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MASTER THESIS

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English Literature

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The Role of Short Stories in Improving EFL Students' Reading Skills

**A Case Study of Second-Year LMD Students of English at Biskra
University**

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Academic Year: 2024-2025

Declaration

I, **Hana ARIBI**, declare that this dissertation under **Dr. Leila LOUCIF's** supervision is my work and has not been submitted previously to any university for a degree. This work was completed at Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra, Algeria.

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Dedication

I dedicate and express all my gratitude to my beloved parents, who have been my inspiration during this entire journey and the first support to achieve what I am now.

To my fiancé, Moslim, thank you for your love, support and help.

I also want to thank my only brother, Ahmed and my lovely sisters for always motivating me whenever I needed them; I wish you all the best.

To my dear uncle 'Sakkay' and his family, I thank you for your love, support and encouragement.

To all my relatives and friends who sincerely supported me with their prayers and encouragement.

Acknowledgements

All praise is for Allah, the Almighty, who gave me the strength and power to overcome all the challenges to accomplish my dissertation.

I am sincerely grateful to my supervisor, **Dr. Leila LOUCIF**, for her patience in reading and correcting my dissertation, for her kindness and guidance.

I want to thank the members of the jury, **Pr. Ramdane MEHIRI** and **Mrs. Nadjat MOUSSAOUI** for their efforts in reading and examining my work.

My sincere appreciation goes to the teachers of the reading and text analysis module for their participation, time, and effort. I also thank all the students who kindly agreed to complete my questionnaire.

To Mr. Abdel Madjid, the person in charge of the Master's office, for his valuable advice and collaboration.

To our last teacher, **Dr.Said SLIMANI**, who could not see this thesis completed, I know how proud he was, even though he will not be around us to see my graduation. He may rest in peace.

Finally, I would like to express my respect to all my university teachers and staff, with whom I have spent the past five years.

Abstract

This research work investigated the role of short stories in improving second-year students' reading skills. It aimed at exploring students' and teachers' perspectives on whether or not short stories can develop this receptive skill. In this sense, we hypothesised that if EFL teachers integrate short stories into classrooms, students would improve their reading skills. To achieve these objectives, a mixed-methods research was conducted; it was based on the analysis of data gathered from a questionnaire administered to 150 students and a semi-structured interview held with 7 teachers of the reading and text analysis module. The results indicated that short stories are an effective teaching tool in improving students' reading motivation, comprehension, fluency, inference, vocabulary development and critical thinking skills.

Keywords: Short stories; reading skills; second-year students of Biskra University; teachers of reading and text analysis module, mixed-methods research.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AI: Artificial Intelligence

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ELT: English Language Teaching

ESL: English as a Second Language

L1: First Language

L2: Second Language

LMD: Licence, Master, Doctorat

MKU: Mohammed Kheider University

NRP National Reading Panel

PhD: Doctor of Philosophy

PoV: Point of View

Q: Question

US: United States

%: Percentage

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General Introduction

General Introduction

Introduction

As reading has always been a daunting skill among EFL learners, many methods and strategies for teaching and learning this skill are suggested. With the development of technology and science, short stories have become a powerful and common tool in developing skills because they are considered one of the easiest and fastest educational methods for acquiring and learning new phrases and vocabulary. Therefore, short stories are a rich source of information that can enhance not only the EFL students' reading skills but also all the other language skills.

Reading short stories is highly beneficial as it allows the reader to learn about verb tenses through the temporal context of the story, which helps them distinguish between the past, present, and future tenses, as well as imperative verbs. He can also develop a set of grammatical structures and linguistic forms, and learn how to conjugate verbs according to the linguistic rules. In addition, he can discover cultures through reading short stories, especially those that provide interesting styles that encourage him to go deeper into the linguistic features of the texts.

Moreover, reading short stories improves writing and pronunciation. It also impacts the learner's personality intellectually, spiritually, and culturally. Furthermore, it contributes to developing critical thinking and creativity, analysis, and reading comprehension skills. All in all, we can say that short stories help English language students develop the four skills: listening, speaking, writing, and reading.

1- Statement of the Problem

Reading is considered one of the most important skills in mastering the English language, but many learners still find it difficult to understand. Although EFL teachers always do their best and select the most appropriate strategies and materials, like textbooks and book exercises to capture their students' attention and improve their language understanding, they still suffer from reluctant learners.

As university students, we have observed that most EFL learners lack sufficient interaction and development of their level to a deeper understanding of reading. This problem is due to many reasons, but it mostly comes from learners who do not choose to read stuff that piques their attention and makes them enjoy it. For instance, they struggle with language comprehension, word decoding, adaptable text complexity, and English vocabulary. In this case, short stories are the most suitable solution to this problem. It can improve their reading skills and comprehension. Moreover, they remain a potential tool that combines an engaging narrative with the simplicity and ease of language.

This research investigates the role of English short stories in developing the reading skills of EFL second-year learners at Biskra University. Therefore, the question that can be posed here is: Would short stories be an effective strategy to improve EFL students' reading skills and comprehension?

2- Aims of the Study

This study aims to explore EFL students' and teachers' opinions about the role of short stories in improving reading skills. More specifically, we intend to find out the relationship between reading skills and short stories and to what extent short stories can develop reading skills among second-year students of English at the University of Biskra.

3-Research Questions

The current study attempts to answer the following key questions:

- Do short stories motivate learners to read in the English language?
- How do short stories help EFL students master reading skills?
- What is the impact of reading short stories on reading comprehension?

4-Research Hypothesis

The present study tries to test the following hypothesis:

-If EFL teachers integrate short stories into classrooms, students would improve their reading skills.

5-Literature Review

Reading is an essential skill that students should master. However, most EFL students lack this skill and have many problems, such as fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension of written texts. In this case, short stories are a more appropriate strategy to overcome those problems.

Many researchers have supported short stories to develop students' reading skills and other language skills. Al-Dersi (2013) emphasised that short stories have benefits for developing the vocabulary of EFL learners. First, they make studying English fun and appealing. Second, they encourage pupils' interest in the language and culture. Third, they get pupils ready for complex real-world uses of the language itself.

In the same context, Ibrahim (2017) conducted a study on the impact of teaching short stories on the Sudanese EFL learners' achievement of the English language. He recommended that curriculum designers, educators, and experts adopt and include short stories in syllabi. Thus, there is an urgent need for training programs for teachers in literature in general and short stories in particular. Simplified copies of short stories such as *A Tale of Two Cities*, *The Black Tulip*, *Treasure Island*, and others are highly recommended as formal literary texts.

Similarly, using literature to teach language has several advantages that contribute to a better linguistic understanding, the development of creative skills, and an authentic model of language use with its rich potential (Collie & Slater, 1987; Ramsaran, 1983 as cited in Ceylan, 2016). Another study conducted by Maley (1989) found seven justifications for using literature as a language learning aid. He emphasised that short stories are the universality, non-triviality, personal relevance, variety, interest, economy, suggestive power, and ambiguity of literature as potential language learning tools (as cited in Oktaviana, 2022). In line with these views and studies, we defend the importance and the role of short stories to help students master reading skills.

6-Research Methodology

6.1 Research Method

This study adopts mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative research methods to address the research problem.

