

## Enhancing Reading Competency through Short Stories

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### **Introduction**

Learning the language is the most crucial thing in the world. English is a world language; thus, focus must be placed on four skills: Speaking, listening, reading, and writing. One of the competencies that any student should possess is reading, which is undoubtedly a complex task. Teachers of English as a second language know the challenges of teaching reading skills.

The use of literature in language classes has assisted students in understanding the world from a different perspective and becoming aware of the historical, social, political, and cultural events that are taking place in a specific cultural context. It helps to foster the learner's ability to interpret the culture in their target language. In literary texts, language creates its context. This research analysis aims to study the impact of short stories as a pedagogical tool in teaching reading skills to commerce students. This research study emphasizes the effect of short stories taught in the English language by great authors such as O. Henry "The Gift of the Magi", R.K. Narayan "An Astrologer's Day", and Prem Chand "The Child" on students' vocabulary, critical thinking abilities, and reading comprehension.

Short stories are fascinating, motivational, and quick to read; authors utilize them as an alternate strategy to lessen reading difficulties. Reading short stories can improve vocabulary, teach logical thinking, and give real-world examples of grammatical structures in addition to entertainment. Reading short stories helps pupils learn how to make decisions, solve issues, sympathize, and discriminate between good and

bad things. Readers of all ages can improve their reading skills, making them a handy tool for improving reading comprehension. The briefness and the focus are two of the main benefits of short stories. Short stories usually center on a single central narrative theme, which enables readers to fully engage with the story without becoming sidetracked by complex plots or a large cast of characters. Short stories have a simplified format; readers may more readily follow the plot, identify crucial details, and understand the underlying meaning or message, making them especially important.

Short stories are so brief that they can read them all at once, which gives readers a sense of achievement and motivates them to read more. This sense of accomplishment can be immensely encouraging, particularly for reluctant or struggling readers who might find more significant works intimidating or overwhelming. Readers can gain confidence in their skills and a greater love of reading by feeling the accomplishment of finishing short stories from beginning to end. It, in turn, leads to further skill development. Short stories provide an extensive variety of topics and styles, enabling readers to experiment with a broad range of genres, viewpoints, and literary devices. Short stories improve their comprehension of the written word. As readers engage with these diverse short stories, they can develop a more sophisticated and critical reading style by recognizing and evaluating the many literary methods and approaches used by the authors.

Short stories can also be an excellent tool for developing specific skills because of their condensed style. Teachers can carefully choose short stories that cater to particular reading comprehension abilities, such as figuring out the central theme, making deductions, or identifying metaphorical language. Readers can effectively practice and improve these distinct abilities by focusing on them within the overall structure of a unique story. Short stories can be pretty accessible, especially for reluctant or complex readers. Short tales offer a more accessible and reasonable introduction to literature than the intimidating notion of diving into a long novel.

Short stories are an effective and adaptable tool for readers of all ages and skill levels because of their succinct format, wide range of subject matter, capacity to promote a sense of accomplishment, and ability to focus on specific skill areas. Because of their condensed style, short stories can also be an excellent tool for developing particular skills. They can help readers love reading and feel confident in their abilities by providing a more concise and readable format, opening the door for further growth. Short stories can help people develop a lifetime love of reading, improve their basic reading abilities, and open up a world of literary discovery.

## **Advantages of Conducting Short Story Reading**

### **Experiments:**

Conducting experiments using short stories as a learning tool provides a wealth of benefits for students, especially when aiming to enhance language skills like vocabulary, comprehension, and critical thinking. Such experiments not only promote active engagement with reading materials but also enable teachers to track learning outcomes in a structured way. The following are key advantages of conducting short story reading experiments among students:

### **Enhanced Vocabulary Acquisition and Retention**

Short stories are typically rich in diverse vocabulary, making them an excellent source for language learners to encounter new words within a meaningful context. Vocabulary learned through context is more likely to be retained compared to rote memorization, as students can associate terms with specific scenarios, characters, or emotions presented in the story. Experiments show that reading short stories significantly expands students' lexicon as they encounter varied language, idiomatic expressions, and nuanced word usage, all of which contribute to more robust language skills.

### **Improved Comprehension and Analytical Skills**

Short stories often revolve around a central theme and focus on a single, cohesive narrative. This structure helps students build comprehension

skills as they follow a straightforward plot while also interpreting deeper meanings. Reading experiments with short stories encourage students to analyze motives, emotions, and events, which enhances both literal and inferential comprehension. By answering questions or participating in discussions about the story, students develop a more sophisticated understanding of character motivations, literary devices, and symbolic themes.

### **Promotion of Critical Thinking and Empathy**

Short stories often feature moral dilemmas, character conflicts, or social issues that prompt students to think critically about human behavior and societal norms. Experiments incorporating reflective questions or group discussions can guide students to analyze these elements, fostering critical thinking. Additionally, as students empathize with characters from diverse backgrounds or unique situations, their emotional intelligence and empathy are enhanced. These skills are critical for interpreting not only literature but also real-world situations with a more nuanced perspective.

### **Increased Student Engagement and Motivation**

Short stories helped the reluctant students to motivate or those who might find lengthy texts overwhelming. When students are more engaged, they are more likely to participate actively in learning activities, leading to better retention and comprehension. Through experiments, teachers can measure engagement levels and gather feedback on which types of stories resonate most, allowing for further tailoring of reading material to match student interests.

### **Adaptable Learning and Skill-Building Opportunities**

Experiments with short story reading allow teachers to introduce various literary genres, themes, and styles, giving students exposure to a broad range of literary elements. From science fiction to historical narratives, short stories can be chosen to target specific comprehension skills like theme identification, foreshadowing, or tone. The structure of short

stories is also beneficial for differentiated learning, as students can work with material at their own reading level while still practicing similar skills as their peers. This adaptability makes short stories a versatile tool for language acquisition across different student abilities.

## **Structured Assessment of Learning Outcomes**

Conducting short story reading experiments provides a structured method to assess improvements in reading skills. Pre- and post-experiment tests can reveal measurable growth in areas like vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and critical thinking. This data-driven approach allows educators to track progress, adjust teaching methods, and provide targeted interventions for students who may need additional support.

## **Review of Literature**

Researchers and teachers have shown a great deal of interest in the use of literature, and short stories in particular, in the language learning process. Literary texts offer a rich and captivating structure that encourages vocabulary acquisition, critical analysis, and the development of broader language skills, which is why studies have repeatedly shown the advantages of including them in the curriculum. Furthermore, it has highlighted that short stories, in particular, are a powerful tool for teaching languages because of their condensed structure and captivating plots, which enable students to become more deeply engaged with the material. Several studies have examined the benefits of using short stories to improve vocabulary learning, showing that the vivid imagery and context-specific information found in these literary works can help students understand and retain new words more effectively than traditional vocabulary-building exercises.

Magdy, Ghada, and Maher Khalid focused on improving EFL vocabulary acquisition and student interest among secondary-stage students through short stories. A total of 32 students participated in their study, divided into two groups: an experimental group and a control group. For data collection, they used an interest scale and a vocabulary test. According to the data, the experimental group outperformed the control group in

terms of the mean score. Students in the experimental group excelled in the target skills, demonstrating that reading short stories positively influenced their vocabulary learning and interest in the subject.

In another study, Durak and Yavuz explored ways to improve reading techniques through selected genres of literature. They utilized various library resources, including academic publications, articles, and books, to gather data and analyze. Their findings suggest that authentic texts significantly improve reading comprehension and develop learners' abilities. The study highlights essential tactics such as skimming, scanning, guessing, and distinguishing between implied and literal meanings, which are crucial for learners' understanding of authentic texts. Furthermore, the study emphasizes how important it is to incorporate reading and literature, and it concludes that using these techniques and literary resources can help English as Foreign Language students prepare for the more difficult parts of complicated texts.

Julanie L. Abella, Floyd G. Delfino, Iris R. Tabanas, and Mitzi A. Pardo worked on the effect of fables on reading comprehension. Fables incorporate allegorical storytelling along with a moral lesson that is beneficial for boosting the reading comprehension of all ages. The results demonstrate fables' capacity to engage readers in critical thinking and reasoning for total text comprehension. Fables will enhance empathy and moral reasoning in young readers. This study sought to use experimental and quasi-experimental approaches to enrich and promote the comprehension ability of the learners alongside whole-person development against the nomenclature of behaviorism, where comprehension comes out as teaching learners to exploit fables and their morals. This systematic review takes a detailed viewpoint on the fables as a teaching tool. It opens the eyes of many teachers and researchers regarding the benefits of fables in contributing to improved literacy and socio-emotional development.

Aya Raaed Abdullatif, Sanaa Iskandr Oyed, and Sarah Hasanen Ali conducted a study titled "The Role of Short Stories in Developing Reading and Writing Skills among EFL Learners." Its primary emphasis is the

importance of short stories in EFL classes. The research is now conducted at Cihan University in Erbil. The study's objective is to improve the reading and writing skills of the students by using specific kinds of literature in EFL classes. It follows the quantitative and qualitative methods. The participants are 75 EFL students at CUE. The hypotheses of the study present three. The study concludes by supporting the notion of the importance of developing reading and writing skills through the usage of short stories. It ends with a recommendation for teachers in the EFL area to promote the utilization of short stories in EFL classrooms.

Manirakiza, E., Ndimurugero, S. N., Mugirase, G., & Hakizimana assessed how the students felt about using short stories and how effectively they comprehended English. The study aimed to determine the advantages of using short stories for the students, their difficulties, and how they overcame them. This study focused on 222 first-year students using constructivism theory. The research employed a descriptive methodology, gathering data through focus group interviews and a questionnaire. The results showed that students may learn the four macro-skills of the English language through short stories. The results showed that students' vocabulary increased by 98.2% when they read short stories. The results showed that students need more confidence, restricted vocabulary, and spelling issues made it easier to understand the concepts being provided. Short stories were suggested as suitable resources to mediate learning a second language after the study found that they might be helpful language resources.

## **Methodology**

At the outset, Commerce major students are informed about this particular reading experiment. They were motivated by the relevance of reading as a skill. This study employed a design with a control group and an experimental group of 15 commerce students. The control group received conventional reading training, While the experimental group read a selection of short stories, "The Gift of the Magi," "An Astrologer's Day," and "The Child," in addition to the standard curriculum. They collected data through pre-tests and post-tests, which assessed vocabulary, critical thinking, and reading comprehension. Vocabulary

was measured using a standardized vocabulary test, and critical thinking was assessed through paragraph responses analyzing the short stories. Reading comprehension was evaluated using multiple-choice questions based on the assigned readings. Separate training sessions were also given to them. A Control group of students were given traditional works, and training was given based on that. Three tasks were given to experimental and Control groups to assess their understanding of reading skills.

**Task 1:** Measuring the vocabulary through Multiple Choice questions, filling in the blanks, and matching exercises.

**Example:** Match each vocabulary word to its definition

**Task 2:** Assessing the reading comprehension

S.No.	Vocabulary	Definition
1.	Agile	a) Very poor; needy
2.	Prudence	b) Ability to move quickly and easily
3.	Depreciate	c) Quality of being cautious
4.	Covet	d) Strongly desire (something)
5.	Generosity	e) Willingness to give more

**Example:**

1. What does the astrologer do to make his predictions seem accurate?
2. What secret does the astrologer keep about his past?
3. Who is Guru Nayak, and why is his interaction with the astrologer significant?

**Task 3:** Analyse critical thinking abilities

**Example:**

1. How does Gangu convince the narrator about the character of Gomti?
2. What does the astrologer do to make his predictions seem accurate?
3. How does the astrologer handle the situation when he realizes who Guru Nayak is?

The Performance of the individual students was analyzed. The scores were noted.

## Results and Discussion

The findings of the result demonstrate the result of the statistical evaluation and data tabulation. It compares the students' pretest and posttest results, as well as the mean pre-test and post-test results.

**Table 1:** Experimental Group Performance in Reading

S.No.	Register Number	Pre-test (30 Marks)	Post-test (30 Marks)	Difference
1.	23CO1850	20	28	08
2.	23CO1851	16	26	10
3.	23CO1852	15	28	13
4.	23CO1853	14	27	13
5.	23CO1854	11	19	08
6.	23CO1855	15	25	10
7.	23CO1856	15	27	12
8.	23CO1857	20	28	08
9.	23CO1858	13	24	11
10.	23CO1859	11	25	14
11.	23CO1860	10	24	14
12.	23CO1861	13	24	11
13.	23CO1862	21	29	08
14.	23CO1863	11	24	13
15.	23CO1864	10	25	15

**Table 2:** Control Group Performance in Reading

S.No.	Register Number	Pre-test (30 Marks)	Post-test (30 Marks)	Difference
1.	23CO1865	14	18	04
2.	23CO1866	12	18	03
3.	23CO1867	16	20	04
4.	23CO1868	11	18	07
5.	23CO1869	08	11	03
6.	23CO1870	20	26	06
7.	23CO1871	08	14	06
8.	23CO1872	10	15	05
9.	23CO1873	14	16	02
10.	23CO1865	18	18	00
11.	23CO1866	19	21	02
12.	23CO1867	12	15	03
13.	23CO1868	14	17	03
14.	23CO1869	15	22	07
15.	23CO1870	13	19	06

The observed improvements in the experimental group can be attributed to several factors related to the engagement with short stories. The diverse vocabulary employed in the stories exposed students to new words and expressions, thereby expanding their lexical range. For instance, in “The Gift of the Magi,” O. Henry uses words like “parsimony” and “instigates,” enriching the students’ vocabulary. The varied sentence structures and literary devices used in the stories also contributed to vocabulary development.

The complex themes and narrative structures of the stories challenged students to think critically and analyze the text at a deeper level. In “An Astrologer’s Day,” Narayan’s use of irony and foreshadowing encourages critical thinking about the astrologer’s methods and motivations. Similarly, Premchand’s “The Child” prompts reflection on societal issues and human relationships. Analyzing these literary elements fostered critical thinking skills in the experimental group.

The emotional and imaginative aspects of short stories increased student motivation and engagement, leading to improved learning outcomes. The poignant sacrifice in “The Gift of the Magi,” the astrologer’s cunning in “An Astrologer’s Day,” and the poignant portrayal of childhood in “The Child” captivated the students’ interest and encouraged deeper engagement with the texts. This increased engagement translated to improved reading comprehension.

When the pre-test and post-test results from the experimental and Control groups are compared, it is evident that the experimental group’s reading abilities improved more after reading the short stories. The experimental group’s mean score on the pre-test was 47.77, while the Control group’s was 45.33. The experimental group scored an excellent 85.11 on the post-test, while the Control group’s mean score increased to 59.55. According to this analysis, reading abilities improved significantly. The students benefited from the training sessions involving short stories since they were able to understand the story well and engaged enthusiastically. There was a notable difference between the students’ pre-test and post-test scores based on their correct answers. After learning through short stories, their reading abilities significantly improved, evident in the significantly greater post-test scores compared to the pre-test results. The findings showed that the students reading skills have significantly improved. The majority of students did a great job. Feedback on the stories was collected, and everyone expressed that they enjoyed the story immensely. During critical reading and reading comprehension, they were able to successfully communicate their ideas because they found it simpler to organize and articulate them.

## **Limitations**

The study’s limitations are that only a small number of samples were chosen, and only a Limited number of training sessions were given. Only three short stories have been used.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, the short story is effective in the reading skills of ESL learners of tertiary-level students. The research result showed that the experimental group had good reading skills in the post-test, with a percentage of 85.11. After reading the short story, there was a significant difference between pretest and post-test. Experiments also showed that their skills, as mentioned above, related to ESL reading skills, could be improved with literature-based tasks, particularly using short stories. If short stories are used in a contextual and interesting learning session, the learners will feel good working with them. Therefore, they performed well.

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