

The Advantages of Teaching Short Stories in ESL classrooms: A Critical Evaluation

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Abstract: Many experts have emphasized that short story has an important role in learning English as a second language (ESL). The use of short stories in teaching ESL classes has frequently been studied. Many researchers and educators have tried to identify more effective approaches to assist students become more efficient readers. They believe in the usefulness of including literary works into language classes. Literature, in general, and short stories, in specific, have countless advantages for ESL learners when they are taught properly by the ESL teachers. In this review, seventeen studies have meticulously been chosen. They show and discuss the ways literary works and short stories can be utilized in ESL classrooms. Distilling the major findings of the articles, the review concludes that short stories had various advantageous if properly selected and taught.

Keywords: Short Stories, ESL, Reading Comprehension Skill, English Language Teaching

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is one of the most important language skills. It is described as the ability of a language learner to understand a written text in order to find the primary idea and specific facts. The ability to infer ideas from a text is important for students who learn English as a Second Language (henceforth ESL). Anderson (2003) views reading skill as the most important instrument for academic settings. That is because reading is more than just a single skill. It is a collection of skills and processes through which readers interact with written words and texts for information and enjoyment. Educators can use reading to teach writing, speaking, vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and other parts of the language. Apart from that, reading helps students understand the world, expand their interests, and solve their personal difficulties. What reading strategies we can use to make ESL students explore the world, expand their thinking horizons, and finding their personal questions? The answer is simple: through reading literature. The notion of using literature in teaching ESL classes is not new. It dates back to nineteenth century where literature was one of the essential materials in Grammar Translation Method (Khatib, 2011).

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Students were required to translate literary texts from second language to their native language. However, with the advent of Direct Method and the Audiolingual Method, literature was no longer used in teaching the second language. In the seventies of the previous century, several other approaches such as the Community Language Learning, the Silent Way, Total Physical Response, and the Natural Approach were used and none of them utilized literature (Erkaya, 2005). In the eighties and nineties of the previous century, literature found its way back to teaching in ESL classes. However, not in the way that was used with the Grammar Translation method. A whole new approach was used with teaching reading through literature this time. Teachers and educators used literature to reinforce the skills and complement language teaching.

Among literary genres, short stories seem to be the most suitable choice due to its potential to help students enhance the four skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing—more effectively because of the motivational benefit embedded in the stories (Pardede, 2011). Many ESL experts have recognized that short story, as a short genre in literature, is significant in improving reading comprehension skill. They believe in the usefulness of including literature into language classes. This use of short stories has been frequently studied and recommended, especially in locations where English is taught and learnt as a second language. This is due to the fact that studying and mastering another language is challenging for ESL students for several reasons. The most important reason is the lack of the second language exposure. Educators believe that short story is one of the greatest strategies that teachers can use in ESL classrooms to fill the gap that students face due to the lack of second language exposure.

Short stories are excellent sources of information and for improving students with many advantages. With short story, the readers attempt to derive conclusions from the brief story. Therefore, students become more aware of hidden and suggested meaning. Unlike reading non-literary material where students learn to read the lines and decipher the meaning, in reading short stories they learn to read between the lines. The findings of this review serve as a guide by teachers as they will identify and evaluate the advantages of teaching short stories.

1.1 The Aim of the Study

In this paper, various advantages have been highlighted for the use of short stories in the ESL classes. To attain the goal of this research paper, this review aims to answer the following question:

- What are the advantages of using short stories in teaching ESL classrooms?

2. Methodology

A literature search has been performed on different databases. Seventeen relevant studies were selected on this topic. They were critically evaluated and the results were summarized narratively.

2.1 Advantages of Teaching Short-Stories

Abu Zahra and Farrah (2014) state that the use of short stories in the ESL classroom exposes students to distinctive opportunities for educational, intellectual, cultural, and linguistic development. Ceylan (2016) highlights the advantages of literature, in general, and short stories, in specific, in four points: First,

students experience an authentic model of language. Second, it helps ESL students understand another culture. Third, it can reinforce the language skills in teaching. Lastly, it helps the student to elicit emotional responses. Erkaya (2005) looks at the benefits of short stories from a different angle. She believes that short story has motivational, literary, cultural and higher-order thinking benefits. Khatib (2011), on another hand, believes that using short story has advantages in creating the students' interpretations and analysis by involving their views, experiences and feelings. Barzani (2020), surveying 10 students and 10 teachers in a tertiary education, highlights that short story supports the process of teaching and enhances reading comprehension of the ESL learners. The advantages of teaching short stories in ESL classrooms are countless. However, this review, by taking into consideration a broad range of previous empirical studies conducted in the field, highlights that short story increases interest in reading, improves reading comprehension skills, provides cultural knowledge, teaches moral values, provides effective tools to teach children, and stimulates prior knowledge.

2.2 Short Story Increases Interest in Reading

Erkaya (2005) affirms that short story is motivationally effective if students genuinely engage with it and appreciate its aesthetic qualities. She elaborates that "since short stories usually have a beginning, middle and an end, they encourage students at all levels of language proficiency to continue reading them until the end to find out how the conflict is resolved" (p. 2). Vandrick (1997) claims that short stories, as a part of literature, motivate students "to explore their feelings through experiencing those of others" (p. 98).

Undoubtedly, one of the most influential factors in learning a second language is motivation. Notably, the structure and content of literary texts help to trigger and install this important factor in students. Studies show that literary products have a positive effect on student success, attitude and behaviour.

Barzani et al. (2021) consider short story to be one of the most influential factors in teaching and learning a second language. They highlight that the structure and content of literary texts trigger and install motivation in ESL learners. In the research that they conducted on 40 students, they conclude that in order for the teachers to get more desirable outcomes and the ESL learners attain near-native competency, literary texts should be included in teaching ESL classes.

Puri et al. (2014) believe that reading ability is critical for ESL students to overcome challenges in all language skills. Puri and her fellow researchers conducted their research to find out how they could motivate or increase the interest of Indonesian students to read, because Indonesia's reading interest index hit 0,001, meaning only one person out of a thousand was interested in reading (Puri et al., 2014). They decided to use short stories because it was the most suitable choice to enhance student's four skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In their research, Puri et al. conclude that short story improves the students reading comprehension achievement and it improves student's interest in reading. Along with that, the writers make some recommendations. They recommend that the English teachers should provide colorful content and pictures. Also, during the teaching and learning process, teachers should encourage students to be more participatory, conversational, and engaged in the classroom.

2.3 Short Story Improves Reading Comprehension Skills

Krashen (1985) argues that reading is an excellent source of comprehensible input that enhances second language acquisition. Jeni (2020) argues that reading short stories develop students reading comprehension because it is suitable for them. She believes that there is a correlation between reading comprehension, reading habits, and reading interest. That is why she emphasizes that the teacher must help students develop their reading comprehension through the strategy.

Pourkalhor and Kohan (2013) address reading from a different perspective. They say that using short stories is another way to improve students' reading comprehension skills. Readers attempt to derive conclusions from the short story. Therefore, it teaches students to be aware of hidden and suggested meanings. While Students learn to read between the lines and interpret the meaning of non-literary material such newspaper, they learn to read between the lines when reading short stories. The curiosity to find out what happens at the end of the story, takes the students to a journey where they will come across many variables; from verb conjugation to sentence structure to knowledge of diverse vocabulary and, eventually, to improve their reading comprehension.

Reading in a second language is difficult, and students must use a variety of abilities to comprehend the material. The Pourkalhor and Kohan quote both Kucer (2001) and Rosenblatt (1978) as saying “comprehension occurs in the transaction between the reader and the text” (p. 53). Furthermore, reading is a receptive talent in which the reader receives a message from the writer. The purpose of reading is to find or reconstruct the writer's meaning. Also, the reader's job in reading comprehension is to extract information from a book and blend it with knowledge he already knows (Pourkalhor & Kohan, 2013).

Reading in a second language is challenging, and students must use a variety of abilities to understand the material. Pourkalhor and Kohan (2013) refer to several types of comprehension style, depending on the reader's goals for reading. The terms “often referred to in the Longman Dictionary of Language Education” are as follows:

- a) Informational comprehension: Using the reader's experience and intuition, as well as inference, to locate information that is not explicitly mentioned in the passage.
- b) Literal comprehension: reading for the purpose of understanding, remembering, or retrieving explicit information contained in the passage.
- c) Critical or evaluative understanding: reading for the purpose of comparing the information in a piece with the reader's knowledge and beliefs.
- d) Appreciative Comprehension: Reading for the purpose of eliciting an emotional or other valuable response from the text (Pourkalhor & Kohan, 2013, p. 53).

In their research, they concluded that reading comprehension is improving through a short story.

Abdalrahman (2022) familiarizes us with another advantage of short story. He believes that short story is a vital tool for vocabulary instruction because they are a good source of inspiration and aspiration. He adds, “Without knowing, understanding, and learning the accurate use of the words, effective communication will not take place (P. 8). It is the lexical expansion of ESL students ends up improving the improving the reading comprehension skill.

2.4 Short Story Provides Cultural Knowledge

Reading short stories does not only teach a student the language but also educate on cultural differences. They can tell a lot about culture of other people and countries. From belief systems to lifestyles, and to the ways of living. Pardede (2011) wants to familiarize ESL teachers with the benefits of employing short stories in EFL classes. Pardede believes that it is critical for a teacher to select stories that would be interesting to learners, stories that the students enjoy reading and teaching, and stories that have been adapted into films for visual interpretation. Pardede quotes McKay (2001) and Rivers (1968) as saying “students are more likely to read and like the material if the topic is relevant to their lives and interests” (p. 19).

According to Pardede, the advantage of employing literature in language teaching is that it provides cultural knowledge about the target language. Literary works help foreign language learners have a better understanding of the country and the people who speak the target language (Pardede (2011) as cited Collie & Slater, 1991). Short stories help students analyze dialogue in a variety of social and cultural language learning contexts. As a result, students will be more aware of the richness and diversity of the language, as well as its characteristics. Reading literary works allows students to see the world through the eyes of others, observe human values in a different way of life, and discover that others live in societies very different from their own. Students will understand and gain a broad understanding of the social, economic, historical and cultural events that occur in a particular society (Pardede, 2011, p. 16).

Pardede (2011) concludes that the goal of teaching English as a foreign language is to help students communicate effectively in the target language. Teachers should give students a real-world example of how language is used. Because the short story introduces both literary and cultural elements, it is very useful in ESL programs. Short stories provide a purposeful context in which to teach several language topics and develop interpretive strategies for learners.

2.5 Short Story Teaches Moral Values

All short stories are designed to convey a message regarding a certain issue. They all, to a great extent, carry a moral, whether it is hidden, implied, or preachy, because every story wants to tell you something. Pathan (2012) addresses various social and cultural advantages of short stories. He argues that short stories can be the most effective means of teaching cultural and moral ideas. According to Pathan (2012), in culturally sensitive situations such as Libya, teaching short stories can be the most effective means of teaching cultural and moral ideas, as stories have proven to be the most effective means of communicating values, principles and common sense for centuries. Pathan quotes Kirschenbaum (1995) as saying “storytelling is one of the effective tools for inculcating morality, especially for the youth, as stories contain powerful images and symbols and operate on both conscious and unconscious levels, conveying intellectual and emotional meaning” (P. 31). He expands on this argument for the utility of short stories, emphasizing that they can be used in a variety of settings, such as the modern, culturally barren, world of today, where cultural values are degrading every day and many evils and tribulations are infecting our young generation with unthinkable bad habits, immoral deeds, immodest behavior and horrific crimes in their early tender age, stories can be the best method of inculcating healing cultural and moral values. Jeni (2020) reiterates Pathan’s point that short story can be used as a teaching tool and approach, especially to

help students improve their reading comprehension. This is because short stories motivate learners by teaching moral lessons and engage them in learning.

2.6 Short Story is an Effective Learning Tool to Teach Children

Short story can be key resource for providing a natural and engaging context for children in learning the second language. When educators read to children, they do so much more than just teaching them English language. They encourage their imagination, have them explore other cultures and teach them about the world.

In search of finding a good answer to “How to encourage children to read English texts and how the teacher chooses reading materials that motivate students to read?”, Handayani (2013) found out that reading short stories to children can be an effective learning tool because it is suitable for students of all levels; from beginners to advanced learners. Learners are expected to have an easier time following the story. Moreover, it will occupy the children's interest in reading. Also, it allows students to expand their vocabulary; it teaches students to think critically, it improves students' motivation, and it allows students to practice their language skills. Last but not least, short stories can improve children's reading comprehension skill (Handayani, 2013). On the same note, Pardede (2011) believes that short stories provide children real-life examples of grammar and vocabulary, and this gives learners an opportunity to learn about the second language.

2.7 Short Story Can Stimulate Prior Knowledge

The use of a short story in English teaching should be aimed at encouraging the students to use what they have previously learnt. Sagita, Mertosono, and Arid (2019) talk about the importance of short stories in stimulating the prior knowledge. They argue that reading comprehension skill is a method of comprehending a book that incorporates the readers' capacity to connect their prior knowledge and the aim of their reading to the text's meanings. Further, they talk about the purpose of using the short story in the English class is to motivate learners to apply what they have learned so far. This puts the learner at the center of the learning process.

Moreover, learners can read the whole story when they read a short story. They have a brief golden opportunity to understand the sequence and meaning of the context, as well as the message of the book. Students increase their comprehension when they have a relationship between the stated idea, and conclusion, as well as emotional reaction, throughout reading a paragraph. Sagita et al. (2019) concluded that short story encourages students to connect to their prior knowledge. They get familiar with a variety of words and subjects. Learners can be assured of their progress in English because of this. In other words, reading a short story to students is one of the most successful strategies for teaching them to read and remember what they already have.

Ceylan (2016) adds another point about the relations between short story and stimulating prior knowledge. She believes is that short story encourages students to be more creative by stimulating students' imaginations, improving their critical thinking skills and emotional sensitivity.

3. Conclusion

The goal of teaching English as a second language is to help students communicate effectively in the target language. Teachers should give students a real-world example of how language is used. Because the short story introduces both literary and cultural elements, it is very useful in ESL programs in reaching this goal. Short stories provide a purposeful context in which to teach several language topics and develop interpretive strategies for learners. Teaching literary works in language teaching classrooms has many valuable advantages to the ESL learners. The advantages could be related to language, motivation, culture, and human values. Teaching short stories can be encouraging, enjoyable and interesting to ESL learners. Incorporating literary works, and short stories specifically, help ESL learners be more creative and open to other culture. Thus, teaching short stories enhances the development of imagination, creativity and self-awareness among ESL students.

Many researchers concluded that the use of the short story in the classroom for teaching English has long been advised by experts in the field to improve reading comprehension skills, as stories provide language learners with many linguistic, personal, social, cultural, emotional, and cognitive benefits. The stories are seen as being rich in vocabulary, and they can help ESL learners overcome their negative attitudes about reading comprehension. The results of many of the articles discussed in this review showed that reading comprehension was improved through the use of short stories in the reading course.

Other researchers established that the use of short stories can improve children's reading comprehension skill. Despite having a disadvantage in terms of text level, which are difficult for beginner readers as they designed for children in their mother tongue, short stories allow children to expand their vocabulary, they teach them to think critically, they improve their motivation, and they allow students to practice their language skills.

Among other advantages, ESL students can learn about people's customs, traditions, and culture. It is believed that the world of short stories mirrors and reflects human lives. For example, understanding a short story depends not only on the language skills of the reader, but also on his general knowledge of the world and the degree to which that knowledge is shared during the process.

Some researchers believed that short stories can be used as a positive stimulation to motivate students, and they are ideal literary means for classroom usage. The motivational benefit is embedded in the stories. Teaching short stories is one of the most successful strategies for teaching ESL students to read. Short stories encourage students to enhance their reading ability of English text by using the short story technique. They get them familiarized with a variety of words and subjects.

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