they will still encounter some difficulties and challenges as improving listening is a process that requires time and practice and that they are not expected to understand every word each time that they are asked to do listening activities (Brewster, Ellis & Girard, 2002). According to Bloomfield *et al.* (2011), there are some other factors regarding the characteristics of the listeners that can also have a major impact on their ability to listen effectively. Namely, listeners' working memory capacity which is reflected by their capability of understanding more of what they hear when they are listening to L2 language. In addition, a number of factors pertaining to listeners' experience with the L2 influence their listening skills, such as the amount of exposure to the language, familiarity and ability to understand the phonology of the target language, the amount of vocabulary provided and background knowledge about the topic. Bloomfield *et al.* (2011) also claim that it is crucial to be mindful that listeners' anxiety impacts their ability to understand what they can hear, especially young learners who tend to succumb to distractions sometimes and are unable to focus their attention for long periods of time on the same activity, which makes it even more challenging for them to listen effectively. Therefore, we must try to maximize our students' learning ability in class through listening (Rivers, 1981) as this skill is the first phase that connects language with meaning. Furthermore, speaking, proceeds listening cognitively (Bozorgian, 2012) thus, listening provides the input that supplies the basis for language acquisition and allows learners to interact in spoken communication.

## **I. 4. The development of listening skills – listening for gist and specific information**

### **I. 4. 1. Listening for gist**

Even though it is possible to understand the overall sense or presentation of a situation when listening, learners are aware that information comes in a sequence (Ahmed, 2015). In that sequence of information, there are content words that can help them form the ‘bigger picture’ of what they are listening to. This is often called listening for gist, meaning that, when learners listen for gist they become aware that just by gathering broad information of what they can hear they are already able to obtain a general understanding of a topic or situation and use it to discuss it further.

### **I. 4. 2. Listening for specific information**

When listening for details, learners are interested in listening for a specific kind of information – a number, name or object – therefore, ignoring anything that sounds irrelevant for that particular situation (Ahmed, 2015). This way they are able to narrow down their search and obtain the details they need.

## **I. 5. Teaching listening**

Even when listeners have good listening abilities, there is still a possibility that they might not be able to understand what is said in every situation if they do not actively use their listening ability effectively in each listening situation (Rost, 1991). Therefore, as language teachers, it is important to conceive ways to incorporate listening into our teaching and provide opportunities inside and outside the classroom for our students to be exposed to significant listening input.

Linse (2005) claims that “Learners can and should be actively engaged in listening tasks and activities.” (p.25), meaning that a purpose for listening in a particular task must be defined such as listening for specific details or the main idea. Knowing the purpose for listening helps to reduce the burden of comprehension since listeners are listening for something very specific, which, in turn, will help them determine the type of listening required and the necessary approach to a given task (Richards, 1990). Teaching listening can therefore be one of the hardest tasks for teachers mainly because listening skills are acquired over time and through practice. However, listeners who are taught and encouraged to use effective strategies, such as avoiding mental translation, for instance, are more likely to have a better L2 listening comprehension (Bloomfield *et al.*, 2011).

### I. 5.1. Teaching listening strategies to develop learners' listening skills

Effective language teachers help learners adjust and adapt their listening behavior to deal with a variety of situations, namely, different types of input and listening purposes, helping them develop a set of listening strategies and match appropriate strategies to each listening situation.

Listening is regarded as a thinking process (Rost, 1991). Thus, effective listeners think about the meaning of what they hear. In order to successfully make use of the listening ability, listeners have to make effective decisions regarding what they are about to listen to, and these decisions can be called *listening strategies*. An example of a listening strategy used in a classroom context can be listening activities that give students an idea of what to expect and then listen for confirmation.

According to Ellis and Brewster (2014), the objective is to focus children's attention not only on what they learn but also how they learn as a means to encourage them to become aware of how to develop their own strategies when it comes to learning, leading them to become more effective and independent learners. This can be achieved if teachers support children's understanding more effectively, in other words, if they manage to steer learners' attention to specific points of activities that actively support their understanding and guide their attention to specific parts of what they listen to (Brewster, Ellis & Girard, 2002). It is also believed that children's learning depends highly on connections made between what they know and what they are able to understand in the speech they hear (Wells, 1987). However, they do not learn only by listening. If learners do not actively search for meaning, learning will not necessarily occur. Therefore, teaching learners listening strategies can be an opportunity to help learners become better listeners (Harmer, 1998), in the sense that they will be actively engaged in the listening process, improving their chances of acquiring new and solid knowledge of the target language.

### I. 6. Listening and storytelling

According to Gunter and Puchta (1996), teaching a foreign language requires strategies in order to allow the child to become a more efficient learner. When teaching listening, storytelling is one of the methods teachers can use as it is assumed to promote skills such as listening and speaking (Bala, 2015). During storytelling, the teacher is able to center learners' attention on the target language and work together with students while

in a warm and happy atmosphere (Moon, 2000). Moreover, young learners do not get bored listening to the same story several times, and this repetition can create opportunities to introduce or review vocabulary or sentence structures (Dujmovic, 2006).

Students acquire new information and are able to consolidate what they already know through listening to stories told by their teachers, if suitable to their language level. It is also important to bear in mind that storytelling is not a passive activity. According to Ellis and Brewster (2014), when being told a story, children listen and observe the storyteller's gestures and movements. This enables them to notice subtle differences in her/his voice and they are able to match any visuals shown to the language they are hearing, which allows them, in turn, to build up their own pictures in their heads, predicting what comes next, guessing the meanings of new words and so on. In short, while listening to a story, a great deal of information-processing takes place in learners' heads and it stimulates the students' awareness regarding sentence construction in the target language (Bala, 2015). Furthermore, storytelling encourages and enhances children's listening skills. Usually, children talk a lot more than they listen which can be a problem especially in the classroom, due to their short attention span (Rana & Pinar, 2014). However, if listening to stories becomes a habit, it can help them become better listeners as it provides them the necessary training to listen and understand more, while becoming aware of rhythm, intonation and pronunciation of the target language (Brewster *et al.*, 2002). In addition, listening to a story provides young learners with exciting experience exposing them to language contextualized in a meaningful and enjoyable way (Cameron, 2001), which in turn can help them relax and take more advantage of the learning process that occurs, reducing one of the factors that prevents them from being better listeners, namely, anxiety. Therefore, helping young learners acquire and develop strategies for listening through storytelling as stated in Ellis and Brewster (2014), can encourage them to use their background knowledge to work out the meaning from context, using pictures, clues from the storyteller's gestures, facial expressions or voice to decipher intelligently what they are listening to. Ellis and Brewster also claim that some of the most important listening strategies are: predicting what they think might come next in a story, which means that they can then listen again to check if their expectations are in accordance with what they hear. Also, inferring opinions or attitudes providing awareness to stress, intonation and body language and –



namely gestures and facial expressions – which helps them understand if the characters in the story are happy or sad. Although these are strategies that learners cannot use in other types of listening, namely, when listening to a CD because they cannot see what is taking place. Another important listening strategy is working out the meaning from context, which learners use their general knowledge to understand meaning (pp.34-35).

