

THE ATTITUDE OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS TOWARDS EFFECTIVENESS OF USING SHORT STORIES IN EFL CLASSROOM OF MYANMAR

¹Mary, ²Akkarapon Nuemaihom, ³Kampeeraphab Intanoo

¹Ph.D. Scholar, English Language Teaching Program, Buriram, Rajabhat University, Thailand,
640427092006@bru.ac.th

²English Language Teaching Program, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Buriram Rajabhat
University, Thailand, akkarapon.nm@bru.ac.th

³English Language Teaching Program, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Buriram Rajabhat
University, Thailand, kampeeraphab.it@bru.ac.th

Abstract

Short stories could be positively utilized in order to improve English language acquirement. This is reflected by students' attitude toward applying short stories in the EFL classes. The objectives of this quantitative and qualitative research were 1) to evaluate if short stories enhance learners' language skills, develop their personal reflection and facilitate cultural tolerance, 2) to investigate practice of students and teachers towards effectiveness of using short stories in EFL classrooms of Myanmar, and 3) to identify the opinions of the EFL learners and teachers towards the use of short stories for developing language skills and communicative competence. The samples were composed of 143 English specialization students from second year to fourth year and 27 English teachers who are currently teaching short stories at selected universities in Myanmar. They were selected through a purposive sampling method. The instruments used to gather information were student questionnaire, selected students' interview survey and teacher's semi-structured interviews. The statistics employed to analyze the quantitative data were percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The result revealed that short stories help the students to develop the language skills more effectively. The gained vocabulary and expressions through reading and listening. According to teacher participants, short stories can contribute to students' reinforcing effectively and meaningfully their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. It is also found that it can assist students to be more creative and imaginative in their writing in a way to free the students from the routine procedures occurring in the classroom.

Keywords: Attitude, Effectiveness of Using Short Stories, EFL Classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

The use of short stories has been widely discussed and recommended, particularly, in places where English is taught and learned as a foreign language. Due to the lack of target language exposure, inappropriate methodology, boring teaching and learning material used inside the classroom for developing the language skills and negative perceptions of

teachers and / or learners towards any material or methodology, learning and mastering foreign language skills pose many problems and difficulties for EFL learners. Using short stories is one of the best methods in ELT because of various educational aspects (Lazar, 2015). This research investigates the perceptions of the Myanmar EFL learners towards the use of short stories in EFL classrooms. The research also

focuses on the current status of the use of short stories in the Myanmar EFL classroom and offers the researcher's perspective about the use of short stories in the EFL classroom for developing reading comprehension skill.

According to Abrams and Harpham (2014), short story is a narrative that can be read at one sitting from one-half hour to two hours, and that is limited to 'a certain unique or single effect,' to which every detail is subordinate. Since it is short, and aims at giving a 'single effect', there is usually one plot, and a few characters. Therefore, it is easy for the students to follow line of the story. Several researchers support the use of short stories as one of the most suitable literary genres in ELT by explaining its advantages. Short stories are practical as their length is long enough to cover entirely in one or two class hours.

Moreover, all levels of learners can use short stories as they appeal to different interests of learners. King (2001) also notes that stories may operate as vehicles, and a powerful and motivating source for helping students consolidate and practice language (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation), and to foster certain values and beliefs. In the English language classrooms, it is common to observe boredom, lack of interest, a negative attitude towards learning, an absence of stimulation to actively use the L2. Using stories may offer answer to such difficulties, as stories help a non-threatening learning incident, causing a stress-free atmosphere and letting for pleasure and more learning to take place.

1. Teaching English through Short Stories

Short stories are suitable for EFL classrooms. Incorporating short stories in EFL classrooms can provide numerous benefits for teaching; the language used in these stories is generally understandable for students and enables their employment in reading. Based on the studies carried out by Pourkalhor & Kohan (2013), Erkaya (2005), and Premawardhena (2005), some advantages of teaching English through short stories are as follows: 'They make the students' reading task easier; they help students to be more creative, they raise

cultural awareness, they reduce students' anxiety and assist them feel more comfortable, they succeed universal language and they involve fiction. In fact, these ideas guide teachers' work with significant accomplishments that provide prominently to students' learning.

In addition, Pardede (2010) uncovered in his research that short stories are attention-grabbing to use as material for individual pleasure and also benefit students attain better mastery in the enhancement of language proficiencies. Therefore, teachers can apply activities that involve student inspirations as a way to progress their language acquirement. Language is seen as a natural process through which they can distinguish the functions of words in the sentences by the time students are engrossed in a story. Sakthivel, Phil, & Kavidha (2010) observe that reading a piece of literature can understand the diverse use of words, phrases, phrasal verbs, multiple meanings, idioms, among others" (p. 230). These opinions proof how teachers can use short stories because they reassure collaborative language work which is both expressive and motivating for students.

2. Short Stories and Language Skills Development

Teachers can teach the four skills to all levels of language proficiency by using short stories. According to Murdoch (2002), short stories can provide quality text content which will greatly enhance ELT courses for learners at intermediate levels of proficiency if chosen and manipulated applicably. He also claims that short stories could be very valuable materials in ELT reinforcement by using them in learning activities such as, discussion, writing and acting out dialogues. Sepahvand (2014) mentioned that short stories may help students learn the four skills -listening, speaking, reading, and writing more effectively due to the motivational benefit embedded in the stories" (p. 1849). So, the teachers' responsibility was to urge students to speak, generating gaps for them to consider their private accepting and also use their creativity to reconstruct the incidents in the stories.

Hismanoglu (2005) also agreed concerning the advantages of teaching languages skills in an essential way for language use. It can be said that listening to and reading short stories help speaking because these accomplishments offer students with language patterns and occupy their oral production. Moreover, teachers can utilize literature as the main material in EFL classrooms. It assists them to adjust the energetic and is also an instrument for promoting students' reading stratagems.

This study was carried out in order to answer the following questions: How

short stories enhance learners' language skills, develop their personal reflection and facilitate cultural tolerance? What is the way that students and teachers practice towards effectiveness of using short stories in EFL classrooms of Myanmar? And what is their attitude towards the use of short stories for developing language skills and communicative competence? These questions can be answered via the following three research objectives: to evaluate how short stories enhance learners' language skills, develop their personal reflection and facilitate cultural tolerance, to investigate practice of students and teachers towards effectiveness of using short stories in EFL classrooms of Myanmar, and to identify the opinions of the EFL learners and teachers towards the use of short stories for developing language skills and communicative competence

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Participants

The participants in this study were 143 undergraduate students from different English departments at selected universities who have been studying in English specialization course, and 27 English teachers who are currently teaching short stories at selected universities in Myanmar. It should be also noted that these students had already passed some relevant English courses, including Reading Comprehension and Advanced Writing. The

main phase of the study was conducted in 2020-2021 academic year.

2. Data Collection

Data for this research were collected from undergraduate students who are doing their B.A. in English and English teachers at selected universities. The reason, behind selecting the students, was to avoid selecting only the beginners or advanced students. A purposive sampling technique was used which allowed the researchers to collect data from key informants. A mixed-method approach was adopted in this study. The instruments used to gather the students' information questionnaire, interview survey, and teacher's semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted with each participant face-to-face. A questionnaire with predominantly closed ended questions was used to collect quantitative data. To enhance the data collected from students' writings and diaries, it is noted that a questionnaire was developed compatible according to the commitment of the research. The questionnaire aimed to determine students' opinions on the degree to which the practice of using short stories has been effective in various aspects in learning English.

These students were given questionnaires to find out their perceptions towards literature, in general, and short stories, in particular, for developing reading comprehension skill. After the participants had taught reading comprehension skill by using short-stories, they were posed a questionnaire to find out their outlooks towards reading comprehension skill and the use of short-stories for teaching reading comprehension skill in EFL classrooms. The data were gathered from the questionnaire, and presented prior and after the use of short-stories for developing reading comprehension skill. Moreover, the data were categorized in the line with the purposes of the present research and investigated to find out the results of the study and draw the appropriate conclusions.

3. Data Analysis

The simple descriptive analysis was used to analyse the data. The researcher manually reviewed each questionnaire and completed a

tally of responses. SPSS version 2.2 was used to analyze the quantitative data. The data were then statistically sorted into percentage, mean and standard deviation. The qualitative data were analysed through content analysis and common themes were also identified.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The results were presented in line with the research objectives. According to Gray & Densten (1998), one way the research design can be enhanced is to diversify the data collection techniques. Hence, data collection tools were used to collect quantitative and

qualitative data to be able to address the research objectives in this research.

According to the data obtained from the questionnaire, it was found that the students' views of the usefulness of exploiting short stories in EFL classrooms of Myanmar. Questionnaire is a set of systematically structured questions used by a researcher to get needed information from respondents. Through questionnaires the researchers get information that to know the respondents' opinions. The researcher gives the questionnaires to the students, and they had 15 minutes to answer all questions. The average mean of the factors with five-rating Likert's scale are employed to analyze the data as follows:

Table 1: *Students' attitude towards short stories (n=143)*

SN	Statement	Responses (%)					Calculation		Interpretation
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Decided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD	
1	I like studying English language.	29	30	22	12	7	2.38	1.21	Moderately positive
2	I felt comfortable with reading skill in English through listening and reading short stories.	16	14	11	31	28	3.41	1.43	Very positive
3	We have a significant gain in vocabulary and expressions through reading and listening.	24	36	13	12	15	2.58	1.37	Moderately positive
4	Reading short stories was useful for improving our oral competence.	10	11	27	29	23	3.44	1.24	Very positive
5	Short stories also engaged us to improve language acquisition and practice.	11	19	32	17	21	3.18	1.27	Just positive
6	Short stories help to develop our language skills more effectively.	33	34	13	10	10	2.30	1.29	Moderately positive
Average		20.5	24.0	19.7	18.5	17.3	2.88	1.39	Just positive

NOTE:

1.00-1.80 = Slightly positive

1.81-2.60 = Moderately positive

2.61-3.40 = Just positive

3.41-4.20 = Very positive

4.21-5.00 = Completely positive

The table 1 reveals that the general attitudes of the students towards utilizing short stories are positive (mean = 2.88). The dimensions are arranged consistent with the higher means with the dimension of improving oral competence coming first (mean = 3.44), like having a noteworthy benefit in vocabulary and expressions from reading and listening coming second (mean= 3.41), and improving language acquirement and habit coming third (mean=3.18).

Having interviewed the student participants, their responses were found that the practice of short stories also increases students' confidence and enjoyment in reading. If the teachers encourage the addition of short stories at a tertiary level in EFL instruction, it can be complete advantage of the EFL learners. Look at the obtained data presented in Table 2:

Table 2: *Students' Interview responses (n=51)*

SN	Discussion Items	Sample Responses
(i)	Students' opinion concerning the contribution of short story to benefits for learning the language	<i>The language applied in the short stories is normally understandable for us and facilitates our employment in reading skills.</i>
		<i>Short stories make our reading mission simpler because they are simple and short.</i>
		<i>Short stories help us to acquire the four skills — listening, speaking, reading and writing—more efficiently due to the motivational profit rooted in the stories. In addition, teachers can teach literary, cultural, and higher-order thinking aspects through short stories.</i>
		<i>Short stories can be measured as good resources used in language classrooms.</i>
(ii)	Students' opinions concerning the contributions of short stories to use as material for personal enjoyment and help students achieve better mastery in the development of language skills	<i>However, novice instructors should understand the benefits of short stories and plan classes that meet the needs of their students before attempting to apply short stories in the classrooms.</i>
		<i>Through reading and listening, we gain in vocabulary and expressions: reading was useful for improving our oral competence; and that our exposure to the target language engaged us to improve our language acquisition and practice.</i>
		<i>In EFL classrooms where there are students who are not interested and who are</i>

		<i>low achievers, a story, if it is well-chosen, can help alteration their approaches to the language. Exploiting short stories will not automatically make students become more interested in English unless the stories are stimulating, and the language applied meets the level of the learners.</i>
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In accordance with the interview responses of the student participants, the aim of using short stories in a language classroom is to create the class cooperative and it can be identified that a synergistic class can obviously improve communicative competency of the students and retain a long-lasting consequence on their awareness. They support that the main objective of EFL teaching is to support learners to communicate fluently in the target language. Among literary genres, student participants discuss that short stories seem to be the most suitable choice for this due to its potential to help the learners. The interviews inform despite some limitations, the practice of short stories helped the learners to progress their reading comprehension.

The results imply that the employment of reading strategies and the characteristic of short stories gave influences to the improvement of students' better view of other cultures. Furthermore, the results from student interviews indicate that apprentices were aware of having advancement by means of vocabulary and comprehending the text generally. Accordingly, students realize the advantages of literature in language teaching and a strong majority came out in favor of it (though there were dissenting voices). The main benefits of literature in language teaching are seen to be vocabulary development and development of reading skills.

Regarding the data obtained from the interview for 27 teachers, it was presented in the table 3 below:

Table 3: Teachers' Interview responses (n=27)

SN	Discussion Items	Sample Responses
(i)	The use of short story in English teaching	<i>The concept that the core objective of EFL teaching is to support pupils to interconnect smoothly in the target language cause most teachers still suppose that an EFL class should emphasis on understanding linguistic features only.</i>
		<i>Amid literary genres, short stories can be the most appropriate choice for this due to its impending to aid pupils enrich the four skills — listening, speaking, reading, and writing — more efficiently because of the motivational advantage rooted in the stories</i>
		<i>Expounding on this linguistic feature, short stories allow teachers to educate the four language proficiencies to all levels of language skill, and if chosen and manipulated properly, short stories offer quality text-content which will greatly enrich ELT courses for students at intermediate levels of expertise.</i>
		<i>The use of short stories has emotional benefits also for EFL learners.</i>
(ii)	Short stories and language skills development	<i>We can create a variety of writing activities to help students to develop their writing skills such as paraphrasing some sentences, summarizing the story, writing the theme of the story, writing a paragraph on the reason why a particular character did something, writing a specific kind of paragraph about the theme of the story.</i>
		<i>Nonetheless, recent trend in EFL teaching reveals the inevitability of incorporating literature because of its rich potential to deliver a dependable standard of language use.</i>
		<i>Short stories motivate students to explore their feelings through experiencing those of others.</i>
		<i>Literature should be viewed as discourse, which indicates that the students should learn the language system, the structures and the vocabulary used in communication.</i>

This study discusses the advantages of using short stories in EFL classrooms. Regarding the effectiveness of short stories on acquisition of language skills and intercultural understanding in the higher education context, the attitudes of the teachers were significantly positive. They reported that short stories can be the most appropriate choice amid literary genres due to its impending to help students enrich the four skills more efficiently because of the motivational advantage rooted in the stories.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

Short stories have been the focus of attraction for centuries for numerous people for various purposes but mainly due to appealing educational qualities rooted in them. For many ELT experts and educators, they have been critically focused on argument and conversation in the recent years due to various educational profits and insinuations for

developing language skills of EFL learners. In this research, the student respondents and the teachers in the study are overwhelmingly in favor of using short stories in language teaching, emphasizing the common involvement of literature in education as well as the linguistic assistances. The findings are similar to notable researchers such as Nurie (2017), Yimwila (2015), Khezlrou, (2012), Mujumdar (2010), Haji Maibodi (2008), and Savvidou (2004). who have all attested to the idea of the usefulness of the application of literature in the language class.

The students also argue that the use of short stories is amusing and motivational in nature. It is measured as a highly efficient approach for teaching and learning a foreign language like English and is recommended for the same reasons by eminent intellectuals. Thus, the results of the analysis provide with valuable insights about the integration of literary texts to develop students' communicative competence.

Short stories offer language learners a picture of people, through the characters, while they are fighting and suffering which can make young learners to cope with the conflicts in their own life. Stories also help language learners to release their own feeling, which is considered to be very essential for a healthy development. With such advantages, there is no doubt that if rightly used; short stories will help the EFL learners in developing not only their language skills but their character as well.

These results are consistent with Ghasemi (2011) in which she claimed that the short story as a multi-dimensional literary genre can be profitably used in the acquisition of various language skills when it is chosen based on the students' level of English proficiency. Moreover, it can offer them adequate linguistic, intellectual, and emotional involvement and enrich their learning experience. Thus, this article proposes that the short story can provide ESL/EFL learners with a suitable study resource which is both delightful and instructive to improve their linguistic proficiency and reading/writing skills. However, as the learners and their views define the achievement of any material used in the classroom; their mindsets need to be explored before making the decision about those materials. This is similar to Nazara (2019c) who claimed that short stories in language teaching is very advantageous because it provides authentic material, cultural enrichment, language advancement, and personal growth.

In the background of this effectiveness of the use of short stories for developing language skills in EFL classrooms, the present research investigates the attitudes of the EFL learners and teachers towards the use of short stories for developing language skills and communicative competence. The participants (27 teachers) of the tertiary level who have teaching experience of short stories participated in this semi-structured interview at the outset and end of the course. This research delivers confirmation that listening to and reading short stories in the foreign language engrossed students in increasing their language proficiencies. Thus, they practiced reading, listening, writing, and

speaking instantaneously, which is a strength in language acquisition because it reproduces real-life interaction. This study illustrates the advantages of the integration of literature into the curriculum for improving students' language skills, their communicative and cultural competence, and their critical thinking skills. Using literature in language teaching is very beneficial as it motivated students, enhanced critical thinking skills and led to developing linguistic knowledge and cultural awareness (Osman, 2018). Teaching short stories is the most appropriate genre of literature as it does not consume the time and effort of teacher. Furthermore, short stories can raise cultural awareness, linguistic awareness, and motivation and improve four basic skills. The long listening and reading sessions offered students important exposure to the target language, which served as a model for their production. The written compositions, focused on different activities, allowed students create a draft to prepare their oral reports and improve it with the development of support guides and the researcher's guidance. Short stories are considered as good resources that can be used for language teaching. A story, if it is well-chosen, can change the attitudes of the students who are not motivated or low achievers in the foreign language.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The main contribution of the paper is that the results of this study can be beneficial for English teachers and EFL learners. Although literature was seen by some teachers in the study to be a challenge, it was nevertheless felt that the benefits of short stories in the language classrooms outweighed the challenges. This study shows that short stories can invite students to engage in more active and informed discussion of their involvement with the text and their own personal experiences relevant to the world of the text.

Due to the limitations of this study suggested previously, further studies should be conducted. First, a larger number of participants should be involved, which includes a more balanced

number of male and female students so that a less biased conclusion can be drawn. If time is allowed, a larger-scale study should be conducted in other classes, other grade levels or even other universities. By this way, the data obtained would be more representative and generalizable. Apart from conducting a larger-scale study, if more time is available, a longitudinal study should be conducted, with more different titles of short stories used. Then a firm conclusion of the effectiveness of the use of short stories in enhancing students' interest and confidence in English could be drawn.

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