

## Enhancing Reading Skills through Storybook Scaffolding: Unlocking the Linguistic Potential of Short Stories

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### Abstract

This research study aims to investigate whether reading short stories can have an impact on developing the student's reading skills or make them more inclined to developing their English reading proficiency. The research paper argues that short stories should be used in the English language classroom to help students develop their English reading skills and incorporate these strategies into English lessons. This study aimed at investigating the views and practices of teachers as regards to the possibility of integrating short stories in the English language syllabus for the purpose of enhancing students' grammatical competence. A combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods was used in the study. A representative sample of the questionnaire was used to get a comprehensive evaluation on effectiveness of the short stories technique within the English classroom context; thus, it was discovered that they help in learning new words as well as getting mental images such as forming sentences in English.

**Keywords:** Short stories, reading skills, English language teaching, teacher perceptions.

### Introduction

There is little understanding as to how effective would be the use of short stories in enhancing the reading skills of students. It is necessary that we should look into how varying types of students are affected by this technique and if in any way it assists them to solve particular problems while reading books. The main purpose of this study is therefore to see if using short stories actually improves comprehension in children while exploring key variables that might enhance its applicability range in education context but at the same time restrict its success. The use of stories to understand different languages provides a tool that facilitates better understandability. Investigate how storytelling techniques can improve reading comprehension expanding the vocabulary effortlessly by regular exposure to different words when adapting them for written narratives and short stories (Richard, 2016) One of the main purposes of formal learning is ensuring that individuals can read fluently and accurately. The current study fills in gaps by investigating if the use of short stories can be impactful in improving student reading levels. Short stories are essential in captivating learners' interests because they are brief and make students active participants in the learning process. Despite very many researches have focused on the use of short stories in language teaching, further explores are needed to look at the views and teaching methods of English teachers concerning implementing this methodology. The research is important for enriching educational practices and offering useful information on how to increase children's reading abilities,

customize instructional methods for various types of learners, as well as develop courses that are founded in facts about what works best within the context of learning processes so that it becomes more interesting. Here is the main goal of this study which will be achieved through the following research questions:

- 1.How helpful are short stories in improving the reading ability of students as guided by English teachers?
- 2.How ready and positive are English teachers in using short stories to teach?
- 3.How can English teachers integrate short stories into their language teaching and what do they view as the benefits and challenges associated with this method?

### **Literature Review**

Short stories are an excellent choice for language learners who wish to engage in discussions and develop their proficiency. In today's global landscape, where English has become the predominant language of academia, business, and media, being fluent in English is a crucial skill. Short stories, alongside other forms of literature such as textbooks, magazines, and newspapers, provide a valuable avenue for knowledge acquisition and language development. As Ghasemi (2011) stated, short stories have proven to be exceptional tools for language development among students. Literature authors have emphasized the significant role of short stories as essential elements of expertise in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. This notion is further supported by Setyani (2009), who found that short stories are interesting materials that help learners stimulate their curiosity towards the target culture and language. Nurhana's (2014) research revealed that short stories demonstrate substantial progress in terms of grammatical word classes, their meanings, and task achievement. Engaging with short stories enables learners to easily obtain self-confidence and become self-directed in their learning, actively participating in the reading process. Additionally, Frimasary (2015) found that short stories remarkably elevate students' reading comprehension and spark their enthusiasm to read English texts more frequently. Additionally, according to Kahar (2016)'s research, the results suggest that short stories contribute positively towards students' overall performance in different language aspects especially for learners who are in their initial year at college or high school learners. Similarly, Asing (2019) supports how short stories broaden the thoughts of learners thereby creating high levels of argument and collaboration during discussions based on different topics or issues. In and out of a classroom, short stories are deemed as a strong teaching material, particularly for improving language through reading comprehension. Teferra (2022) posits that short stories have a major impact on student comprehension. Learning how to read using short stories would therefore make it easier for them to learn how to read effectively while at the same time helping develop proper studying skills among students. Topping (2015) examined that using short stories in EFL/ESL classrooms are compatible comprehensively. Short stories, according to the research, can be used to enhance the vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, and general language proficiency of students effectively. Topping argues that because of their brevity, learners can easily relate to entire stories in short stories, rather than those longer than that. In a study titled "The Effect Of Short Stories On Iranian EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension And Motivation," conducted by Khatib and Nasrollahi (2012), it is reported that Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension can be improved and motivated to read in English through the use of short stories. The engaging and relatable nature of short stories, which capture students' interest and attention, is what the researchers attribute this to. In a study by Pardede (2011) he explored the potential of short stories in developing students' critical thinking skills. The conclusion reached was that short stories can be used as good tools for encouraging critical analysis because they usually come in many different layers; this makes them difficult for readers' interpretation but essential for deeper engagement and understanding purposes. Hwang and Lee (2017) concentrated on the employment of stories which were brief during instruction English as a second dialect for young learners. They indicated that using such stories would enable kids to learn languages, be conscious about other cultures as well as having high emotional quotients (Hwang and Lee 2017). This research underscores how crucial it is for teachers or parents alike when choosing appropriate age related storybooks according to what children like reading most and their capability levels. According to a study by Erkaya (2005), using short stories can help students enhance their writing skills. She found out that they may enable learners portray ideas creatively and efficiently due to provision of structured models together with varied styles used. In addition, it was found by Lazar (1993) that short stories can serve as materials for teaching foreign languages very efficiently because they help learners practice such skills as speaking, reading, listening or writing. The study makes an important point here – this is yet another way how versatile these stories may be. Due to these characteristics they enable educators to develop diverse activities and exercises that would consider peculiarities of each learning style or objective. According to Collie and Slater (1987), short stories are seen as being very good for learning a second language because