Linse (2005) states that, if young learners can listen attentively to stories then this prepares them to comprehend them better. This is probably due to the fact that crucial auditory input is supplied during social narrative communication (Bala, 2015). Therefore, as language teachers we should take advantage of the fact that we can use storytelling as a teaching tool that awakens their imagination, while engaging them in the process of using language with purpose, by actively listening which can consist of repeating, paraphrasing or simply reflecting on the story while they listen. It also serves to provide a change of mood (Scrivener, 1994) at the end of a lesson or perhaps, in the middle of a lesson which will keep them engaged and motivated. Also, a language teacher should be very thorough when choosing which stories to tell learners in class.

#### I. 6.1. Applying listening strategies used in storytelling to other listening tasks and activities in class

Learners are able to follow a story more effectively and understand it if their attention is focused on specific points they must listen out for, or when provided with important background knowledge of the topic and key language (Ellis & Brewster, 2014). Thus, the aim of this research is to encourage learners to actively listen. According to Rost (1991) providing learners with listening strategies can help them achieve that goal. There is also the intent of encouraging learners to use the same listening strategies namely, predicting, inferring opinions or attitudes and working out the meaning from context, when listening to a story in class in order to facilitate the listening process with other listening tasks and activities in class by giving them examples of how they can apply those strategies to their course books' activities. This way, children ought to feel more confident and be able to use intelligent guesswork when listening in other types of situations and activities. As Cameron (2003) states, confidence will play an important role as it is necessary to maintain children's motivation over the years of language learning that follow so that they do not consider English lessons difficult or a waste of time which could contribute to elevated levels of anxiety in class.

## Chapter II: The Action research

### II. 1. Context

This research project took place in Escola Básica Nº 1 de Lisboa where I was fortunate to learn from a very supportive cooperating teacher and other experienced teaching professionals who help maintain a happy learning environment for children who study there, which is noticeable for those who visit the school's facilities.

The participants involved in this research project were a 4<sup>th</sup> grade class of 26 learners. The students in this class were mostly nine years old. They were a balanced group of boys and girls from a multi-ethnic background. Three students had a very good knowledge of the target language as they spoke English as their second language. There were three Special Needs Students (SEN), two of them diagnosed with dyslexia and one with cognitive deficit and hyperactivity. The SEN students had an adequate language level considering that they had been only learning English for a year. About four or five students had an excellent language level and I was able to speak only English throughout the entire lesson. They were a motivated class with overall good behaviour.

Children had two one-hour lessons a week. The teacher planned lessons according to their course book, *Stars 4!* (Lindade, Botelho, Lucas & Brites, 2017) and *Metas Curriculares de Inglês 1º ciclo*<sup>1</sup> (Bravo, Cravo & Duarte, 2015). The objectives were at A1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference. The *Metas Curriculares de Inglês 1º ciclo* state that learners ought to do oral comprehension activities not only to develop and test comprehension (listening comprehension) but also to help them broaden their range of vocabulary and syntactic, semantic and pragmatic knowledge (listening acquisition) and be able to understand simple words and expressions, simple phrases, clearly articulated and paused. Therefore, the curriculum emphasizes the importance of providing opportunities in class for young learners to be able to understand sounds, intonations and rhythms of the target language. Listening opportunities were provided by

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<sup>1</sup> The *Metas Curriculares de Inglês 1º ciclo* is the official document that establishes the goals for each language skill: listening, spoken interaction, spoken production, reading, writing, and for the vocabulary and grammar, and lastly, for the intercultural domain. It came into force in 2015-16 for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, and in 2016-17 for 4<sup>th</sup> year, when English became part of the Portuguese National curriculum.

the course book CDs in which children could rely on visual support from images and texts while listening.

## **II. 2. Methodology**

The adopted form of research chosen for this project was action research as it allows practitioners to improve and/ or refine their actions and it is relevant to the participants. Action research helps teachers improve their teaching skills through self-reflection and the understanding of the research context, which in turn, helps improve learners' language learning (Burns, 2010).

An action research plan was defined and systematized in order to monitor the development of this research. Firstly, learners were asked to complete a questionnaire to understand their attitudes towards stories at the beginning of my action research cycle, followed by four storytelling activity worksheets, which were done after they were told stories to check their listening comprehension. After the realization that the format of the first activity sheet was not the most appropriate one to test children's listening comprehension skill a second cycle of this action research began. In addition, I used a teaching journal where unexpected and relevant comments and reactions from students were written down and a second questionnaire aimed at verifying students' change of opinions regarding stories, if they had applied the listening strategies they were taught to use when listening and if they considered them helpful. The following points explain the steps taken in this action research and tools implemented in each one.

### **II. 2. 1. Data collection tools**

The data collection tools chosen to obtain quantitative data were a pre-study questionnaire, storytelling worksheets and a post-study questionnaire. Even though these tools provided quantitative data, qualitative data was also essential to get more detailed information. Therefore, a journal was kept to make sure unexpected issues were addressed and adjustments were made when necessary to my teaching skills.

#### **II. 2. 1.1. Letters of consent**

In September, permission was sought from parents, from the school board and also from children with letters of consent addressed to each of the three mentioned parties. (Appendix A, B and C). It is important to obtain consent from all parties involved (Pinter, 2011), including children to make sure they understand the objectives of the study, its purpose and why their collaboration is essential throughout the research project. Each

letter was written in Portuguese stating the title of my action research, its objectives and the data collection tools that would be used throughout this research. The letters addressed to the school board and parents had formal language, however, the letter addressed to the children was written in a more informal and playful manner and it was given to them in class and the research objectives were explained and doubts were clarified.

## **II. 2. 1.2. Selected storybooks**

Children were not accustomed to storytelling in the English classroom context, therefore, I chose to tell them the story *Look at me! Look at me!* by Rose Williamson (Williamson & Marts, 2014) to introduce them to it. This story had some familiar vocabulary namely, colors and animals and it provided a beautiful message of how important it is to be thankful. Also, because it is written in a simple way I thought it would be easier for children to follow the story since it was their first time. *Room on the broom*, by Julia Donaldson and Alex Scheffler (Donaldson & Scheffler, 2003) was the second story told in class. This story was told a day before the Halloween holiday since children had been reviewing and learning new vocabulary and facts about this holiday and were already familiar with this celebration. The third story told in class was *Pete the cat: Rocking in my school shoes* by Eric Litwin (Litwin & Dean, 2011). This story was chosen due to the fact that it contained vocabulary related to the places at the school which was in accordance with what children were learning at the time. Since children really enjoyed this story, and the Christmas holidays were close, I decided to tell learners a story by the same author with the same main character related to Christmas called *Pete the cat saves Christmas* (Litwin & Dean, 2012) right before winter break. Children were able to follow the story without much difficulty because they were acquainted with Christmas vocabulary by the time they listened to the story. Finally, since children's second module of the course book STARS 4 was related to the theme of the body, I chose the story *My nose, your nose* by Melanie Walsh (Walsh, 2002). This story was chosen because it used target vocabulary related to the body while also providing a message of acceptance of oneself and others.

## **II. 2. 1.3. Pre-study questionnaire**

Learners were only given a pre-study questionnaire after being told the story *Look at me! Look at me!*, by Rose Williamson (Williamson & Marts, 2014) because storytelling in class was not a teaching method they were accustomed to. Therefore, it was necessary to provide them with that experience first so they could have their own opinion on the

matter. The pre-study questionnaire (Appendix D) had six closed questions in which learners were asked to put a cross according to their answers: a happy face for 'yes', a not so happy face for 'more or less' and a sad face for 'no'. Additionally, one open question was introduced to analyze learners' personal opinions on what was best about stories. Kellet (2005) claims that if learners understand what they are being asked about they can provide reliable answers. This questionnaire was written in English so I made the decision to translate each statement as children completed the questionnaire at the same time, to make sure they understood what they were being asked. The main objective of this questionnaire was to learn more about children's attitudes towards stories in the classroom context as a learning tool. Also, learners' were allowed to answer the open question in Portuguese and their answers were read and qualitatively analyzed and results presented in percentages in order to compare differences between children's attitudes towards stories in the beginning of this action research and at the end.

#### **II. 2. 1.4. Storytelling activity sheets**

Firstly, there was an initial format of a storytelling activity sheet with the purpose of checking students' listening comprehension after listening to a story in which children were given a multiple choice exercise followed by a true or false exercise. The story was *Room on a broom*, by Julia Donaldson and Alex Scheffler (Donaldson & Scheffler, 2003) (Appendix E). However, the following three storytelling worksheets (Appendixes F, H and I) suffered a few changes after the realization that the results could have been conditioned by children's ability or lack thereof to exclude options that were known to be incorrect and choose from the remaining options. Children who were able to identify options within the multiple choice exercise that did not make sense in the context of the story could easily chose the correct option and this could have nothing to do with their listening abilities which was not what I was aiming for. The objective of these worksheets was to check for an improvement of learners' listening comprehension by having the same set of activities adapted to each story told to compare qualitative results. Therefore, I decided to share and teach children three listening strategies that supposedly help students improve their listening when being told a story (Ellis & Brewster, 2014), and created worksheets that had three sets of exercise, adapted to each strategy taught, namely, predicting, inferring opinions or attitudes and working out meaning from context. The first storytelling activity sheet adapted to the listening strategies taught in class was regarding the story *Pete the cat: Rocking in my school shoes* (Litwin & Dean, 2011)

(Appendix F). Children were reminded to use the three listening strategies, and because this was their first time doing activity sheets adapted to listening strategies, I elicited information from them before they started completing it, regarding what they would have to do for each set of exercises and corrected them when necessary. The process of reminding learners of what to do in each set of exercises regarding the three listening strategies were also done for the following stories told in class, namely *Pete the cat saves Christmas* (Litwin & Dean, 2012) (Appendix H) and *My nose, your nose* by Melanie Walsh (Walsh, 2002) (Appendix I) to make sure they would apply the strategies.

## **II. 2. 1.5. Teaching listening strategies**

Children who were known for having good results overall in English were asked to share their own strategies with the whole class. This was done orally, where I asked in turns, what the best students in English did to understand what they listen to and complete the tasks successfully when being assessed. The purpose was to make every child aware of strategies they could utilize when doing listening activities that could help them be more in control and do better. After listening to children's strategies I taught them three listening strategies namely, predicting, inferring opinions or attitudes and working out the meaning from context (Ellis & Brewster, 2014) by providing them with practical examples from the previous two stories they listened to, *Look at me! Look at me!* (Williamson & Marts, 2014) and *Room on a broom* (Donaldson & Scheffler, 2003). I wrote them on the board so they could take notes and review whenever necessary. From this point on learners were encouraged to apply these listening strategies, by being reminded to use the three listening strategies and eliciting information from them of how to do it, not only when listening to stories but also in other listening activities from their course book. From the third story onwards, *Pete the cat: Rocking in my school shoes* (Litwin & Dean, 2011), children were reminded to use the strategies shared and taught in class so they could better comprehend the story and enjoy it more, therefore, helping them to feel more in control. This way, a second cycle of research began in which the storytelling worksheets had three sets of exercises, each in accordance with the listening strategies children were taught to apply, namely, predicting, inferring opinions or attitudes and working out the meaning from context. For instance, when children had to complete a timetable regarding school subjects they were asked to predict what they thought they would listen to first. Then, after they listened to the CD they were asked to infer opinions and attitudes regarding the people and what they heard and finally, they worked out the

meaning of what they heard from the context (school subject timetable).

### **II. 2. 1.6. Post-study questionnaire**

To finalize the quantitative data collection, children were asked to complete a similar questionnaire to the first one they did. The post-study questionnaire had the same six closed questions and three additional questions regarding the strategies they were taught, for instance, if they had been useful to them and if they were able to apply them successfully when doing other types of listening activities and tasks. Learners were asked to put a cross according to their answers: a happy face for 'yes', a not so happy face 'more or less' and a sad face for 'no' (Appendix J). The objective of this final questionnaire was to compare children's answers regarding the same six closed questions in the first questionnaire to see if their attitudes towards stories had changed and also to have their feedback on how useful they thought the strategies they learned were helpful when listening to stories.

### **II. 2. 1.7. Teaching journal**

As planned I kept a journal systematically, in which I recorded any remark I thought relevant throughout the lessons, for instance, interesting or unexpected questions or reactions of students to particular exercises. This helped me realize I was diverting the focus from what I had proposed to do at first and that the exercises I was asking them to do were not in alignment with what I wanted to find out with my research. Also, it was useful to discuss all of the relevant remarks that I had taken note of later with my co-op teacher, to have a different perspective and make any adjustments necessary to my teaching skills specifically in order to meet my objectives in terms of improving my learners' listening skills. This allowed me to reflect on my teaching practices overall, therefore, helping me to improve my teaching skills (Tice, 2011) and make any necessary changes when needed throughout this process, especially when it came to teaching.

## **II. 3. Results**

The results presented in the following sections aim to display the outcome of my action research, with the objective of improving students' listening skills through storytelling. These were the first questionnaire, followed by four storytelling activity sheets. In addition, I used a teaching journal and second questionnaire aimed at verifying students' change of opinions regarding stories. The following results were achieved by

implementing the previously mentioned research tools in order to try and answer the following research questions:

1. How can teaching learners strategies such as predicting, inferring opinions or attitudes and working out meaning from context, help improve their listening for gist and listening for specific information skills using storytelling to enhance learners' listening in English?
2. How can I apply the same listening strategies used in storytelling to listening activities from the learners' course book?

### II. 3. 1. Questionnaire no.1: getting to know students' attitudes towards stories

As an initial stage of enquiry, it was important to understand students' attitudes towards stories in English lessons since learners were not familiar with storytelling. As shown in Table 1 (statement 1) 88% of the students perceived stories as fun, in contrast to 12% represented by three students who thought stories were fun but only to a certain extent. The percentage of students who claimed to like listening to stories was slightly lower (84%) and only 16% claimed to like it 'more or less'.

Table 1 - Results of questionnaire no. 1. Total number of students: 25

Statements		Yes	More or less	No
1.Stories are fun!		22 (88%)	3 (12%)	0 (0%)
2. I like listening to stories.		21 (84%)	4 (16%)	0 (0%)
3. I understand stories in English.		5 (20%)	17 (68%)	3 (12%)
4. I remember more words with stories than songs.		8 (32%)	14 (56%)	3 (12%)
5. Listening is easier with stories than CDs.		18 (72%)	7 (28%)	0 (0%)
6. I can say words and sentences of a story after I listen.		13 (52%)	12 (48%)	0 (0%)
<b>OPEN STATEMENT</b> "The best thing about stories is..."	<b>It's Fun</b> 9 (36%)	<b>It's interesting</b> 6 (24%)	<b>Provides learning</b> 6 (24%)	<b>Other answers</b> 4 (16%)



When asked if they understood stories in English (question 3) only 20% responded affirmatively, whereas 68% stated they understood stories told by their teacher to a certain degree and, 12% claimed they could not. These results indicated that more than half of the students might have had doubts about the story they were told in English. What was not surprising was the fact that more than half of the class (56%) claimed to remember more words with songs than stories. This is probably due to the fact that children enjoy singing and, since at primary level songs are quite simple and repetitive, it allows learners to learn ‘chunks’ or meaningful phrases of language more easily in comparison to stories. The majority of students (72%) also believed that it was easier to understand a story than CDs and, only 28% claimed to somewhat understand. The reason for this may be that when children are being told a story they can also rely on the teacher’s gestures, intonation changes and teacher’s overall interpretation to try and understand the meaning. However, only 52% of the class believed they were able to say key words or sentences after listening to a story in order to retell it on their own, while the remaining 48% were not sure they could do it. I believe these results could also be due to young learners’ lack of confidence of trying to express themselves in a foreign language and not based on their lack of capabilities of doing so. In addition, children were also asked about what they thought was best about stories by completing the statement “The best thing about stories is...” The three most common answers were that stories were ‘fun’, interesting and that they provided learning opportunities to learn vocabulary about the topic of the story. Results show that the majority of children thought that the best thing about stories was the ‘fun’ factor (36%). The remaining 64% also considered stories interesting and providers of learning opportunities while the remaining 16% gave other reasons such as interesting characters, the genre of the stories and the story being told in a foreign language, to name a few.

### **II. 3. 2. Storytelling activity sheet no.1**

Children were introduced to their first storytelling activity sheet (no.1) with the story *Room on a broom* (Donaldson & Scheffler, 2003). (Appendix E).

Table 2- Storytelling activity sheet no.1 statements' results. Total number of students: 25

<b>Multiple choice exercise</b>	<b>Correct answer</b>	<b>Incorrect answer</b>
1) The witch's friend is a:	<b>"cat"</b> 25 (100%)	0 (0%)
2) The witch and the cat fell on the:	<b>"ground"</b> 25 (100%)	0 (0%)
3) The broom breaks in:	<b>"two"</b> 24 (96%)	1 (4%)
4) The dragon wants to eat the:	<b>"witch"</b> 24 (96%)	1 (4%)
5) The cat, the dog, the bird and the frog help the:	<b>"witch"</b> 22 (88%)	3 (12%)
6) The witch and her friends fly in the:	<b>"sky"</b> 20 (80%)	5 (20%)
<b>True of false exercise</b>	<b>Correct answer</b>	<b>Incorrect answer</b>
1) The witch has a tall hat.	<b>True</b> 25 (100%)	0 (0%)
2) The bird is yellow.	<b>False</b> 25 (100%)	0 (0%)
3) The dragon is not hungry.	<b>False</b> 21 (84%)	4 (16%)
4) The dragon wants to eat the witch and chips.	<b>True</b> 24 (96%)	1 (4%)

Prior to giving this storytelling activity sheet I asked the class gist questions to make sure they understood the general message of this story as it is good practice to check gist, allowing further discussion on the topic of the story and only after did they check their listening comprehension of this story with specific information from the activity sheet. Results show that all of the students were able to choose the correct answer of multiple choice exercise statements 1 and 2. However, the following statements were not as clear to all students as only one student failed to choose the correct answer to statements 3 and 4. Regarding the last two statements, 12% of the class failed to answer correctly to question no.5, and 20% of students were not able to choose the correct answer for question no. 6. Perhaps the reason for the higher percentage of incorrect answers of the two last statements was due to the fact that sentences were longer and therefore more difficult for students to understand. However, overall the majority of students were able to answer the multiple choice questions correctly. Regarding the true or false exercise, as noticeable, the statement that was more difficult for students to answer correctly was no.3, where 16% of the class failed to answer correctly. I believe that this may have been caused by the fact that they had a negative statement perhaps leading them to a wrong assumption

of what was true or false. However, once again, results show that overall the class had a good understanding of what was a true or false regarding the story they heard.

Table 3- Storytelling activity sheet no.1 final results. Total number of students: 25

ITEM	Poor (0-49)	Fair (50-69)	Good (70-79)	Very good (80-89)	Excellent (90-100)
Storytelling activity sheet no.1	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	22 (88%)

Even though the results showed that the majority of students (88%) had excellent results, there was a realization that it might have been so because the sentences in the multiple choice exercises and ‘true or false’ statements were too similar to what they heard from the storybook which allowed them to exclude any options that seemed out of context without greater difficult.

### **II. 3. 3. Storytelling activity sheet no.2: adapting the activity sheet to listening strategies**

Once I realized the activity sheet previously done by students was not entirely in alignment with what I intended to discover, since children could be resorting to other strategies such as excluding options that appeared to be out of context, I decided to rearrange the exercises for the following storytelling activity sheets. Also, bearing in mind that I was going to teach them listening strategies, I created three sets of exercises adapted to each one of the previously mentioned strategies. Even though this was students’ second storytelling activity sheet (no.2) based on the story *Pete the cat, Rocking in my school shoes* (Litwin & Dean, 2011) (Appendix F) it was their first activity sheet with three sets of activities adapted to each strategy.

Table 4- Storytelling activity sheet no.2 results. Total number of students: 25

<b>1) Predicting content</b>			
	Correct answers	Partially correct answers	Incorrect answers
Write key words about the cover of the story.	<b>20 (80%)</b>	<b>5 (20%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>
<b>2) Inferring opinions or attitudes</b>			
a) Pete the cat, likes his school. <b>True</b>	<b>25(100%)</b>		<b>0(0%)</b>
b) Pete is angry when he sings his song. <b>False</b>	<b>24 (96%)</b>		<b>1 (4%)</b>
c) Pete is not happy at all. <b>False</b>	<b>19 (76%)</b>		<b>6 (24%)</b>
<b>3) Working out meaning from context</b>			
1. "I'm rocking in my school shoes."	<b>8 (32%) I'm wearing.</b>		<b>17 (68%) I'm running.</b>
2. "Does Pete worry?"	<b>18 (72%) Pete is happy.</b>		<b>7(28%) Pete is sad.</b>
3. "The lunchroom!"	<b>18 (72%) The canteen.</b>		<b>7(28%) Lunch.</b>

The first set of exercises of storytelling activity sheet no. 2 consisted of writing key words on three blank spaces based on the cover of the story that would help children predict the content of the story before being read. Results of *table 4* show that the majority of students (80%) were able to successfully complete the total of three blank spaces with key words while the remaining 20% wrote at least one or two key words (considered partially correct). This exercise had the highest percentage of success perhaps due to the fact that children were allowed to write words they were confident about as long as they proved relevant. The following set of exercises related to inferring opinions or attitudes shows that the whole class chose the correct answer for question no.1, whereas only 1 student (4%) failed to answer question 2 and 6 (24%) chose the incorrect answer for question no. 3. Perhaps the negative sentence led students to error. Finally, the last set of exercises regarding working out meaning from context got the lowest percentage of success with only 32% of the students answering question no.1 correctly while the remaining 68% answered it incorrectly. I believe this was due to the fact that the statements had a different type of language such as "rocking".

#### **II.3. 4. Listening activity from the course book: applying the same listening strategies to the course book listening tasks.**

Students had practiced vocabulary regarding school subjects and were familiar with target vocabulary and sentences. Children were asked to use the listening strategies they were taught beforehand during a listening exercise of course book *Stars 4!* (Lindade, Botelho, Lucas & Brites, 2017) which consisted of filling in a timetable of several students' classroom subjects (p.13). This was extremely difficult for about 85% of the students (only four students managed to complete the exercise by the third time they heard the CD track), and children kept blaming external factors, such as, the fact that they could not understand people's accents or that they spoke very fast, which was true. Despite the initial difficulty and stress due to speakers speaking fast and having different accents children were able to listen to the CD track three times but unfortunately some children still were not able to fully complete the exercise. (Appendix G)

#### **II.3. 5. Storytelling activity sheet no.3**

From this point onwards, every activity sheet had the same three set of exercises adapted to each listening strategy, in order to compare results (Appendix H). Storytelling worksheet no.3 was based on the story *Pete the cat saves Christmas* (Litwin & Dean, 2011).

Table 5 - Storytelling activity sheet no.3 results. Total number of students: 23

<b>1) Predicting content</b>			
	Correct answers	Partially correct answers	Incorrect answers
Write key words about the cover of the story.	<b>20(87%)</b>	<b>3 (13%)</b>	<b>0(0%)</b>
<b>2) Inferring opinions or attitudes</b>			
a) Santa needs help. <b>True</b>	<b>23(100%)</b>		<b>0 (0%)</b>
b) Pete likes Santa. <b>True</b>	<b>21 (91%)</b>		<b>2 (9%)</b>
c) Pete wants to save Christmas. <b>True</b>	<b>21 (91%)</b>		<b>2 (9%)</b>
d) Pete is unhappy to give gifts. <b>False</b>	<b>20 (87%)</b>		<b>3 (13%)</b>
<b>3) Working out meaning from context</b>			
1. "Give it your all."	<b>23(100%) Do your best.</b>		<b>0 (0%) Don't help.</b>
2. "This is totally groovy!"	<b>14 (61%) This is cool.</b>		<b>9 (39%) This is sad.</b>
3. "Children sleeping all snug in their beds"	<b>18 (78%) Comfortable.</b>		<b>5 (22%) Cold.</b>

Results of *table 5* show that there was an overall increase of the percentages of correct answers. The first set of exercises (predicting content) continued to be the exercise with the highest percentage of correct answers by 87%, followed by the set of exercises regarding inferring opinions or attitudes with 83%. However, these results also show that the exercises related to the listening strategy of working out meaning from context continued to be the exercises that most children struggled with. Probably due to unfamiliar vocabulary which might have confused the students, even though they were practicing working out meaning from context.

### II.3. 6. Storytelling activity sheet no.4

Storytelling worksheet no.4 was based on the story *My nose, your nose*. (Walsh, 2002) (Appendix I).

Table 6 - Storytelling activity sheet no.4 results. Total number of students: 25

<b>1) Predicting content</b>			
	Correct answers	Partially correct answers	Incorrect answers
Write key words about the cover of the story.	<b>24(96%)</b>	<b>1(4%)</b>	<b>0(0%)</b>
<b>2) Inferring opinions or attitudes</b>			
a) The colour of their skin is different. <b>True</b>	<b>23(92%)</b>		<b>2 (8%)</b>
b) They dislike the smell of chocolate cake. <b>False</b>	<b>15(60%)</b>		<b>10 (40%)</b>
c) The colour of their eyes is the same. <b>False</b>	<b>20(80%)</b>		<b>3 (12%)</b>
d) When they sleep, they close their eyes. <b>True</b>	<b>21(84%)</b>		<b>4(16%)</b>
<b>3) Working out meaning from context</b>			
1. "They both hate washday!"	<b>21(84%) They hate taking a bath.</b>		<b>4(16%) They like to wash.</b>
2. "Arthur's nose turns up."	<b>18(72%) He smells something.</b>		<b>7 (28%) His nose is small.</b>
3. "They both kick hard in the swimming pool!"	<b>20(80%) They play in the pool.</b>		<b>3 (12%) They have legs.</b>

Similarly to previous results, the first set of exercises (predicting content) had the highest percentage of correct answers in which, 96% of the students were able to write correct and relevant key words to predict the content of the story they would be told bearing in mind what they could see in the cover of the book. However, there was an overall decrease of successful answers of the remaining set of exercises, namely regarding the listening strategies of inferring opinions or attitudes and working out meaning from context when compared to the average percentages of correct answers of the previous storytelling activity sheet (no.3).

### II.3. 7. Storytelling activity sheets – comparing final results

Table 7 - Storytelling activity sheet no.2 results. Total number of students: 25

ITEM	Poor (0-49)	Fair (50-69)	Good (70-79)	Very good (80-89)	Excellent (90-100)
Storytelling activity sheet no.2	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	4 (19%)	10 (48%)	6 (29%)

In spite of difficulties, half of the class managed to get very good results after applying the listening strategies they were taught. I think the reason there were not as many “Excellent” marks this time in comparison to the first one was due to the changes that were done to the activity sheet and because its structure was different, since this time every set of exercises were done according to the taught listening strategies. Also, stories were all different and could have had a different level of difficulty for learners.

Table 8 - Storytelling activity sheet no.3 final results. Total number of students: 23

ITEM	Poor (0-49)	Fair (50-69)	Good (70-79)	Very good (80-89)	Excellent (90-100)
Storytelling activity sheet no.3	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	2 (9%)	1 (1%)	19 (91%)

As shown in table 8, the majority of students had an excellent performance in storytelling activity sheet no.3. However, there was still one student who did poorly.

I believe that these results are due to the fact that the set of the exercises were similar to the previous activity sheet which perhaps made it easier for them to focus on the listening task since they already knew exactly what was expected of them for each exercise.

Table 9 - Storytelling activity sheet no.4 final results. Total number of students: 25

ITEM	Poor (0-49)	Fair (50-69)	Good (70-79)	Very good (80-89)	Excellent (90-100)
Storytelling activity sheet no.4	0 (0%)	2 (8%)	2 (8%)	6 (24%)	15 (60%)

Even though there was a slight decrease of the percentage of the excellent results, in comparison to the previous storytelling activity sheet (no. 3), more than half the class was able to get excellent results, and there were no poor results in this activity sheet.



### II.3. 8. Questionnaire no.2 – comparing attitudes towards stories

Table 10 - Results of questionnaire no. 1 and 2 regarding the same statements. Total number of students: 25

QUESTIONNAIRE NO.1				QUESTIONNAIRE NO.2		
Statements	Yes	More or less	No	Yes	More or less	No
1.Stories are fun!	22 (88%)	3 (12%)	0 (0%)	21 (84%)	4 (16%)	0 (0%)
2. I like listening to stories.	21 (84%)	4 (16%)	0 (0%)	20 (80%)	4 (16%)	0 (0%)
3. I understand stories in English.	5 (20%)	17 (68%)	3(12%)	1 (4%)	23 (92%)	3 (12%)
4. I remember more words with stories than songs.	8 (32%)	14 (56%)	3(12%)	6 (24%)	7 (28%)	12 (48%)
5. Listening is easier with stories than CDs.	18 (72%)	7 (28%)	0 (0%)	7 (28%)	9 (36%)	9 (36%)
6. I can say words and sentences of a story after I listen.	13 (52%)	12 (48%)	0 (0%)	4 (16%)	13 (52%)	8 (32%)

When comparing the two questionnaires, I realized that students' opinions had changed regarding the same matters. The majority of students changed their opinions regarding how well they understood stories in English, namely, only one student claimed that he understood stories in English and there was a significant increase of the percentage of students who claimed to understand stories only to a certain degree. These results may be related to children's awareness towards their listening comprehension after having to complete activity sheets to check their comprehension of the stories they were told.

Also, there was an increase by 36% of students who believed that they were not able to remember more words with stories than songs, and 36% of students changed their mind regarding listening being easier with stories than CDs, if we compare the previous percentage of students who answered no (0%) previously in questionnaire no.1. I think a possible reason for this change of heart may have been due to the fact that throughout this research children became more aware of how listening required a very active role on their

part in order to accurately understand what they were listening to. In addition, only 4 students (16%) thought they were capable of saying words and sentences of a story after they listened to one, which differed from the previous result of statement 6 questionnaire no.1 where more than half of the class claimed to be able to retell a story using key words or sentences that they heard while being told the story. Again, I believe these results emerged from learners' increase of awareness therefore, also making them perhaps more aware of how well they could express themselves in the target language in this particular context.

Table 11 - Final questionnaire (no.2) – listening strategies statements. Total number of students: 25

Statements	Yes	More or less	No
7. I use the listening strategies that I learned in English when I listen to a story now.	4 (16%)	17 (68%)	4 (16%)
8. Using listening strategies helps me understand stories better now.	2 (8%)	11 (44%)	12 (48%)
9.I use listening strategies also when listening to CDs.	3 (12%)	8 (32%)	14 (56%)

In order to verify if children thought the listening strategies they were taught and encouraged to use when listening to a story or when doing other listening activities in class, namely, listening to CDs were indeed useful, three more questions were added. Regarding the listening strategies, only 16% of the students said they used the strategies when they listened to stories and only 2% believed that they were actually helpful. Thus, the majority of the students (56%) claimed to not use them, in particular when doing other listening activities, namely, listening to CDs (Appendix J). What is most surprising about these results is that a lot of children did not seem to realize that they all used the listening strategies because every set of exercises of the last three storytelling worksheets were done according to each strategy taught. However, they were still not aware of it.

### II.3. 9. Teaching journal

Through my teaching journal I had the opportunity to reflect on my students' most unexpected feedback and attitudes throughout my action research project, with the help of my co-op teacher who was always willing to provide a more experienced perspective on any matter that concerned me. For instance, after correcting storytelling activity sheet

no.1, I asked the children who got excellent results to share what strategies they used while listening to get such good results (the intent was to make them aware of their own strategies before teaching them the three listening strategies they would be using from that point onwards – predicting, inferring opinions or attitudes and working out meaning from context). Most learners said that what helped them with the multiple choice exercise in particular was the fact that they could rule out words that seemed out of context, therefore, making it easier for them to recognize the correct option (‘Children said some of the multiple choice answers did not make sense for the story they listened to’ – Teaching journal) Even though this was a good strategy to share and it was helpful to the class, it made me realize that if I kept this style of activity sheet it would not account for learners’ listening skills since they could clearly use other skills. In addition, a particular listening task of their course book and their struggle to understand what they could hear (“Learners struggled to complete the timetable” – Teaching journal), made me aware that even when students are provided with strategies, for instance, to improve their own performance during tasks, they could still find it difficult to apply it in different contexts. It truly surprised me that even after students were taught listening strategies that they could use to help them improve their listening, having examples and storytelling activity sheets’ exercises adapted to each one of those strategies, children would still struggle with what appeared to be a simple exercise. Perhaps they were confused on how to apply the same listening strategies to listening tasks of their course book. Or perhaps the external factors that they complained about such as the speakers’ accents and the fact that they spoke very fast simply made it quite difficult for them to follow.

## **II. 4. Discussion and conclusions**

This action research involved a group of 26 students between 9 and 11 years old in year 4 at primary level. It started in October and finished in December. As research tools for this study I used storytelling activity sheets to collect quantitative data, an initial questionnaire to understand students’ attitudes towards stories and a final questionnaire similar to the first one with some new questions regarding the listening strategies they were taught. In addition, I had a teaching journal where I took notes on any unexpected and relevant feedback from students during other listening tasks and other activities overall.

From day one, I noticed I had students who took this research seriously not only because they were curious since they had never listened to stories in English in a

classroom context as a teaching resource, “They haven’t listened to stories in English before.” (Teaching journal) but also because they wanted to help me discover if this would be helpful for children who needed to improve their listening skills as all of them agreed that it was one of the most difficult skills in English for them. As the listening activities were carried out in the lessons, either with storytelling activities or other listening tasks from their course book, children became less fearful of failing in those given tasks because they knew there were strategies available for them to overcome difficulties, despite the fact that they answered that they had not used them on the final questionnaire. However, even though they became familiar with the process of listening to a story bearing in mind that there were strategies they could use, such as predicting, inferring opinions or attitudes and working out meaning from context that could help them organize the main information they heard, results show that they did not find the listening strategies helpful to understand stories. Nevertheless, I believe that this experience allowed them at least to feel more in control of their learning process as they recognized that they could use strategies on their own to help improve their performance in listening tasks.

In general, the results displayed in the second cycle of this research were encouraging as the majority of children were able to get good to excellent results. However, even though I might have thought that there was no other option than for students to somehow utilize the listening strategies they learned, since each exercise of the second cycle of the action research activity sheets were shaped according to each listening strategy, the majority of students still did not think that they actively used those strategies. The truth of the matter is that indeed there is no evidence they used the strategies – they could have simply guessed. This makes me realize that there is still a long way to go, and it is very important to make children consciously aware that they do play the most important role in taking control of their own learning process. Therefore, my role as a teacher is to guide them and show them ways to become independent learners and make them aware of it. In fact, even though children were guided by me through this entire process, I learned that over time they gained some autonomy and already knew what they could do to help themselves when doing listening activities.

In conclusion, the development of my action research required taking into account my specific classroom context, my students’ listening skills and how they were able to apply the listening strategies they were taught to use when doing listening activities and my own ongoing reflection of my teaching practices. By aiming to improve my students’

listening skills through storytelling I learned that not only is it necessary to think of new and motivating teaching tools to implement in class to encourage them to become better learners, but rather an entire process of reflecting on effective ways to apply those teaching tools in order to benefit students' autonomous and conscious learning and equip them with not only knowledge itself, but encourage them to be responsible for their own learning and make them aware that they have what it takes within themselves to achieve their learning goals.

Overall the listening strategies chosen to be taught and put in practice in this action research were helpful as they worked as guidelines for me as teacher which allowed me to create a more specific set of exercises that were in accordance with strategies known to help language learners improve their listening comprehension of stories and also in other listening tasks in the classroom. I also realized my students were becoming more confident when we discussed the stories after they listened to them because as I asked them specific questions that were in accordance with the listening strategies that they were taught they already knew what I expected them to answer and in turn it made it easier for them to answer more quickly but still accurately. However, even though children were able to improve their results in general I was still not able to be positive that these strategies helped them indeed since as the final questionnaire results show, they admitted not have used them. Therefore, I am not sure if these strategies were the best strategies to be chosen to improve learners' listening skills but at least I believe it helped children become aware that there are strategies they can try to see if they are able to improve their listening skills and overall performance in class.

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## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A - Letter of consent to parents

### PEDIDO DE AUTORIZAÇÃO AOS ENCARREGADOS DE EDUCAÇÃO

Caros pais e encarregados de educação,

O meu nome é Rubina Santos e tenho vindo, desde meados de Setembro do corrente ano, a realizar o meu estágio em ensino com o seu educando. No âmbito de um relatório final de estágio de Mestrado em Ensino de Inglês no 1º ciclo na Universidade Nova intitulado *Improving young learners' listening skills through storytelling (Aperfeiçoamento das competências auditivas através de histórias)*, venho por este meio, solicitar a vossa autorização para poder incluir o seu educando neste estudo.

O estudo decorrerá entre Outubro de 2017 e Dezembro do mesmo ano, envolvendo a intervenção das crianças como objeto de observação, e análise das suas respostas a fichas de atividades relacionadas com as histórias contadas em aula, questionários e entrevistas.

A informação recolhida fará parte do relatório final de estágio de mestrado em ensino, sendo os resultados obtidos divulgados no respetivo relatório. A instituição e os alunos permanecerão anónimos em qualquer circunstância.

Agradeço que até ao dia 15 de Outubro de 2017 me conceda a autorização para proceder à implementação do estudo em causa, permitindo que o seu educando faça parte do estudo.

Rubina Soares Santos

Professora Doutora Carolyn Leslie  
Orientadora de Estágio  
FCSH, Universidade Nova Lisboa

*Carolyn Leslie*



Eu, \_\_\_\_\_, encarregado de educação de \_\_\_\_\_

declaro que fui informado(a) dos objectivos do estudo intitulado *Improving young learners' listening skills through storytelling (Aperfeiçoamento das competências auditivas através de histórias)* e autorizo o meu educando a participar no estudo.

Data: \_\_\_\_\_

Assinatura: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B - Letter of consent to the school board



### Pedido de autorização à Direção do Agrupamento de Escolas Nuno Gonçalves

Exma. Sra. Diretora Laurinda Maria Diogo Pereira,

O meu nome é Rubina Soares Santos e é com muito gosto que irei estar com os alunos da turma A do 4.º ano da Escola Básica nº 1 de Lisboa a estagiar (Prática de Ensino Supervisionada II) durante o 1º período deste ano letivo.

Estou a frequentar o Mestrado em Ensino de Inglês no 1º Ciclo na Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas na Universidade Nova de Lisboa, e este implica que durante o estágio faça um pequeno projeto de investigação. Este projeto fará parte do meu relatório final, e intitula-se *Improving young learners' listening skills through storytelling (Aperfeiçoamento das competências auditivas através de histórias)*.

Venho, por este meio, solicitar a vossa autorização para incluir os alunos da turma A do 4.º ano da Escola Básica nº 1 neste meu projeto que irá decorrer entre Outubro e Dezembro de 2017 durante o meu estágio.

Depois de pedir autorização aos alunos e encarregados de educação da referida turma para os incluir no meu estudo, a recolha de dados será efetuada mediante fichas de atividades relacionadas com as histórias contadas em aula, questionários e entrevistas. A qualquer momento os alunos podem escolher não participar. As informações obtidas serão referidas no meu relatório final de mestrado e eventualmente em artigos académicos e conferências.

A instituição, todos os seus funcionários e as crianças permanecerão anónimas em qualquer circunstância. Nunca serão tiradas fotografias nem obtidas imagens, quer da instituição quer das crianças, contudo, o mesmo não se irá aplicar aos trabalhos dos alunos, que permanecerão no anonimato.

Se tiver questões a colocar agradeço que me contacte através do e-mail: [rubinasantos@hotmail.com](mailto:rubinasantos@hotmail.com).

Agradeço que autorize a participação dos alunos da turma identificada no meu estudo. Pelo que peço que me entregue esta autorização assinada, se possível até 15 de Outubro do corrente.

Lisboa, 28 de Setembro de 2017

Rubina Soares Santos

Prof.ª Doutora Carolyn Leslie

Orientadora de Estágio

FCSH, Universidade Nova Lisboa

✕

Eu, \_\_\_\_\_

Diretor(a) do Agrupamento de Escolas Nuno Gonçalves, declaro que fui informado(a) dos objetivos do projeto intitulado *Improving young learners' listening skills through storytelling (Aperfeiçoamento das competências auditivas através de histórias)*, e autorizo os alunos da turma A do 4.º ano da Escola Básica nº 1. a participar no estudo.

Data: \_\_\_\_\_

Assinatura: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C - Letter of consent for children

Hello there!

Como já todos sabem, sou a professora Rubina e também estudante de Mestrado em Ensino de Inglês 1º ciclo para tornar-me uma professora ainda melhor. Por isso estarei convosco durante o 1º período, e estou muito feliz por vos ter como alunos! Até o Natal, terei oportunidade de vos dar aulas e desenvolver o tema para o meu projeto final da faculdade.

Como já vos expliquei na primeira aula, irei fazer o meu projeto sobre algo de que gosto muito, e penso que vocês também... contar histórias!

*Care to join me?*



Venho vos convidar a participar desta experiência em que usaremos belas histórias para melhorar o vosso inglês!

Vou tentar tornar as aulas o mais interessantes possível e não irei revelar os vossos nomes nem usar imagens vossas no meu projeto final. O importante serão as fichas de atividades relacionadas com as histórias contadas em aula.

Os vossos pais já foram avisados do meu projeto e já lhes foi pedida autorização bem como à escola. Estarei sempre disponível para esclarecer qualquer tipo de dúvidas sobre o meu projeto, e caso assim o desejem, poderão desistir a qualquer momento de participar no meu estudo.

Bora lá? Conto com a vossa participação!

Hugs&Kisses

Rubina Santos



Eu, \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Aceito participar no projeto

☐ Não aceito participar no projeto.

Data: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix D - Questionnaire no. 1



### Questionnaire

My name is...
Date:



Put a tick:

1) Stories are fun!

--	--	--

2) I like listening to stories.

--	--	--

3) I understand stories in English.

--	--	--

4) I remember more words with stories  
than songs.

--	--	--

5) Listening is easier with stories than CDs.

--	--	--

6) I can say words and sentences of  
a story after I listen.

--	--	--

Complete the sentence:

The best thing about stories

is.....

.....

.....

.....

## Appendix E - Storytelling activity sheet no.1

### Storytelling Activity Sheet no.1

Teacher:	Name:
Mark:	Date:

#### 1. Listen and tick.

Ouve e assinala a resposta correta.

1) The witch's friend is a:

a) cat ☐      b) hamster ☐      c) fish ☐

2) The witch and the cat fell on the:

a) ground ☐      b) canteen ☐      c) table ☐

3) The broom breaks in:

a) two ☐      b) five ☐      c) ten ☐

4) The dragon wants to eat the:

a) frog ☐      b) witch ☐      c) dog ☐

5) The cat, the dog, the bird and the frog help the:

a) flowers ☐      b) fish ☐      c) witch ☐

6) The witch and her friends fly in the:

a) sky ☐      b) sun ☐      c) tree ☐

#### 2. Write True (T) or False (F):

Assinala com verdadeiro ou falso.

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1) The witch has a tall hat.                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2) The bird is yellow.                          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3) The dragon is not hungry.                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4) The dragon wants to eat the witch and chips. | <input type="checkbox"/> |



## Appendix F - Storytelling activity sheet no.2

### Storytelling Activity Sheet no.2

Teacher:	Name:
Mark:	Date:

*(Predicting content)*

1. Look and write key words about the cover of the story.  
Olha e escreve palavras-chave sobre a capa do livro.

\_\_\_\_\_

*(Inferring opinions or attitudes)*

2. Write True (T) or False (F):

Assinala com verdadeiro ou falso.

- a) Pete the cat, likes his school. ☐
- b) Pete is angry when he sings his song. ☐
- c) Pete is not happy at school. ☐

*(Working out meaning from context)*

3. Listen and tick the correct answer.

Ouve e assinala a resposta correta.

What does it mean? O que significa?

- 1) "I'm rocking in my school shoes":

a) I'm wearing ☐ b) I'm running ☐

- 2) "Does Peter worry?"

a) Pete is sad ☐ b) Pete is happy ☐

- 3) "The lunchroom!"

a) The canteen ☐ b) Lunch ☐





## Appendix G - STARS 4 Student's Book – Listening activity (exercise 2)

Unit 1 – Back to school

Lesson 2

Language Focus

# My timetable

1 Listen and say.

★ Language Focus ★

When do you have maths? I have maths <b>on Tuesday morning</b> .	Where do you play with your friends? I play <b>in the playground</b> .	What do you do in the music room? I <b>play guitar and sing</b> .
---	---	--

2 Listen and complete the table.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning		Maths			
	Lunch				
Afternoon	English		Portuguese		

3 Listen and read.

Mike: This is the music room.

Lee: It's really cool. What do you do in here?

Mike: I play guitar and sing in my music lesson.

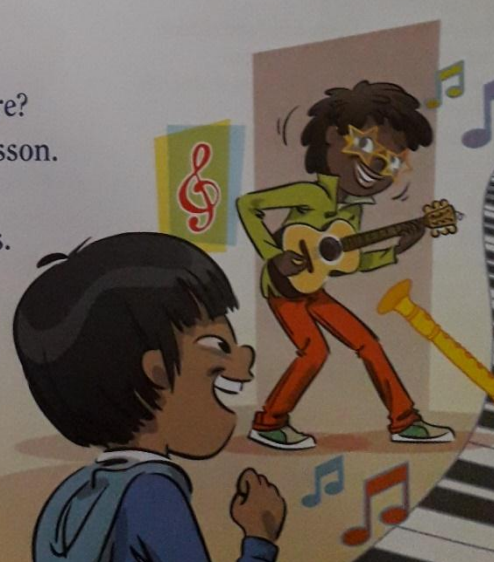
Lee: When do you have music?

Mike: I have music on Mondays and Fridays.

Lee: And where do you play with your friends?

Mike: I play in the playground.

Let's go. It's break time.





## Appendix H - Storytelling activity sheet no.3

### Storytelling Activity Sheet no.3

Teacher:	Name:
Mark:	Date:

*(Predicting content)*

1. Look and write key words about the cover of the story.

Olha e escreve palavras-chave sobre a capa do livro.

\_\_\_\_\_

*(Inferring opinions or attitudes)*

2. Write True (T) or False (F):

Assinala com verdadeiro ou falso.

- a) Santa needs help. ☐
- b) Pete likes Santa. ☐
- c) Pete wants to save Christmas. ☐
- d) Pete is unhappy to give gifts. ☐

*(Working out meaning from context)*

3. Listen and tick the correct answer.

Ouve e assinala a resposta correta.

What does it mean? O que significa?

- 1) "Give it your all."

a) Do your best. ☐ b) Don't help. ☐

- 2) "This is totally groovy!"

a) This is cool! ☐ b) This is sad! ☐

- 3) "Children sleeping all snug in their beds..."

a) Comfortable ☐ b) Cold ☐



## Appendix I - Storytelling activity sheet no.4

### Storytelling Activity Sheet no.4

Teacher:	Name:
Mark:	Date:

*(Predicting content)*

1. Look and write key words about the cover of the story.

Olha e escreve palavras-chave sobre a capa do livro.

*(Inferring opinions or attitudes)*

2. Write True (T) or False (F):

Assinala com verdadeiro ou falso.

- a) The colour of their skin is different. ☐
- b) They dislike the smell of chocolate cake. ☐
- c) The colour of their eyes is the same. ☐
- d) When they sleep, they close their eyes. ☐

*(Working out meaning from context)*

3. Listen and tick the correct answer.

Ouve e assinala a resposta correta.

What does it mean? O que significa?

- 1) "They both hate washday!"

a) They like to wash. ☐ b) They hate taking a bath. ☐

- 2) "Arthur's nose turns up."

a) He smells something. ☐ b) His nose is small. ☐

- 3) "They both kick hard in the swimming pool!"

a) They play in the pool. ☐ b) They have legs. ☐



## Appendix J - Questionnaire no.2



### Questionnaire

My name is...

Date:



Put a tick:

- |   |                          |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1) Stories are fun!   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2) I like listening to stories.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3) I understand stories in English.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4) I remember more words with stories than songs.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5) Listening is easier with stories than CDs.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6) I can say words and sentences of a story after I listen.                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7) I use the listening strategies that I learned in English when I listen to a story now. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8) Using listening strategies helps me understand stories better.                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9) I use listening strategies also when I listen to CDs.                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |