



## The role of short stories in enhancing first year students writing skills

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### Abstract

This study aimed to shed light on the importance of short story strategy for developing English language learners students' writing skills. The researcher has implemented the test which consisted of one question and has taken place with the students of first year, University level at Gezira State. Pre and post-test were used as a research instrument for data collection. The sample of the study consisted of (53) students from both sexes. The research's data has been entered and processed by using the (SPSS). The study has found out that: firstly, students of first year can develop better writing skills. Secondly, Thirdly Therefore, the study recommends that Short stories should be considered as an essential material for teaching English language.

**Keywords:** short story, English language, writing skills

### Introduction

Tribble (1996) <sup>[3]</sup> states that there is considerable scope for an approach that emphasizes both knowledge about the context and content of a piece of writing (focus on genre) and knowledge of the best way of preparing for a writing task (focus on process). In such a view, a successful writer has to draw on knowledge of the genre (content and context), knowledge of the language system (for example, lexis and syntax) necessary for doing the writing task, and knowledge of the writing process (the steps) for preparing the task. When these sets of knowledge are interrelated, writers are more likely to produce effective texts since they know what to write in a given context, which parts of the language system are the most appropriate for carrying out the task in hand, and they have a command of the necessary writing skills for the task.

### Review of Literature

#### Using of Short Stories

Using short stories in the EFL classroom exposes learners to distinctive opportunities for educational, intellectual, cultural and linguistic development. Short story is considered as one of the literary genres that can be used in the EFL classroom to enhance language skill, motivate students, and increase their cultural awareness and tolerance. King (2001) concludes that short stories can be utilized as engines, and a powerful and motivating source for assisting learners consolidate and practice language (grammar, diction). Similarly, Ellis and Brewster (1991: 1: 2) emphasize, "As stories are motivating and fun, they can help students develop positive attitudes towards the foreign language and enrich their learning experiences".

Lazar (1993) believes that exposing learners to literature provides them with memorable syntactical or lexical items. Moreover, it also encourages learners to make predictions, inferences and draw conclusions about actions, behaviors of character and ends of literary works.

This quantitative and qualitative paper aims to shed light on

EFL learners' attitudes towards using short stories in EFL classroom and exploring certain practical applications for one selected short story in the classroom. Another advantage for short stories is their practical length, which enables learners to wrap up the discussion and analysis of the story in one or two classroom sessions.

Several studies discussed the importance of using literary genres in the EFL classroom. The studies explore and illustrate the benefits of utilizing such genres in the language classroom such as authenticity, language enhancement, personal development, critical thinking and cultural awareness: Yeasmin, *et al.*, 2011; Pardede, 2011; Khatib & Rahimi, 2012; Thiyagarajan, 2014; Violetta-Irene, 2015). For example, Thiyagarajan (2014: 5-6) states:

*"Reading short stories motivates the students not only to develop their reading skill, but also their imaginative thinking skill." He added that reading skill enables learners "to speak the language in a more imaginative way and to discuss everyone's perspectives." According to him, "reading of short stories not only mirrors and illuminates human lives but also improves the learners' communicative competences".*

#### The following subsections demonstrate the value of using and selecting short stories:

**1. Authenticity:** One of the main advantages for using short stories is that they offer authentic material which appeals to the taste, interests, and liking of learners in the reading and discussion process (Cameron, 2001; Ghosn, 2002; Shrestha, 2008). They discuss and reflect human experiences (Collie and Slater, 1987: 15). One of the fundamental characteristics of the communicative approach is that learners should be exposed to authentic materials and extensive reading activities. Thus, "a literary text is authentic text, real language in context, to which we can respond directly" (Brumfit & Carter, 1987, p. 15). They add that "Literary texts provide

examples of language resources being used to the full, and the reader is placed in active interactional role working with and making sense of this language.” In this regard, learners respond to texts intended for native speakers and they are exposed to actual language samples of real life experience, so they become familiar with many different linguistic approaches, communicative functions and meanings (Khatib, Ranjbar, Fathi, 2012). Short stories can be seen as the best opportunities where learners are exposed to authentic material that is genuine and not distorted. As Collie and Slater (1987: 6) explain:

*“Students have also to cope with language intended for native speakers and thus they gain additional familiarity with many different linguistic uses, forms and conventions of the written mode: with irony, exposition, argument, narration, and so on”*

Brumfit (1988: 184) asserts that “literature provides us with a convenient source of content for a course in a foreign language”. According to him, it could provide motivational and communicative material. Tasneen (2010:2) explains, “learners are exposed to real, authentic usage of language in literary texts; these texts show them a variety of styles, registers and language learning materials at several stages of difficulty.” Hwang (2005: 2) explains, “learners’ exposure to great amount of authentic materials “increases their sensitivity to and competence in the target language”. He added that popular materials such as short stories “have been found most appealing because of their realistic, ready-to-use language and relevance to learners’ mindsets and experiences”. Learners’ exposure to authentic material will prompt the process of natural language acquisition (Hwang, 2005; Sell, 2005).

**2. Language Enhancement:** Literary texts contribute to language skills enhancement as they are ideal tools for intensive and extensive reading approaches. Collie and Slater (1987) mention certain benefits that learners can gain when tackling literary texts. For example:

*“learners are exposed to “a rich context in which individual lexical or syntactical items are made more memorable. Moreover, learners can develop their “ability to make inferences from linguistic clues, and deduce meaning from context. Learners’ exposure to short stories will help them gain new vocabulary and encourage them to guess their meaning”*

Povey (1967: 41) suggests that “literature will increase all language skills because literature will extend linguistic knowledge by giving evidence of extensive and subtle vocabulary usage, and complex and exact syntax.” McKay (1982:530) clarifies, “literature presents language in discourse in which the parameters of the setting and the role relationships are defined.” She explains that since language is best understood within a social context, literature is the ideal environment for developing awareness for language use. Slatterly and Willis (2001: 98) suggest:

*“The activities that teacher develop should help learners*

*to acquire language unconsciously. Consequently, they state that “stories are the most valuable resource” for helping learners in acquiring a language as they offer them “a world of supported meaning that they can relate to” and can be used to help learners “practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing”*

**3. Cultural enrichment:** Short stories enhance and enlighten learners’ knowledge of the native culture of the learned stories. In order to get better understanding of this aspect, the literary text will not be a translation of a literary work into English. This genre provides the opportunity for learners to explore the various cultural aspects and to see the similarities as well as the differences between their culture and the cultures exposed through their reading. King (2001) believes that short stories are very important as they enhance certain values and beliefs.

**4. Personal growth and reflection:** Short stories play a vital role in the development and the growth of the personal experience of learners and their reflection on life through literature and through reading, analyzing, and appreciating. Carter and Long, (1991 stated that literary genres encourage intellectual development and personal growth simultaneously, Tasneen, (2010: 2) testified, “reading literature is more likely to provide the students with opportunity for reflection and personal growth.” Furthermore, Violetta-Irene (2015: 3). Notes, “reading literature effectively will enhance the growth of learners in addition to helping them in establishing stronger relationships with their surroundings”. It is worth mentioning that personal growth of learners depends to a certain extent on the quality of the literary texts and the experience and depth of understanding from the side of the instructor. As Violetta-Irene (2015: 3) mentioned in her article, “encouraging individual growth necessitates that “the teacher has to select texts to which students can respond and to which they can use their ideas and imagination creatively.”

### **The Selection of the Short Story**

When selecting a short story, certain criteria should be taken into consideration. Instructors should avoid texts that are linguistically or culturally extremely difficult or offensive to the learners. Murdoch (2002: 9) explains, “short stories can, if selected and exploited appropriately, provide quality text content which will greatly enhance English language teaching courses for learners at intermediate levels of proficiency”. In order for the selected texts to achieve the desired benefits McKay (1982: 532) suggests, selecting texts from literature written for young adults. According to her, such literature has the following benefits:

- a. The theme of such literature deals with the problem of personal growth and development.
- b. Most literature for young adults tends to be relatively short, and the characters usually limited to a small cast of characters with a young adult as the central character.
- c. Most importantly, from an ESL perspective, many of the books tend to be stylistically less complex.”

Similarly, Thiyagarajan (2014: 8) advises, “ESL instructors to “select authentic materials on the basis of learners’ needs and

expectations, proficiency of the learners, interests, age and gender and different levels of the learners.” Further, cultural sensitivity should be considered when choosing a short story. In summary, this section provided literature review related to the advantages of using short stories and the criteria of selecting them. The following section will discuss the methodology of the study.

There is no doubt that the study and teaching of literature enhance the four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking). Reading literature from different periods adds to the understanding to human experiences and values. Teaching and reading different literary genres can contribute in enhancing students' creative writing. In this regard literature is considered to be the core of language learning. Here stems the need for further investigation for the role of English literature in enhancing creative writing short stories and dramatic scenes. Morley, David (2007) points out that reading works of literature, such as novels and poems, is the reason behind the wish of many individuals to become a writer. McKay (1980) argues that literature will increase all language skills, for literature enhances linguistic knowledge by giving evidence of widespread and rich vocabulary usage and complex and exact syntax. Little wood (1986) who observes that notwithstanding the fact that literary texts were predominantly valuable for developing language skills, it could further be exploited for the purposes of explaining grammar and indicating various types of language usage.

Likewise, Collie and Slater (1987) are in favor of the inclusion of literature in classroom language teaching.

They claim that literature provides valuable authentic material and develops the students' personal participation and contributes to the enrichment of culture and language. O'Sullivan, (1991) believes that since literature has power to develop the students' creativity and imagination, it is only natural to include it in language teaching. Principally, the aim of teaching literature is to increase the students' abilities and confidence through the study of literary texts.

Likewise, Lazar (1993) points out that literature should be seen as valuable resource of motivating material that would provide access to cultural background. Further, Lazar believes that literature enhances language acquisition, expands the students' language awareness and abilities of interpretation. She thinks that the use of literary texts in language teaching, provide the students with the cultural knowledge about the target language and its use in context. It also helps good interpretation. She believes that teaching literature can help to stimulate the imagination of learners, develop their critical abilities and increase their emotional awareness.

Smith, Hazel (2006) <sup>[4]</sup> asserts that creative writing used to be treated like a poor relation to literary studies within higher education. Literary texts were the prime object of attention, and students were given no opportunity to write such texts themselves. Even for the benefit of literary study this was unfortunate, because it is possible to learn a great deal about literary texts by creating them. To understand the activity of writing is to appreciate more the writers' work, the choices they make and their use of language. Writing is often a means of becoming a more informed and critical reader.

Stern (2001) <sup>[6]</sup> has also supported the view that literature can

be a rich and inspiring source for writing; both as a model and as a subject matter. Literature as a model can be found in the students' writings which will closely resemble the original works or great literary writers' or imitate the content, theme, organization or style.

Literature as a subject matter can be displayed by the students in their demonstration of original thinking, interpretation or analysis all of which may have evolved from or have been inspired by the literary works they have read. Stern believes that the learners' writing is better improved when they are exposed to literary texts.

Oster (1989) asserts that literature exposes the learners to coherent and expert writing which fact helps in better writing. Reading literary texts by different authors is believed to introduce the learners to different writing styles; and this will, in turn, insight learners and encourage them to develop their own writing styles.

To stress the importance of creative writing to the students' achievements, Tompkins (1982) <sup>[7]</sup> points out that there are seven reasons for requiring the students to write stories and poetry: To foster artistic expressions, to explore the functions and value of writing, to stimulate imagination, to clarify thinking, to search for identity and to learn to read and write.

Creative writing enhances the general writing skills among students. Richards, (1990) points out that writing is a requirement at every level of the students' academic pursuit and is not entirely limited to language and literature. This serves the objective of writing programs, which is to enable the students to produce different kinds of writings.

Creative writing develops critical reading skills. In support of this, Kramsch (1993) has observed that creative writing leads to more creative reading. By being engaged with what they are writing the learners are expected to reach the level of intuitive understanding of how the texts function, which fact makes similar texts easier to read.

Bastrukmen and Lewis (2002) assert that the notion of success in learning English creative writing is associated with self-expressions, the flow of ideas, outsider expectations, growing confidence and enjoyment of academic writing. They believe that good writing involves the ability to express ideas clearly and confidently to readers.

Also, they stress that creative writing enables the students to express themselves more efficiently and with great confidence.

## **Materials and Methods**

The population of this study is drawn exclusively from Gezira University Faculty of Education Al Hasahiesa Department of English Language- first year Students of English language, the academic year 2016-2017.

The researcher chooses thirty five (53 first year students as the sample.

## **The students' pre and post-test**

The material of this research are originally written as answers to writing test designed by the researcher, to test subject's ability to express their ideas in two different sessions, the first year students will be provided to with a writing topic and will be given one hour to finish the topic.

**Validity and Reliability of the instrument**

For checking the test's reliability and validity, the researcher

showed it to the supervisor of the current study and some other experts in the field

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics of the pretest and posttest

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre	51.6667	53	19.44822	4.24395
	Post	63.9048	53	17.02030	3.71413

**Table 2:** Shows mean and standard deviation of the difference of the scores the students got in two tests of study.

Paired Samples Correlations				
		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Pre & Post	53	.891	.000

**Table 3:** Paired sample result

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre – Post	-1.22381E1	8.82556	1.92589	-16.25544-	-8.22075-	-6.354-	52	.000

The rise of the study group in terms of pre-test and post-test results was found significant compared in the pre and pre/posttest (P=0.010). With this result, it can be short stories had a significant positive effect on the enhancing first years students productive skills.

**Table 4:** Total Results of the two Parts of the Test

Section	Pre test				Posttest			
	Pass	%	Fail	%	Pass	%	Fail	%
Students	12	22.4%	41	77.6%	27	50.2%	26	49.8%
Total	53	100%	53	100%	53	100%	0	100%

The table (4.19) shows that the result of the two parts of the test pre and posttest, in the pretest(41) students are fail on the other hand on the posttest just (26) students are fail this means that the students on the posttest are success that the pretest. In the pretest (20) students gets (zero) mark no one gets (zero) in the post test. More than (15) students get more that 55 marks in the post test. This result means.

**Findings**

- The selection of appropriate text from short stories for teaching writing is essentials.
- Short stories are rich through content for teachers.
- Short stories can be used as master key for apply language (grammar diction.....etc).

**Recommendations**

The study recommend the following:

1. EFL teachers must pay more attention for teaching writing skill due to its crucial role in the process of teaching EFL.
2. Sudanese EFL syllabi need to be revised adapting order to achieve the balance in using the four basic skills.
3. Literature must be used in EFL classes in a proper way and employed so as to achieve the intended results.
4. Many teachers need to understand the importance of literary text as a tool to reinforce productive skill not only for the entertainment.

5. Teacher can use short stories continuously to stimulate students and motivate them to write and speak more.

**Conclusion**

This study is an investigation for the role of short stories in enhancing first year student's writing skills. The study has found out that students' writing improved significantly after the experiment if it is compared with students' writing before the experiment.

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