6.2 Research Population, Sampling and Sampling Techniques

The population of this study is second-year LMD students and English teachers at Biskra University. To gather data for the questionnaire, a sample of 150 participants will be randomly selected from the population of 460 second-year students. The random sampling technique will ensure that each student has an equal chance of being selected and allow for unbiased representation. Additionally, the study will include semi-structured interviews with 7 teachers responsible for teaching the reading module in the English division at the University of Mohamed Kheider-Biskra. This combination of random sampling for students and purposive sampling for teachers will provide a comprehensive view of the subject under investigation.

6.3 Data Collection Tools

Two tools are used to gather the necessary information for this study. First, a questionnaire that includes yes/ no questions, open-ended questions, and multiple-choice questions will be submitted to students to gather information about their views on how short stories can improve their reading skills. Second, an interview was conducted with teachers specialising in reading to collect data about their attitudes towards reading short stories. The primary focus was to understand how teachers perceive the effectiveness of short stories in developing students' reading skills, engagement, and overall learning experience.

7- Significance of the Study

The findings of this research are expected to benefit education by exploring the role of short stories in improving second-year students' reading skills. In this regard, university teachers, students and researchers may gain both theoretical and practical benefits from these findings.

For the teachers, this study provides information about the benefits of using short stories in EFL reading classes, the strategies that may help them overcome their students' challenges, and the factors they consider when selecting short stories for classroom use. For the students, the findings are expected to help them get good scores and be motivated in learning reading skills through short stories.

For the researchers, this study is considered a reference for those who want to conduct studies in the same area. In addition, they can gain insights into the effectiveness of short stories in improving students' reading skills. Moreover, more research can be carried out to test the effect of short stories on speaking, listening, writing and vocabulary.

8-Research Limitations

This study has some limitations related to time, as it hinders us from addressing the problem thoroughly. Another limitation is the lack of suitable resources. Moreover, this study

focuses only on short stories as an independent variable; thus, no other types of texts, such as scientific, linguistic, sociological and psychological texts, are considered in this study. Furthermore, this study is limited only to second-year students at Biskra University.

9-Structure of Thesis

This research work is divided into two parts: theoretical and fieldwork. It starts with the theoretical one, which consists of two chapters organised as follows: The first chapter is about reading skill; it outlines its definition, importance, components and strategies. It also deals with its relation to other skills, how it is taught to EFL students and the teacher's role in reading classes. The second chapter is about short stories, their types, elements, characteristics, benefits, reasons, and strategies for teaching them and their impact on reading comprehension. We finalise the study with the practical part, the third chapter, which deals with data presentation, analysis, and discussion of the findings.

Chapter One:

Reading Skills

Chapter One: Reading Skills

Introduction

This chapter presents definitions of reading and how researchers interpret the process. Then, it deals with its importance and components. It also sheds light on the relationship between reading and the other skills, its effective strategies and how this skill is taught to EFL students. It concludes with the teacher's role in reading classes.

1.1 Definition of Reading

There are four essential skills for mastering the English language: listening, speaking, writing, and reading. The latter is an activity through which the reader builds meanings of words to understand the written text.

According to Parmawati and Yugafiati (2017), reading is a complicated activity that includes creating and obtaining information, determining its meaning, and choosing the content. In other words, reading is a free exploration and a significant educational activity in personal growth. It is required at all academic levels. In addition, Urquhart and Weir stated that "Reading is the process of receiving and interpreting the information encoded in language form via the medium of print" (1998, as cited in Liu, 2010, p.152).

Reading is a sophisticated cognitive process rather than a mechanical act. To gain a better understanding and knowledge, the reader must grasp and evaluate the written form by taking the meanings from the text and converting them into concepts that are easy to understand. In the same context, Alderson (2000) asserted that reading is "the interaction between the reader and the text" (p.3). Thus, it involves a deeper interaction where the reader

thinks about the text, relates it to what they already know, and considers how it connects to other things they have read. The reader also reflects on their reaction to the text, whether they find it interesting, helpful, or boring.

1.2 Importance of Reading Skills

Reading is essential for broadening our knowledge and experience, so having strong reading skills is crucial for accurately expressing ideas. According to Rintaningrum (2019), reading literacy plays a vital role in personal and national growth. Its importance is reflected in its inclusion in school and university curricula. It is essential for self-improvement, professional development, and societal progress.

Reading has a lot of benefits. First, it keeps the brain engaged and ensures it functions properly. It can lower stress hormones and help the mind relax because the more we learn, the better equipped we become to handle life's challenges. Then, it helps expand vocabulary, develop writing skills, express thoughts clearly and boost confidence in communication. Also, reading helps improve the brain's ability to retain and recall information, think critically and creatively, analyse situations, solve problems and understand complex ideas. In addition, it enhances focus and concentration as well as social interactions since it exposes readers to different cultures, behaviours, and social dynamics (Patiung, 2016).

In brief, reading as a physical and mental process is crucial for acquiring information, understanding content, intellectual growth, and enhancing vocabulary. It requires concentration and preparation using various materials like books, articles, and others (Pradani, 2021).

1.3 The Relationship between Reading and the Other Skills

Several studies have explored the connection between reading abilities and other skills. Tierney and Leys (1984, p. 14) stated that "the type and amount of reading materials to which writers are exposed may influence their choice of topic, genre, writing style, and vocabulary". In the same view, Stanovich et al. (1996, as cited in Grabe, 2003) demonstrated that engaging in extensive reading enhances vocabulary acquisition, verbal fluency, understanding of syntax and semantics, and a greater awareness of the world.

Similarly, Krashen (1984) claimed that "it is reading that gives the writer the 'feel' for the look and texture of reader-based prose" (p.20). Zamel (1998) declared that due to its heuristic, generative, and recursive nature, writing allows students to engage with reading, helping them understand that writing and reading share many similarities and that reading is a process of composition. On this account, the relationship between reading and writing skills is crucial for EFL students at university. Reading enhances vocabulary and writing styles, while writing enhances grammar, structure, and expression.

Additionally, there is a relation between reading and listening skills. Wolf et al. (2018) discuss this relationship and focus on shared and modality-specific components. They hypothesise that reading comprehension explains a significant variance in listening comprehension. The overlap is substantial with vocabulary, memory and intentional skills, which all contribute to reading comprehension. Vocabulary, listening and reading comprehension are unique to each other.

Reading and listening comprehension are closely connected and share a strong relationship. They rely on the same underlying comprehension processes; therefore, once decoding skills are mastered, performance should be similar. Furthermore, a person's listening

comprehension can influence and predict their reading abilities. Thus, listening plays a key role in reading skills (Sticht et al., 1974, as cited in Diakidoy et al., 2005).

In language learning, teachers play a significant role in fostering the connection between reading and speaking proficiency. They should select appropriate and interesting reading materials that help students internalise language patterns and build confidence in their speaking skills. Hence, speaking can be improved through reading as it helps students overcome hesitations and vocabulary gaps that hinder fluent communication (Akbar, 2014).

1.4 Components of Reading Skills

1.4.1. Phonemic Awareness

English words consist of phonemes, which are distinct units of sound. Pupils must understand that words are made up of these discrete speech sounds. Phonemic awareness refers to the ability to hear and control the sounds of uttered words. It focuses on learning and manipulating individual sounds within words rather than understanding the relationship between sounds and letters. Researchers suggested that teaching phonemic awareness to students improves their reading achievement (The National Reading Panel, 2000).

1.4.2. Comprehension

Reading comprehension is a complex cognitive process that enables readers to understand the material they read. It involves recalling information and actively creating meaning. In essence, it is the process of analysing the information presented in a text. It requires dynamic thinking, where readers use their knowledge to engage with the author's ideas, follow the organisational structure of the text, draw conclusions from the author's reasoning, and interpret the content through these perspectives. Therefore, a reader's mental

engagement with a text is essential for true comprehension (The National Reading Panel, 2000).

1.4.3. Reading Fluency

Fluency is an important aspect of reading. It is the ability to read and make sense of the text without having to stop and decode each word. Fluent readers can read orally with appropriate speed, accuracy, and proper expression. Guided and repeated oral reading has a positive impact on word recognition, reading fluency, and comprehension in students of all ages. Some students learn to read fluently without explicit instruction, and for others, however, fluency does not develop in the course of normal classroom instruction and needs additional instruction (Dhakal, 2022).

The National Reading Panel (2000) found that encouraging students to read independently does not necessarily lead to increased reading engagement or improvement. During sustained silent reading, at-risk readers may engage in behaviours such as looking at pictures in books instead of reading, or selecting a challenging book to appear like their peers while not reading. Even when these students do read, their pace is slower compared to proficient readers. In this light, the NRP emphasises the importance of strategies, such as teacher modelling, repeated reading, and progress monitoring, to enhance reading fluency, comprehension, and achievement.

1.4.4. Phonics

Phonics involves understanding the connection between written letters and the sounds in spoken language. Phonics instruction helps students apply these connections for reading and spelling words (Dhakal, 2022). The National Reading Panel (2000) stated that systematic phonics instruction improves children's ability to learn to read and is much more effective

than approaches that include little or no phonics instruction. It involves phonics and decoding skills.

Phonemic awareness and phonics are distinct concepts, though their instruction often overlaps. As students move into phonics, they understand the connection between phonemes (sounds) and graphemes (the letters or letter combinations that represent those sounds) in written form. Teaching phonemic awareness helps enhance phonics abilities, and strong phonics skills, in turn, support the development of phonemic awareness (Lane & Pullen, 2004, as cited in Dhakal, 2022).

1.4.5. Vocabulary

Vocabulary acquisition occurs primarily through listening to others speak or read. It can also be taught directly and indirectly through activities, like learning words before reading, repetition, exposure to words in various contexts, incidental learning, and using technology. Research-based strategies for vocabulary learning include providing student-friendly definitions, defining words in context, using context clues, visualising words, applying them in practice, analysing word parts, creating semantic maps, and fostering word awareness (Dhakal, 2022).

The following graph summarises the already mentioned components of reading skills.

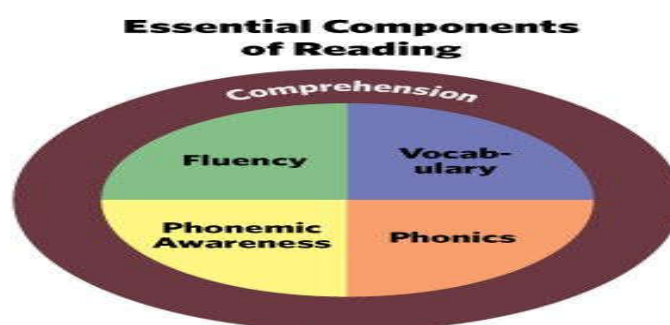


Figure 1: Components of Reading Skills(The National Reading Panel,2000)

The figure shows the essential components of reading, with comprehension at the centre goal, supported by four key skills: phonemic awareness (recognising sounds in spoken words), phonics (connecting letters to sounds), fluency (reading smoothly and accurately), and vocabulary (knowing word meanings). These components work together to help readers understand and make meaning from texts.

1.5 Reading Strategies

Reading strategies are effective in making reading less complex for EFL students. According to Garner (1987), they are “generally deliberate, playful activities undertaken by active learners, many times to remedy perceived cognitive failure” (p. 95). This means that the deliberate actions students use to engage with a text are referred to as reading strategies. They are designed to help students overcome obstacles and improve their comprehension.

There is substantial evidence that supports the role of reading strategies in enhancing reading skills. Namara et al. (2009) stated that “reading strategies are more useful and beneficial for learners who lack knowledge in the domain of reading, as well as for those with lower reading skills. Learners strongly need to use these strategies to achieve reading comprehension.” (p. 218). Therefore, using reading strategies helps readers develop strong reading skills.

1.5.1 Predicting

Magiliano (1993) asserted that “prediction strategy involves thinking about what might be coming next in the text. It is applied by effective readers; they use pictures, headings, texts, and personal experience to make predictions before they begin to read” (pp. 35-36). Therefore, the prediction strategy uses these various elements to form educated guesses about what will happen next, making the reading experience more interactive and proactive. It aids comprehension, helping readers stay focused and more connected to the text.

Jessica (2000) also viewed that “it is used in reading task, it helps learners think what will happen based upon the text, the author, and background knowledge in other words it makes students elicit their interest, activate their prior knowledge, or pre-teach vocabulary or concepts that may be difficult” (as cited in The Ohio University Education, 2014). In this sense, it is important to prepare students mentally and conceptually before reading to ensure they can fully engage with and understand the text.

1.5.2. Scanning

Scanning is a reading strategy where the reader quickly looks through a text to find specific details without reading it in its entirety. This involves focusing on elements like the title, table of contents, or any headings to identify the information needed (Grellet, 1981). In the same vein, Harmer (2007) stated that scanning involves searching for specific pieces of information: finding a phone number, checking the television schedule at a particular time, or quickly going through an article to locate a name or other detail. This technique allows individuals to avoid reading every word or line, as doing so would hinder the effectiveness of the scanning process.

1.5.3. Skimming

Skimming is a technique used to understand printed materials. Through skimming, readers can quickly seek specific information or grasp broad concepts before diving into a more detailed reading (Grellet, 1999). However, focusing too much on specifics may hinder the ability to identify the overall theme of the text. Readers may become bogged down in the details, making it harder to grasp the general idea (Aritonang, Lasmana, &Kurnia, 2018). Additionally, students may use skimming to identify key terms that help them deduce the general meaning of a text, enabling them to read more efficiently and interpret it faster (Maxwell, 1969 as cited in Diaz & Laguado, 2013).

1.5.4. Inferring

The inferential reading strategy is the ability to use two or more pieces of information from the text to draw a conclusion or deduce an implicit idea (Kispal, 2008). According to Prezler (2006), inferences are conclusions we draw based on evidence; for instance, when reading, students make conclusions about the text based on their prior knowledge. Additionally, Rapp and Van den Broek (2005) explained that inferences are “a central component of successful reading and that the construction of a representation may be viewed as a problem-solving process in which the reader infers relationships among ideas, events, and states described in the text” (p. 277). Therefore, reading is an active and complex cognitive process in which the reader constructs understanding by making connections and inferring relationships throughout the text.

1.5.5. Guessing the Meaning of New Words: Unfamiliar or new words are the biggest challenges students face in developing their reading skills. Clark (1980) said that "to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context to save time and continue reading without interruption or referring to a dictionary" (pp. 211-212). This strategy allows readers to maintain reading and save time, so they can understand the text more efficiently without getting stuck on individual words. Several factors can assist students in understanding unfamiliar words, such as guessing the meaning from the surrounding text, analysing the word's structure, and utilising background knowledge about the subject (E.O.I. de Sabinaningo Organisation, 1993).

1.5.6. Self-Monitoring

Self-monitoring is one of the common forms of self-management interventions, alongside self-evaluation, self-instruction, goal setting, and strategy instruction (Mooney et al., 2005). It consists of a two-step procedure for managing personal behaviour. The initial

step involves observing one's behaviour, while the second requires recording a specific aspect of that behaviour (Mace, Belfiore, & Hutchinson, 2001). By following these two steps, self-monitoring helps individuals become more aware of their actions and make necessary changes to achieve desired outcomes. The process can be useful in various settings, such as improving productivity, managing habits, or behaviour modification.

1.5.7. Summarising

Summarising is used to analyse and rearrange the information being read. Readers condense the material into a concise version that emphasises only the most important parts after thoroughly comprehending the text and expressing its main concepts in their own words. According to Oxford (2006), “summarising is a short description of the main ideas or points of something without any details.” (p. 717). Hence, it is the act of compressing information into a concise version of the essential ideas of a text while omitting extraneous details. It focuses on the main principles, eliminates unnecessary information, and delivers the substance of the text more shortly.

1.6 Teaching Reading to EFL Students

Teaching reading skills helps students learn how to read effectively, gives instructions, guides them in the written material, provides knowledge, and helps them know or understand. There are ten implications for teaching reading to EFL students:

- Word Recognition Fluency: It is crucial for reading comprehension, especially in the early stages. While studies in L1 research have not been the main focus of L2 research. Fluent readers tend to have better skills, while those with less can improve through L2 instruction (Grabe, 2004).

- **Vocabulary Learning:** The connection between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension is strong in first and second-language contexts. In L2 settings, vocabulary knowledge is a key predictor of later reading ability, though research confirms this direct link (Grabe, 2004).
- **Background Knowledge:** It is essential for reading comprehension because it facilitates inference, mental model building, and meaning clarification (Grabe, 2004).
- **Language Knowledge and Comprehension Skills:** Language skills and the capacity to identify important concepts and their connections are necessary for text comprehension. Grammar is indirectly supported by teaching strategies. Techniques like visual organisers, mental imagery, prior knowledge activation, text structure comprehension, monitoring comprehension, and summarising have been successful in L1 situations (Grabe, 2004).
- **Text Structures:** Text structure awareness is crucial for L1 learners to understand expository texts, while proficient students understand abstract text organisation patterns. Direct instruction, visual aids, and reading training can enhance comprehension (Grabe, 2004).
- **The Strategic Reader Rather Than Individual Strategic:** Multiple tactics as summarising, clarifying, predicting, picturing, creating questions, leveraging prior information, monitoring, and assessing, are the subject of research on L2 reading instruction. Nevertheless, the efficacy of these strategies in improving reading comprehension has not been thoroughly investigated (Grabe, 2004).
- **Intrinsic Motivation for Reading:** Motivation has a beneficial effect on reading outcomes because more motivation results in more reading comprehension. It is greatly increased by Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI). Researchers create this framework to improve students' reading comprehension by integrating content knowledge, reading strategies, and motivation (Grabe, 2004).

- **A Coherent Curriculum for Student Learning:** In L1 contexts, reading has improved with two primary curricular approaches: Content-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) and Transactional Strategies Instruction (TSI). In L2 situations, Coherent curricula are crucial to acquire the skills, strategies, metacognitive awareness, and knowledge integration (Grabe, 2004).

1.7. Teacher's Role in Reading Classes

In reading classes, teachers play different roles that are summarised as follows:

-Motivator: Being a motivator is a crucial role that a teacher can play since pupils will learn well. They will not succeed if they lack sufficient motivation. Teachers should have a kind, supportive, understanding, adaptable, and open mindset. They should also address students' interests through practice and interaction (Yilmaz, 2020).

-Informant: the teacher's primary role as an informant is to lead the initial presentation in the reading class, build upon the material that has already been introduced, remind students of the previous tasks and provide explanations (Yilmaz, 2020)..

-Conductor: This role involves the practical skills a teacher must possess to manage the lesson effectively. He/she must be able to use teaching aids efficiently, provide suggestions and clear instructions for activities, offer a model for students to follow, explain concepts and address students' questions, prompt students to answer, establish rules and ensure that students have understood the necessary concepts (Yilmaz, 2020).

Conclusion

Reading skill is an essential part of learning that should be acquired and mastered. It is an effective cognitive process for first, second and foreign language learners. It has a strong connection with the other English language skills, as they complement each other. It consists of different components like vocabulary, comprehension, fluency and others. Readers can use various strategies while reading texts, such as skimming, scanning, summarising, self-monitoring, and many other techniques. Teaching this skill is so necessary that it is included in all worldwide educational curricula. Within reading contexts, teachers should be motivators, informants and conductors.

Chapter Two:

Short Stories

Chapter Two: Short Stories

Introduction

This chapter offers an overview of short stories, their elements, and types. It then discusses their characteristics and benefits. It also addresses the main reasons for teaching short stories. In addition, it explores the strategies for teaching short stories in EFL classrooms. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the impact of short stories on reading comprehension.

2. 1 Definition of Short Stories

A short story is a concise fictional prose that deals with a few characters and focuses on a single effect (Hansen, 2025). According to Pratt (1981), it is "an artistic construction and communication of a limited sequence of events, experiences, or situations according to a closed correlative order that creates its perception as a totality (p. 179). Thus, a short story is a structured narrative that establishes a comprehensive meaning within a narrow scope.

Additionally, Asdian (2010) stated that short stories are typically read in one sitting, and the information they provide is pertinent to the story being conveyed. They connect to leave a singular impression or effect. As they are brief, the author relies on the reader's past knowledge and experiences to inform the narrative.

2.2 Elements of Short Stories

According to Craiker (2022), there is no specific order of importance among the seven fundamental components of a story, as they are all equally important. When writing a story, you may begin with one of these elements and develop the others later.

2.2.1 Character

Characters are essential to any story. They do not have to be human or humanoid-animals or supernatural beings can also serve as characters. Most stories feature multiple characters, although some may include only one. Typically, there is a main character or protagonist who is most involved with the plot and its central conflict. A story may incorporate several protagonists or supporting characters (Craiker, 2022).

2.2.2 Setting

The setting refers to the geographical location and the period in which a story occurs. Some stories may have multiple settings, while others may feature only one. A story can include both a primary setting and several smaller ones. The period, whether a specific year, an era, or a more general reference like "modern day" or "near future", is also an important part of the setting. Regardless of its precision, time is a crucial element that helps establish the story's context (Craiker, 2022).

2.2.3 Theme

The next component of a story is the theme, which can be thought of as the 'why' of the narrative. It represents the main idea, the reason the story was written, and the message the author is trying to convey (Craiker, 2022).

2.2.4 Tone

Tone is a crucial element of storytelling that influences the overall emotional impact of the narrative. It should align with the genre and the specific story, and it can be shaped by factors such as word choice, sentence length and variety (Craiker, 2022).

2.2.5 Point of View

Point of view (PoV) is essential in storytelling, as it determines through whose perspective the story is told. There are four main PoVs. First person is told from a character's perspective. Third-person limited presents the story through the thoughts of one character, while third-person omniscient gives the narrator access to the thoughts of multiple characters. Deep PoV is a technique used in third-person limited to create an intimate connection with the character. Second-person PoV is often found in short stories (Craiker, 2022).

2.2.6 Conflict

Conflict is the driving force that moves a story's plot forward. It represents what stands in the way of characters achieving their goals. Conflict can be internal, where characters struggle with their thoughts or emotions, or external, involving outside forces. In literature, there are seven main types of conflict: character vs. character, character vs. nature, character vs. society, character vs. technology, character vs. the supernatural, character vs. fate, and character vs. self. A story typically includes one major internal or external conflict, along with several smaller ones. While every story element is important, conflict gives a narrative its appeal and emotional impact (Craiker, 2022).

2.2.7 Plot

A plot is a series of events in a story that consists of a beginning, middle, and end. Despite different plot structures, all plots have the same essential elements that form a story arc (Craiker, 2022).

- **Exposition:** It sets the scene. At the story's entry, we are introduced to the main character and gain insight into their life. This stage also establishes the mood and atmosphere of the narrative.

-Rising Action: It begins with the inciting incident and includes events that build tension and develop the plot. Most of the story's conflict occurs during the rising action, as complications arise and stakes increase.

-Climax: It is the story's turning point where the character confronts and overcomes the main challenge. The rising action heightens the tension and peaks at the conclusion. Some stories may feature multiple climaxes, especially if there are two distinct character arcs.

-Falling Action: This stage follows the climax where the conflicts resolve and loose ends are addressed. Although the main challenge has passed, not everything may be fully settled, as new issues or consequences can still arise.

-Resolution or Denouement: It is the final stage of the story, where major conflicts are resolved or left open for a sequel. It often ends with a happily ever after (Craiker, 2022).

2.3 Types of Short Stories

Due to the variety of themes and arts, a short story has different types, including anecdote, drabble, fable, frame story, and fairy tale.

2.3.1 Anecdote

An anecdote is a short story about a real person or incident that is interesting and amusing. It has no specific length and is commonly used to illustrate a point in an essay, article, or chapter (Roan, 2014).

2.3.2 Drabble

The objective of this style of storytelling is brevity. In this format, the author's writing skills are tested, as they must convey meaning effectively within limited space (Roan, 2014).

2.3.3 Fable

Fables are popular among children. It involves various mythical creatures (animals, plants or animate things) that speak and behave like humans. It shares a moral lesson through its characters' actions and dialogue (Roan,2014).

2.3.4 Frames Story

A frame story or nested narrative inserts a story inside a story to introduce the scene for the main narrative or a sequence of short stories (Roan,2014).

2.3.5 Tale

A fairy tale is also called a magic tale. It is a traditional folktale that includes fictional creatures such as fairies, witches, wizards, trolls, goblins and fire-breathing dragons (Roan,2014).

2.3.6 Legend

Legends include factual and fictional accounts of the lives and deeds of particular human groups, such as saints, folk heroes, or historical figures (Roan,2014).

2.3.7 Story Sequences

A story sequence is also known as a composite book or short cycle. It is a collection of short stories combined to create a longer work. However, each story functions independently as a standalone narrative (Roan,2014).

2.3.8 Myth

A myth is a classic narrative that explains people's beliefs about imaginary phenomena or supernatural creatures. This type is connected to historical occurrences and customs. It was believed to be real by those who told them. These short stories have a religious connection and are approved by authorities and priests (Roan,2014).

2.4 Characteristics of Short Stories

Garcia (2007) suggested a set of qualities that make a great story stand out. First, it should be brief, read in a single place, have a single plot and character, and a surprise or unexpected ending. Then, it should concentrate on a single idea and one impression, and should not include extraneous characters. After that, storytellers can focus on background information and elaborate on the scene or atmosphere. In addition, it usually ends at the climax or soon after and leaves the reader expecting the story to end. Moreover, the planned effect should start with the first sentence. Furthermore, every word, speech, and description should be used as sparingly as possible. Finally, character development should be limited to what the plot demands.

2.5 Benefits of Short Stories

There are several advantages to using short stories in ESL/EFL instruction. Erkaya (2005) mentioned higher-order thinking, literature, culture, and motivation. Thus, short stories help students analyse what they read and develop cognitive and critical thinking skills, such as making judgments, being decisive, synthesising information, organising, evaluating, predicting, and applying knowledge. They can also enhance intermediate learners' reading skills and vocabulary. They transmit the storyteller's culture, traditions and customs.

2.6 Reasons for Teaching Short Stories

According to Collie and Salter (1991), there are four main reasons for using short stories in language classes. First, they are useful to be covered in one or two teaching sessions. Second, students can easily work with short stories because they are not too complex. Third, short stories have different choices for different interests and tastes. Finally, students of all skill levels and class periods can benefit from using short stories.

Moreover, Parded (2011) reported many reasons for integrating short stories in EFL classes. Firstly, short-story vocabulary and sentences are suitable for the students' level. More importantly, graded or simplified stories are highly recommended in such contexts. Secondly, short stories can enhance the English Language skills and subskills through discussion, writing, and acting out dialogues.

2.7 Strategies for Teaching Short Stories in the EFL Classroom

Generally, short stories are appropriate for practising reading and writing literary analysis paragraphs. However, the methods used to teach them are not different from those used to teach any other type of literature. Heads (2023) suggested a list of elements to be incorporated into short story teaching methods:

- Introduce the story in a way that allows students to understand the plot.
- Ascertain that students are familiar with the literary strategies and terminology necessary to understand the story. Before beginning the short story itself, the teacher would frequently introduce important literary methods to students in an interesting mini-lesson.
- Assign guided reading exercises that assess comprehension and assist students in concentrating on important passages.
- Offer chances for class or small-group discussion of difficult issues.
- Ask students to back up their answers to the guided reading questions and discussion with relevant quotes and textual information. This is not the time for generalisations, but for careful reading.
- Assign students to write a paragraph that includes textual evidence in the form of quotations and analysis. When students work on group paragraphs, it helps them improve their writing skills.
- Assess students at the end of the lesson, focusing more on their understanding of the main literary devices, themes, and insights discussed during the debate than on basic

comprehension. Quizzing students on each short story separately can unnecessarily increase your workload, especially when teaching them in quick succession (Heads, 2023).

2.8 The Impact of Short Stories on Reading Comprehension

Literacy plays a significant role in any educational development as it acts as a foundation for enhancing reading and writing skills (Satriani, 2019). Despite its significance, facing challenges with low levels of reading interest has always been a debate in all worldwide educational systems (OECD, 2018).

The environment plays a crucial role in fostering children's interest in reading. For instance, parents who engage in storytelling can significantly influence their children's enthusiasm for reading. Likewise, the school environment, particularly the library, is pivotal in shaping a child's reading habits. As Pinter (2006) suggests, children tend to focus more on their world, which influences their interest in reading, making it essential to nurture this interest in a supportive and enjoyable manner. Socatminah (1991) identified internal factors, such as personal traits, gender, education level, health, and mental state, and external factors as key contributors to the development of reading interest.

To cultivate a child's interest in reading, it is important to introduce various types of books, such as storybooks, textbooks, and fairy tales, which are visually engaging and rich in content. As children's interest in reading grows, their concentration also improves. When a child encounters an interesting book, they are likely to focus on reading it, which over time becomes a habit that can positively affect their academic and personal life. It is equally important to select appropriate books that align with children's interests, as the content plays a significant role in sustaining their reading motivation.

According to Hsu (2010), effective storytelling involves gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, and interactive elements to engage the audience. In the classroom, teachers

employ these strategies to make storytelling more engaging. Students actively participate by showing interest, asking questions, and demonstrating understanding through their reactions. This interaction highlights how storytelling can significantly enhance student engagement in learning. Groeber (2007) further supported this by stating that storytelling allows teachers to focus on delivering the core messages creatively, using vocal variety, language improvisation, and mimicry to connect with students. This suggests that storytelling can serve as a valuable tool in language learning.

Although previous studies have primarily focused on the effects of storytelling on language skills such as speaking and reading, there has been limited research on how storytelling influences students' engagement and perceptions in reading instruction. Over recent decades, researchers have explored reading engagement from multiple perspectives, recognising it as a multi-dimensional construct (Lee, Jang, & Smith, 2021; Unrau & Quirk, 2014).

Reading engagement can be categorized into four key aspects: behavioural engagement, which refers to the time, effort, and frequency of reading; cognitive engagement, which involves a child's willingness to exert effort and persist in reading (Guthrie, Wigfield, and You, 2012); affective engagement, which includes the emotional responses, such as enjoyment that influence a child's positive interaction with reading (Cook et al., 2020); and social engagement, which covers shared reading experiences and classroom dynamics (Lutz, Guthrie, & Davis, 2006).

Reading engagement is a crucial precursor to improving reading competency (Afflerbach & Harrison, 2017; Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Gambrell, 2011). Increased frequency of reading, sustained effort, positive emotions and social interaction during reading activities all contribute to the development of reading skills. As students engage more actively in

reading and enjoy the process, their reading proficiency is expected to improve over time (Baker & Wigfield, 1999).

In conclusion, students' reading interest and engagement can be increased by creating an engaging environment with techniques like storytelling, which ultimately improve reading competency.

Conclusion

Short stories represent a powerful literary form that combines brevity and depth, making them ideal for language and literature instruction. Understanding their definition, key elements, such as character, setting, theme, tone, point of view, and conflict, and the various types, including anecdotes, fables, and myths, provides a solid foundation for learners and teachers. Their unique characteristics and numerous benefits, from enhancing language skills to fostering critical thinking, highlight their value in the EFL classroom. Using effective teaching strategies, short stories can improve students' reading comprehension and literary appreciation. Therefore, integrating short stories into the curriculum not only enriches language learning but also nurtures a lifelong love for literature.

Chapter

Three: Data

Presentation

and Analysis

Chapter Three: Data Presentation and Analysis

Introduction

The current chapter concentrates on the research design, sampling and data collection tools used in the study. Then, it presents the description, analysis and discussion of both students' questionnaires and teachers' interviews. It provides a summary of the findings; examines the hypothesis and answers the research questions that were already mentioned in the general introduction. Finally, it concludes with recommendations that serve as a roadmap for leveraging the research findings in a practical context.

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Research Design

To achieve the research objectives and answer the research questions, we used two tools: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. First, we designed the questionnaire, piloted it and submitted it to 150 second-year students who were chosen randomly to explore the role of short stories in improving students' reading skills. Second, we prepared a semi-structured interview, piloted it and conducted it with 7 teachers of reading skills at Biskra University to elicit their views on the topic being studied.

3.1.2 Sampling

To gather valuable data for our study, both second-year LMD students and teachers of the reading module at Mohammed Kheider University of Biskra were the research target audience. The entire population of students is 460. We worked with a random sample of 150 students, 99 female and 51 male. For teachers, we selected 7 teachers of the reading module using purposive sampling.

3.1.3 Data Gathering Tools

3.1.3.1 The Questionnaire Description

The students' questionnaire consisted of 15 questions that covered yes or no, multiple-choice and open-ended questions. It was designed using Google Forms online. It was divided into three sections. The first section contained five (05) questions about the participants' general information, including age, gender, their level in English, their enjoyment in learning this language and their opinions about the importance of reading skills in English language competence.

The second section covered six (06) questions about their levels of reading preference, their frequency of engagement in reading activities, their perceptions of reading difficulty and the causes behind these difficulties. We also asked them how they learned to read and whether they were motivated while analysing stories and texts. The last section included four (4) questions about their teachers' frequency of using short stories, their views on the importance of short stories in EFL classes and the impact of short stories on enhancing their reading skills.

3.1.3.2 The Interview Description

The interview comprises ten questions and was conducted with 7 teachers of the reading module at Biskra University to explore their perceptions about the role of short stories in improving their students' reading skills. The opening three questions (Q1-Q3) focus on their background information, including their academic qualifications, their experience in teaching English in general and reading skills specifically. The next two questions (Q4-Q5) centre on the challenges that second-year English students encounter in this module and the strategies they used to help them overcome those challenges. The remaining questions (Q6-

Q10) address how often they use short stories, the criteria for their selection, their effectiveness in teaching reading skills, the types of short stories they find effective in engaging students in the course, and finally, the effect of short stories on reading components.

3.1.3.3 Analysis of Students' Questionnaire

Section One: General Information

1. Age

Table 1: *Students' Age*

Options	Participants	Percentage %
18-21	100	66.3
22-28	43	29.9
29-40	7	3.8
Total	150	100

Table 1 shows that (66.3%) of second-year students are between 18 and 21 years old, (29.9%) of them are between 22 and 28, while (3.8%) of them are between 29 and 40 years old. This diversity in age helps us collect different views on the role of short stories in improving reading skills.

2. Gender

Table 2: *Students' Gender*

Gender	Participants	Percentage %
Female	99	34
Male	51	66
Total	150	100

We observed that the number of females is 99 out of 150 participants, whereas the number of males is 51. This shows that females prefer to study English rather than males.

Q3: Your English level

Table 3: *Students' English Level*

English Level	Participants	Percentage (%)
Beginner	39	26
Intermediate	90	60
Advanced	21	14
Total	150	100

The data presented in the table above shows that a high percentage of students (60%) have an intermediate level in English, and (26%) are considered beginners. However, (14%) of them have an advanced level in English. This indicates that most participants have some basis in English, which enables them to speak, read, listen and write correctly. Nevertheless, they have some problems with fluency and accuracy in complex situations.

Q4: Do you enjoy learning the English language?

Table 4: *Students' Enjoyment in Learning the English Language*

Opinion	Participants	Percentage (%)
Yes	143	95.3
No	7	4.7
Total	150	100

A large sample (95.3%) reported that they enjoy learning English, while only (4.7%) of them answered with 'No'. This means that most students are motivated to study the English language.

Q5: Are reading skills important for competence in this language?

Table 5: *The Importance of Reading Skills in English Language Competence*

Opinion	Participants	Percentage (%)
Yes	145	96.7
No	5	3.3
Total	150	100

The findings displayed in the table above showed that the majority of students (96.7%) think that reading is essential for the English language proficiency, yet only (3.3%) do not share this view. This demonstrates that almost all students understand how important reading is to be proficient in English.

Section Two: Reading Skills

Q6: How much do you like reading?

Table 6: *Levels of Reading Preference*

Opinion	Participants	Percentage (%)
Very much	72	48
Considerably	37	24.7
Moderately	25	16.7
Slightly	12	8
Not at all	4	2.6
Total	150	100

According to table (7), (48%) of the students like reading very much, (24.7%) of them considerably favour reading, (16.7%) of them moderately prefer this skill, (8%) of them

slightly admire it, while (2.6%) of them do not like reading at all. This signifies that the participants know the importance of reading in their academic success, so they prefer this cognitive process.

Q7: How often do you engage in reading activities?

Table 7: Students' Frequency of Engagement in Reading Activities

Opinion	Participants	Percentage (%)
Always	53	35
Often	51	34
Sometimes	35	23
Rarely	10	6.7
Never	1	0.7
Total	150	100

A large percentage of participants (35%) said that they always engage in reading activities, (34%) of them do this so often, (23%) of them sometimes read, and (6.7%) of them rarely do it. Only (0.7%) of the respondents never participate in reading activities. These findings indicate that reading is still a popular and valued activity among the sample being selected.

Q8: When reading a text/book, do you find it:

Table 8: Students' Perceptions of Reading Difficulty

Opinions	Participants	Percentage %
Easy to understand /comprehend	85	56.7
Somehow difficult	52	34.7
Difficult to understand /comprehend	13	8.7
Total	150	100

The data presented in the table above revealed that more than half of the students (56.7%) find reading books or texts easy to understand and comprehend. (34.7%) of them said that they somehow difficult, while only (8.7%) reported having trouble understanding texts. Overall, reading as a receptive skill does not require too much cognitive effort, so most students find it an easy process.

Q9: In case you have difficulties in understanding the text, is it because of:

Table 9: Causes of Reading Comprehension Difficulties

Opinions	Participants	Percentage (%)
Difficult vocabulary	90	60
Intended meaning (the meaning is not clear; you have to read between the lines	32	21.3
The use of idioms/slang/metaphors (you do not know their meaning/use)	28	18.7
Total	150	100

Most participants (60%) viewed vocabulary as the primary cause of their reading difficulties. Understanding the intended meaning is the second problem (21.3%) for them, as it involves reading between the lines. Furthermore, (18.7%) reported that they struggle with metaphors, idioms and slang. They added that figurative language and ambiguous meaning hinder them from fully understanding texts and books.

Q10: In your classroom, how do you usually learn reading?

Table 10: *Methods of Learning Reading*

Opinion	Participants	Percentage (%)
Reading aloud	48	32
Silent reading	66	44
Guided reading	13	8.7
Analysing stories and texts	23	15.3
Total	150	100

The results in Table (10) indicate that silent reading (44%) is the most common method used for learning this skill, followed by reading aloud (32%), analysing stories and texts (15.3%) and guided reading (8.7%). A large number of students want to feel independent while engaging in the process of reading. Others suggested a mix of approaches as the most effective way for developing this skill.

Q11: While analysing stories and texts, are you motivated to do the task?

Table 11: *Students' Motivation in Analysing Short Stories*

Opinion	Participants	Percentage (%)
Yes	125	83.3
No	25	16.7
Total	150	100

The data presented in Table (11) revealed that most students (83.3%) are motivated to analyse short stories and texts. In contrast, a small percentage (16.7%) of them are demotivated to do that. Students show a strong interest and positive attitude toward analysing literary works.

Section Three: Short Stories in the EFL Classroom

Q12: How often does your teacher use short stories?

Table 12: Teachers' Frequency of Using Short Stories

Opinion	Participants	Percentage (%)
Always	52	34.7
Often	29	19.3
Sometimes	40	26.7
Rarely	21	14
Never	8	5.3
Total	150	100

Table (12) displays that (34.7%) of the students have teachers who always use short stories. (26.7%) of them said that they sometimes use stories. (19.3%) of them stated that short stories are often used in their classrooms, (14%) of them reported that they are rarely applied, while (5.3%) of them said their teachers never use them. This implies that short stories are a common teaching method in many classes.

Q13: How important do you think short stories are in EFL classes?

Table 13: The Importance of Short Stories in EFL Classes

Opinion	Participants	Percentage (%)
Very important	69	46
Important	59	39.3
Less important	20	13.3
Unimportant	2	1.3
Total	150	100

The results presented in the table (13) indicate that the majority of participants (46 %) viewed short stories as very important, (39.3 %) of them see short stories as important in the EFL classroom. On the other hand, a smaller portion (13.3%) believes that short stories are less important, while only (1.3%) deem them unimportant. This suggests that short stories are a valuable resource for language learning due to their ability to engage students and expose them to authentic language.

Q14: Do short stories help you enhance your reading skills?

Table 14: *The Impact of Short Stories on Enhancing Reading Skills*

Opinion	Participants	Percentage (%)
Yes	122	81.3
No	28	18.7
Total	150	100

The table (14) indicates that a large majority of students (81.3%) believe that short stories help them improve their reading skills. In contrast, (18.7%) of them do not think so. In general, the statistics show that short stories are a useful technique for improving reading skills since almost all students agree on their beneficial influence.

Q15: If yes, how?

Students who agreed that short stories help them enhance their reading skills explained that in different ways. First, short stories expose them to new words in context, which creates effective retention of new vocabulary. Second, they enhance their reading motivation and comprehension, fluency, inference and critical thinking. Finally, they contributed to developing their writing and speaking skills.

3.1.3.4 Analysis of Teachers' Interviews

Question One: What is your qualification/ degree?

This question aimed to gather data about the interviewees' academic qualifications. The results revealed that the majority of teachers (six teachers) have a PhD degree, and only one of them holds a Magister's degree. This indicates that they have adequate experience and expertise in their speciality.

Question Two: How long have you been teaching English at the university?

This question sought to know the interviewees' experience in teaching English at the university. One teacher has more than 20 years of experience; four teachers have taught for more than 10 years, and two teachers have less than five years of experience. This experience in teaching enables them to provide us with insightful perspectives on the topic.

Question Three: How long have you been teaching the module of reading and text analysis? Which level?

The purpose of this item was to collect data about the interviewees' experience in teaching the reading and text analysis module, and at what level they did so. The findings showed that one teacher has taught this module for 20 years, while six interviewees have moderate experience of less than five years. Five of them taught just 1st year license, whereas two of them dealt with both the first and second years. There is a mix of novice and experienced teachers for this module.

Question Four: Based on your experience, what challenges do second-year English students face in this module?

This question seeks to identify the challenges faced by second-year English students in this module. All the informants answered that their students faced many problems when learning reading skills. Two teachers claimed that negative attitude, reluctance to read and do the required instructions, and weak proficiency level in English are the common obstacles that students struggle with. Four teachers stated that lack of reading motivation, fluency,

vocabulary comprehension and inferences are the major problems that their students encounter. Only one teacher said that he suffers from a lack of reading comprehension between the lines.

Question Five: Do you use some strategies to help them overcome those challenges? Mention them

The strategies that teachers used to help students overcome the already stated challenges are as follows:

Teacher 1: I ask them to read each paragraph many times

Teacher 2: I advise them to use dictionaries whenever they find difficult words.

Teacher 3: I drew the meanings of difficult words on the board to help students visualise them.

Teacher 4: I rely on text analysis and discussion to get them familiar with the different genres of texts.

Teacher 5: I provide them with digital resources such as pictures and videos.

Teacher 6: I motivate peer interaction to increase their motivation.

Teacher 7: I used pre-reading strategies like vocabulary familiarisation and brainstorming to build background knowledge.

Question Six: In case of short stories, how often do you use them and why?

In this question, the interviewees have different views. One of them reported that he never used short stories because he believed that reading is not a short story or a novel. Students should read different texts such as scientific, economic, social, psychological, linguistic and other materials. Six teachers asserted that they often used short stories in their classes because they are interesting and useful in attracting students' attention and entertaining them. They are also rich in ideas and can teach students different aspects of the language.

Question Seven: What factors do you consider when selecting short stories for classroom use?

Concerning the factors that teachers consider when selecting short stories for classroom use, they are as follows:

Teacher 1: I do not use short stories. Generally, I consider students' level, background knowledge, and the text difficulty.

Teacher 2: I take into consideration the stories that include mystery plots, moral and educational lessons.

Teacher 3: I choose stories that are appropriate in terms of language, length and the moral lessons they convey.

Teacher 4: I consider the teaching goals.

Teacher 5, 6 & 7: I check whether the cultural content is suitable.

Question Eight: Do you think that using short stories is effective in teaching reading courses?

According to the participants' points of view, short stories are effective in teaching reading courses because they motivate students to read and develop their reading fluency. However, some of them emphasise that short stories should not be the only material used throughout the academic year. Therefore, the types of texts selected should be varied to help students develop critical thinking skills.

Question Nine: What types of short stories do you find most effective in engaging second-year students?

In terms of the most effective type of short stories, teachers mentioned the educational and moral stories, fiction and detective stories, stories addressing identity, relationships, or social issues, stories from different cultures or perspectives, fairy tales and mystery stories.

Question Ten: Are there any specific areas (e.g., vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, fluency...) where you have noticed improvement after using short stories?

After implementing short stories, teachers noticed that their students' negative attitude became more positive. They are more able to understand the writer's thoughts and debate them, answer and analyse questions related to point of view, inference, implications, clarity, logic and accuracy. They enlarge their linguistic repertoire and knowledge about various topics. In addition, they develop their critical thinking, acquire new words and raise their cultural awareness.

3.1.3.5 Discussion and Summary of the Findings

In this study, we submitted a questionnaire to students and interviewed teachers to test the hypothesis and answer the research questions.

The findings of the students' questionnaire revealed that most of them consider reading an essential skill for English language proficiency, so they like it very much and get motivated when analysing short stories and texts. These results helped us to answer the research's first question (Do short stories motivate learners to read in the English language?). Students also reported that they always engage in reading activities, so reading books or texts is easy to understand and comprehend. However, they viewed vocabulary as the primary cause of their reading difficulties.

In addition, they mentioned that silent reading is the most common method used for learning this skill. Moreover, they confirmed that their teachers always use short stories, which are important in improving their reading skills, vocabulary acquisition, reading motivation, comprehension, fluency, inference, critical thinking, writing and speaking skills. Thus, these findings helped us to answer the second research question (How do short stories help EFL students master reading skills?).

The results obtained from the analysis of teachers' interviews showed that weak proficiency level in English, lack of reading motivation, poor fluency, lack of vocabulary comprehension, inferences and reading between the lines are the major problems that their students encounter. They stated that they used different strategies to help them overcome those challenges, such as dictionaries, drawings, analysis and discussion and digital resources.

Teachers often used short stories in their classes, and they depend on some factors while selecting them, like moral and educational lessons, language, length and cultural appropriateness, and teaching goals. Furthermore, they affirmed that short stories are effective in reading courses because they motivate students to read, develop their reading fluency and foster critical thinking skills. They also enlarge their linguistic repertoire and knowledge about the various topics, as well as raise their cultural awareness. These facts answered the third research question (What is the impact of reading short stories on reading comprehension?).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter presented the fieldwork of our research. It included the analysis and discussion of the findings gathered from students' questionnaires and teachers' semi-structured interviews. These findings showed that short stories play a great role in improving students' reading comprehension and fluency, vocabulary acquisition, critical thinking and many other aspects. In light of this, we confirmed our hypothesis, which states that if EFL teachers integrate short stories into classrooms, students would improve their reading skills. Therefore, it is advised to use a variety of short stories during reading sessions to enable students to develop their competencies in this receptive skill.

General

Conclusion

General Conclusion

This study investigated the role of short stories in improving second-year students' reading skills. It aimed to find out both students' and teachers' opinions about the effectiveness of short stories as an instructional tool in enhancing reading comprehension, vocabulary development and fluency. It consisted of both a theoretical and a practical part. The theoretical part included two chapters that review the related literature about reading skills and short stories. The third chapter reported the study findings, analyses and discussion.

The field work was conducted using students' questionnaires and teachers' semi-structured interviews to test the already set hypothesis and explore their opinions about the topic under investigation. Overall, the results supported our hypothesis that if EFL teachers use short stories, their students' reading skills would be developed. They revealed that short stories have a significant role in enhancing students' reading comprehension and fluency, vocabulary acquisition, critical thinking and others.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and the drawn conclusion, some suggestions and recommendations are presented as follows:

- Teachers should encourage students to read short stories that explore moral or social themes.
- They should advise students to use dictionaries whenever they find difficult words to enlarge their linguistic background.
- They should train students in interpretation, analysis, and identifying main ideas to develop critical reading skills.
- They should take into consideration the students' level of language while selecting short stories.

- They should use group discussions and pair work activities to promote effective classroom participation.
- Students should use paper-based and digital short stories to suit different learning styles.
- Curriculum designers should consider continuity, sequence, and integration when developing learning materials that incorporate short stories.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Students' Questionnaire

Dear students,

You are kindly invited to complete the following questionnaire as a part of a master's dissertation entitled "The Role of Short Stories in Improving EFL Students' Reading Skills". Your responses will contribute significantly to this research project. Please put a tick (✓) next to the most appropriate choice or provide a full answer where necessary.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Section One: General Information

1. Age:

2. Gender:

a. Male

b. Female

3. Your English level:

a. Beginner b. Intermediate c. Advanced

4. Do you enjoy learning the English language?

a. Yes b. No

5. Are reading skills important for competence in this language?

a. Yes b. No

Section Two: Reading Skills

6. How much do you like reading?

a. Very much b. considerably c. moderately d. slightly

e. not at all

7. How often do you engage in reading activities?

a. Always ