

# THE APPLICATION OF SHORT STORIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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**Abstract :** The objective of this article was to focus on the use of short stories in English language teaching (ELT). It presented why short stories become one of the best choices used among other literary genres in teaching English. Short Stories can be used as good sources in ELT classes in almost all levels depending on levels of difficulty and appropriateness of the stories used as materials in class. They are very appropriate for every language classroom. The use of short stories in English language teaching is not only for mastering English language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking but also for motivating students to learn some literary aspects, integrate cultural awareness and make them think critically. .

**Keywords :** *Short Story, Teaching English.*

Using literary texts in the English language classroom has undeniable improvements for learners because literature enriches the learners' competence in the target language. According to Collie and Slater (1987) "literature provides valuable 'authentic material', develops personal involvement and enriches the cultural awareness of the students in ELT/EFL classes" (P.3 -6). The integration between language and literature results with the development of critical thinking, interpretation and communication abilities. Motivation and communication have been the two significant drawbacks in ELT/EFL classes and both teachers and students have suffered from fragmentations between the language and content. Many students may acquire to grasp the grammatical and linguistic structures of English; however, they may fail to practice them properly. Literature provides a key to these problems because literary resources not only motivate the students but also exemplify the use of grammatical structures of the target language.

According to Brumfit (1985), "reading is an autonomous activity, which requires an 'integration' of grammar and context and can easily be enriched through literary resources" (p.105). Although literature was ignored in ELT/EFL classes after the rise of Grammar Translation Method or other methods, with the rise of Communicative Approach, English language teachers aimed at integrating four skills with an authentic based context. Since literature enables students to understand and appreciate other cultures, societies and ideologies different from their own, it encourages personal growth and intellectual development (Carter and Long, 1991, p.2-4). During this period, literature became prior in language teaching. Lazar (1993) states that "literature 'should be considered as an invaluable resource which motivates students who can acquire language acquisition, gain a cultural awareness and interpret the texts with critical thinking'".

## **What is literature ?**

Literature has been widely known by many people and experts. The word "literature" is derived from the word "littera" in Latin which means letter. It refers to the printed and written words. The definition of literature where literature covers stories, poem and plays and especially those that have value of art and not just entertainment.

Literature is often defined as a permanent expression in words of some thought or feeling idea about life and the world. Literary work can construct the world throughout words for the motive that words have power. By the side of statement, it is represented that through that power, it can form an image of particular world, as a new world. Those words have documentary aspects that can break through space and times, illustrate past as well as future (Abraham, 2005, p.150).

Literature is a creation of humankind that has aesthetics and artistic sides. In the past, the form of literature was usually conveyed orally, such as Epic stories. In the further progress, literature was made in written form and then it was visualized as in drama. Later, Epic stories, written literature and drama are known as genre of literature. Klarer (1998) explains the parts of three major literary genres; these are fiction that consists of novel and short story, drama that

consists of comedy and tragedy, and poetry that consists of narrative poetry and lyric poetry. These three genres of literature are applicable until now.

Short story emerges as a more or less independent type of text at the end of the eighteenth century, parallel to development of the novel. While the novel has always attracted the interest of literary theorists, the short story has never actually achieved the status held by length fiction. According to Klarer: "A crucial feature commonly identified with the short story is its impression of unity since it can be read in contrast to the novel in one sitting without interruption. Due to restriction of length, the plot of the short story has to be highly selective, entailing an idiosyncratic temporal dimension that usually focuses on one central moment of action" (Klarer, 1998, p.14).

As being above, short story is a part of literary genres, which is fiction. Short story can be categorized as a fiction since most of it relies on fantasy stories, such as fairy tale. It is further explained by Klarer (1998) states that "the roots of short story lie on antiquity and the Middle Ages story, myth and fairy tale relate to the oldest types of textual manifestations, "texts" which were primarily orally transmitted (p.13). Poe (as cited in Abraham, 1970) defined that a narrative can be read at one sitting on from one-half hour to two hours and that is limited to a certain unique or single effect. Short story as a part of literary works is interesting to be analyzed. Although it has a quite short plot, small number of characters and a few places and time as setting, the story can be fully developed. There are many short stories that have been analyzed. Typically, the analysis is related to intrinsic elements of the story.

## **WHY IS USING SHORT STORIES**

### **Reinforcing the Skills**

Instructors can plan a variety of writing activities to help learners to improve their writing skills. Activities such as, dialogue writing, summarizing, paraphrasing and many more can be added with these. In addition, learners' vocabulary and reading can be improved by stories. Tasks designed on word form, antonyms/synonyms, meaning etc. may help learners to get most of the text. Learners also are profited from short stories for speaking skill. They may have opportunities to come up with their own ideas and views and speak up in front of the class which in one sense build their confidence as well as improve fluency what leads them to critical thinking. They become more creative and can speak confidently. In order to improve the listening skill instructors can ask learners to read aloud. They can set some questions based on structure used in the text which learners will answer prior to their listening. It is expected that each learner must show his emotional response towards a literary text. He must have the capacity to discover his emotional attachments as well as his intellectual explanation towards it.

To reinforce this activity some language based task like comment on linguistic pattern, discourse pattern, use of words (formal/informal), and some literature based tasks like comment on the end or on title, content or theme (as for example: organization of the body of the story, comparing the very text with any other of the similar kind), character analysis by commenting on individual or comparing it with other and commenting on any especial incident may be offered and done in the class. Despite its benefits for students, some objections are always raised against the use of literature in public schools due to overcrowded classes, overloaded syllabus and limited time—some problems commonly met in elementary to high public schools in almost all developing countries. First, the deviated and figurative language of poetry necessitates very long time to grasp. Second, the length of novel will make it difficult for such classes to finish. Finally, drama can be used in classes, but it will be difficult to act out a play in crowded classes within limited course hours. Considering these objections, it is obvious that among literary forms, short-story which is defined by Poe (in Abrams, 1970: 158) "as a narrative that can be read at one sitting of from one-half hour to two hours, and that is limited to 'a certain unique or single effect,' to which every detail is subordinate" seems to be the most suitable one to use in public schools. Since it is short, and aims at giving a 'single effect', there is usually one plot, a few characters; there is no detailed description of setting. So, it is easy for the students to follow the story line of the work.

This reason, that short stories are the most suitable literary genre to use in English teaching due to its shortness, is supported by Collie and Slater (1991) when they list four advantages of using short stories for language teachers. First, short stories are practical as their length is long enough to cover entirely in one or two class sessions (p.196). Second, short stories are not

complicated for students to work with on their own. Third, short stories have a variety of choice for different interests and tastes. Finally, short stories can be used with all levels (beginner to advance), all ages (young learners to adults) and all classes.

**The Reasons**

1. Motivating learners
2. Teaching culture
3. Introducing literary concepts
4. Teaching critical thinking

**Short Stories and Language Skills Development**

Short stories allow teachers to teach the four skills to all levels of language proficiency. Murdoch (2002: 9) indicates that “short stories can, if selected and exploited appropriately, provide quality text content which will greatly enhance ELT courses for learners at intermediate levels of proficiency”. According to him, short stories could be very beneficial materials in ELT reinforcement by using them in learning activities such as, discussion, writing and acting out dialogues.

**A. Reading**

Short stories are very useful in the trials to improve students’ vocabulary and reading. three activities can be conducted to help students to acquire more vocabulary. These activities are related to form, meaning, and use respectively(Pardede,2011.p.4).

1. Complete the word form chart below.

V e r b	N o u n	A d j e c t i v e
U s e	U s e f u l n e s s	U s e f u l
A c q u i r e	A c q u i s i t i o n	A c q u i r e d
A c c e s s	A c c e s s i b i l i t y	A c c e s s i b l e

2. Write the letter of the definition/synonym in column B that most closely matches each word/phrase in column A.

A	B
a . N u r s e	1. a belief, judgement, or way of thinking A b o u t s o m e t h i n g
b . s y r i n g e	2. a person formally educated and trained T o c a r e f o r t h e s i c k o r d i s a b l e d
c . o p i n i o n	3. medical instrument used to put the f l u i d i n t o t h e b o d y

3. Choose the word/phrase from column A in the previous activity that best fits each of the following sentences.

- a) The doctor injects .....in patient’s body.
- b) I work in hospital. I am doctor’s assisstant. I am a .....
- c) come on!!! I need your .....

**B. Writing**

Short story can be a powerful and motivating source for writing in ESL/EFL, both as a model and as subject matter. Short story as a model occurs when students’ writing becomes closely similar to the original work or clearly imitates its content, theme, organization, and /or style. However, when student writing exhibits original thinking like interpretation or analysis, or when it emerges from, or is creatively stimulated by, the reading, literature serves as subject matter. In accordance with this, Oster (1989) affirms that “literature helps students to write more creatively”(p.85).

Teachers can create a variety of writing activities to help students to develop their writing skills. They can ask students to write dialogues or more complex writing activities if students have reached a high level of language proficiency.

Some activities to improve students’ writing ability :

1. Paraphrase paragraph seven of the short story.

2. Write a book report or summarize the story in five to seven sentences, including the main character, setting, conflict, climax, and resolution.
3. Write one sentence on the theme of the story.
4. Write a paragraph to explain overall story.
5. Write a book review on the story.
6. Write an essay related to the story.

### **C. Speaking and Listening**

Short story can also be a powerful and motivating source for teaching both speaking and listening. Oral reading, dramatization, improvisation, role-playing, reenactment, and discussion are some effective learning activities which center on a short story EFL classes can use for enhancing these two skills. Asking students to read story aloud can develop their speaking as well as listening skills. Moreover, it also leads to improving pronunciation.

### **Reasons for using short stories**

There are some reasons in using short story in english language teaching :

1. Motivating learners
2. Teaching culture
3. Teaching critical thinking

### **Motivating Learners**

Elliot (1991) stated that “literature motivates advanced students if they genuinely engage with its thoughts and emotions and appreciate its aesthetic qualities” (p.197). Vandrick listed one of the reasons for using literature is to explore their feelings through experiencing those of others (1). Literary texts are often more interesting than the texts found in course books. According to Clanfield “Literature is motivating. For this reason, students can feel a real sense of achievement at understanding a piece of highly respected literature. Also literature is often more interesting than those are found in the course book” (p.9). As a result instructors should agree that short stories encourage students to feel a real sense of achievement and certainly the result is motivating.

### **Teaching Culture**

Short stories can transmit culture of the people about whom the stories were written. By learning about the culture, learners get chance to know about the past, and present, and about peoples’ customs and traditions. At this stage of teaching instructors must be aware of the culture of the people for whom the text was meant. Learners may have a tendency to compare and contrast their own culture to the other one. They should avoid misinterpretation of the target language and the culture.

### **Teaching Critical Thinking**

Of all the enjoyable reasons of using short stories, critical thinking is the most exciting one. Learners of advanced level can analyze what they have read; therefore they start thinking critically. Rahman (2009) agrees that “the use of short stories to teach critical thinking. At this stage of teaching instructors may have the responsibility to help learners to develop the cognitive skills in them. By reading and writing, they develop their critical thinking skills” (p.24).

### **Conclusion**

The use short stories in english language teaching is very useful not only to improve english language skills but also to other issues like literary aspects, cultural awareness and critical thinking. Through short stories, we can reinforce overall students’ english language skills, motivate students to learn some literary aspects. In addition, the instructor can use short story to teach culture which is contained in short stories and asks the students to analyze it so that it can improve their critical thinking.

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