they are not very long stories, thus they offer many chances for reading a lot of text at a time. They go further by saying that through short narratives that contain manageable and stimulating content, students can be exposed to different language forms along with vocabulary and cultural points. Duff and Maley (1990) investigating how short stories could help increase intercultural compassion and understanding among learners of other languages. On their study, it is found that short stories can offer a glimpse of various cultural backgrounds hence enhancing empathy, perspective change and making someone appreciate diverse ways of life. Sage (1987) insisted on the fact that short stories help to capture the emotional and imaginative side of language learners' thereby boosting their interest in learning. It is argued in this study that due to emotional resonance and narrative aspects short stories can make language learning more effective by fully engaging students, thus facilitating retention as well as practical application of the target language. Povey (1967) highlighted the linguistic complexity and literary sophistication of short stories, which can challenge and stimulate advanced language learners. The researcher suggested that the close reading and analysis of short stories can help learners develop a more deep understanding of language structures, stylistic devices, and literary techniques. Brumfit and Carter (1986) thoroughly looked into the value of involving short stories in developing of critical thinking and analytical skills in language learners. According to the research, learners may be encouraged to engage in critical thinking processes requiring inferencing, evaluation, problem-solving through interpreting and discussing short stories.

### **Methodology**

#### **Method**

In the current study, researchers employed a mixed method design involving both qualitative and quantitative approaches, with participant-centered analyses of data collected on how effective short stories were in improving reading skills.

#### **Study Population**

To collect data, fifty (50) English teachers were participated, thirty-six (36) male teachers and fourteen (14) females. Their age ranged from 25-70 years old while they all were Kurdish teachers who specialized in teaching English.

#### **Research Tool**

The researchers endeavored to use two distinct tools for data collection to ensure trustworthy data. They administered questionnaire among teachers based on their years practicing as the first phase. During the second phase, they did school observations in order to assess how effective teaching short stories would be in promoting students' reading abilities.

#### **Procedure of Data Collection**

The purpose of the study was clearly communicated to the teachers at the beginning. As to whether they would participate or not, they had full freedom. When in doubt, certain teachers asked for further explanations and assistance needed so as to facilitate communication through language translation between languages via linguistic abilities they possessed. In order to gain a better grasp of it and have more time to fill the questionnaires, some went home with them. An inclusive pedagogical perspective provided by this heterogeneous and evolving participation will enable us investigate educators' perceptions and insights on teachers use short stories in class to improve learners' reading ability.

#### **Limitation of the Study**

The present study is limited in scope, focusing specifically on English language teachers at high schools in Akre District subordinated to Duhok governorate. Their first language was Kurdish as their native language and has been teaching English as a second language for a long period of time.

#### **Results and Data Analysis**

The table shows the demographic information on the teachers who participated voluntarily in this study. Their age and their gender highlighted clearly for better manifestation and clarification.

<b>Gender</b>	Male ( 36)	Female (14)
<b>Teaching Year</b>	5-20	1-12
<b>Language</b>	Kurdish	Kurdish

The above table shows that thirty six teachers were males and fourteen were females that their teaching period ranged stated from one year to twenty years of teaching experience from different schools of Akre district. All participants were Kurdish native speakers that their first language was Kurdish. Male teachers served more years

of teaching than females. The following table contains nine statements which show the percentage of data collected from the teachers' perceptive toward integrating short stories in their classes for the purpose of promoting students' reading skills level.

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am familiar with incorporating short stories as a teaching technique to enhance Students reading skills	19 %38	28 %56	0 %0	3 %6	0 %0
Short stories significantly contribute to student's vocabulary development within the context of reading	30 %60	19 %38	0 %0	1 %2	0 %0
It's important for students to enjoy the short stories they read to get better at reading	28 %56	19 %38	0 %0	3 %6	0 %0
Short stories might work differently for students in different grades or reading levels	19 %38	22 %44	0 %0	8 %18	0 %0
I have seen students improve their reading skills when we use short stories in class	25 %50	19 %38	0 %0	6 %12	0 %0
I would suggest to other teachers that using short stories can really help students get better at reading	20 %40	25 %50	0 %0	5 %10	0 %0
In your Point of view, should short stories be a standard component of language teaching methodologies for improved student outcomes?	14 %28	24 %48	0 %0	12 %24	0 %0
Do you agree that introducing the short story technique in our classrooms respects and reflects the diversity of Kurdish Culture?	4 %8	28 %56	18 %36	0 %0	0 %0
Using short stories provides a practical and relatable way for students to apply language skills beyond the classroom.	22 %44	23 %46	0 %0	5 %10	0 %0

From the first statement of the questionnaire, it can be concluded that there is a significant agreement among English teachers on the effectiveness of inclusion of short stories in improving students' reading skills in their classroom activities. The teachers acknowledged, in general, the benefits of the integration of short stories into their teaching practices for improving students' reading abilities. Teachers in the second statement highly acknowledged that short stories have a great impact on students' development of vocabularies. There is a general feeling among educators that the use of short stories significantly enhances students' build-up of words as they read. Most teachers strongly agree that short stories help expand students' vocabularies. This statement emphasizes the importance of incorporating short stories into school syllabus so as to develop vocabularies among students. The use of short stories in educational contexts is identified as a great approach that can help to promote vocabulary growth and enhance language proficiency among students. In the context of a study sample conducted among 50 teachers, the main focus was on the significance of students enjoying short stories

they read as a way of improving their reading levels. The majority of teachers in third statement strongly agree on the importance of their students enjoying the short stories they read in order to improve their reading skills. Furthermore, if we take the teacher perspective into account we see that it highly supports the point of including reading stories for enjoyment among short stories which can in turn boost students' performance in reading. In the fourth statement, teachers vehemently agree that teachers tend to have different views about whether short stories work as well in various educational environments. Many of the participants noted that the short story operates unlike any other dependent on the student level and literacy level. This awareness demonstrated that using short stories as learning tools in various educational settings is no mean task. In fifth situation, the researchers addressed whether English teachers observed improvements in students' reading skills when short stories were used in the classroom. It has been obtained that most teachers agree that using short stories to help students improve in reading is a good idea under most circumstances. While, a minor number of teachers consisted of six teachers did not see any improvement. Reading statement number six, most teachers responded that there is wide range of opinion from teachers about incorporating short stories into their reading material as a way through which they can enhance students' reading skills. Teachers had a diverse opinion on how to integrate short stories in their daily teaching English activities. By and large, they agreed that it has its own effectiveness, but five teachers directly disagreed with this idea and they believe that it will not have any kind of impact. Concerning being a standard option for improving students' reading skills through short stories, most of the participants highlighted that it would be well fitted to if we integrate short stories to class activities, while twelve disagreed with this notion. Nothing much was left to suggest henceforth that almost all English teachers believe in using short stories in any language teaching to better students' achievements in one way or another. The number would be close to three quarters who either agree or strongly concur with this strategy. Nevertheless, there are those who don't hold the same opinion which shows diversity in ideas among teachers on whether it is good or bad including other things to have short stories in English lessons. In regard to cultural diversity in eighth statement, the researchers posed a question whether reading short stories increase cultural knowledge toward foreign cultures. Teachers found an ambivalent reaction between English teachers on the degree to which the short story technique mirrors the Kurdish culture diversity and other cultures, with a fair number in agreement or strongly in agreement but another large percentage in uncertainty. In last statement of the questionnaire, whether using short stories offers a practical and relatable avenue for students to apply language skills beyond the classroom. Teachers showed a clear picture of the efficacy of short stories as a means for students to apply language skills beyond the confines of traditional classroom instruction, refer to what English teachers say. According to a study among nearly all the English teachers, most of them believe that using short stories in this way is right.

### **Discussion**

The current research study investigated using short stories in English language classrooms as a way of improving students' reading skills. This investigation aimed at determining how ready teachers of English were to adopt short stories as part of their teaching strategies and determining what they feel about the effectiveness of this method. The study aimed to investigate the level of preparedness and self-assurance of English educators as possible sounds of using short stories to boost reading literacy and Language acquisition through a qualitative analysis and survey. It widens teachers' perceptions and practices as a way of finding out whether incorporating short stories in the English language syllabus would improve student ability. The researchers suggest that short stories are a good way for students to read and understand better by using less words and using different words from English. They also help students learn more new words while making sure that they like reading. Findings from this research may help teachers improve how they teach languages in schools hence making learning more interesting. The study has been divided into five chapters, and we will begin with the introduction which gives us some background information on what it entails like for example problem statements, research goals etc. The second chapter provides an extensive review of literature on this topic highlighting various works investigating how we can make use of short stories when teaching languages. In the third chapter you will find out more about our methods as defined by such roles such as subjects involved as well as tools or instruments required for data collection and analysis purposes. In the fourth chapter, data analysis and discussion are thoroughly explored whereby the survey findings and qualitative appraisals are featured. It is envisaged that this section will offer insight about effectiveness of short stories for improving students' reading skills from the perspective of English teachers, also revealing how well they are equipped mentally suchlike how confident they feel about using such an approach. To finish this study is chapter five which makes suggestions on what more can be done

in terms of research. It seems like this study caters for students in language education who could perform better in reading while at the same time engaging more with English in depth. Knowing how competent in teaching a tutor is and how hopeful they are about using this approach will identify educational areas which require this knowhow. Consequently, educators will be able to use short tales as an interesting means of enhancing reading abilities hence creating good readers. Making teachers understand how ready and assured they are in applying this instructional method can reveal what they needs have regarding their professional growth and assistance. This means that teachers will therefore be able use short stories, among other things, to boost literacy levels among students making them good readers. This inquiry is significant as it could lead to a fruitful input on the English language teaching methodology and practice.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the results of the current study, this study might sum up with some conclusions which might be effective for language teachers and language learners to implement in their daily classroom activities. One of the main conclusions is that short stories are effective materials to improve students' reading skills while teachers release students free to be more autonomous. Integrating short stories could influence on students' linguistic capabilities in terms of sentence structure, grammatical formation and building vocabulary. Students can learn from stories to form well sentence structures, enriching their vocabulary level and familiarizing with punctuation marks while doing some writings It helps both teachers and students to familiarize different cultures and norms of foreign cultures. Short stories are helpful to know social, cultural, and even individual differences of other people. However, adopting short story materials could have some challenges. One of them is choosing the type and level of the short story. Then, providing s specific time for teaching short stories could also affect the context of teaching it. Although using short stories for class management is difficult; however, it is worth it. Managing classes tenderly with problems and capitalizing on positives, instructors create opportunities for students through better ways of learning thus enabling them to perform well academically throughout their entire lives.

### **Recommendation**

For better adopting short stories in teaching and learning process, the followings recommendations are listed below:

1. Providing educational training course for teachers to integrate extra teaching materials for classrooms.
2. There is a need for regular organization of capacity building programs such as storytelling skills based workshops, trainings and seminars to equip teachers with tools and strategies they require.
3. Cultural awareness is highly recommended for teachers while embedding short stories in their classrooms. Teachers should be aware of choosing the types of short stories and their backgrounds.
4. Educational administration should provide all facilities and allocate sufficient materials to schools while implementing storytelling in classrooms.
5. Educational administration should work on possessing those teachers who have a high level of language proficiency so as to fit well with embedding the storytelling in their classrooms.
6. It is important that the Ministry of Education should invest more on enhancing its infrastructure so as to be able to implement storytelling-based methods more effectively.

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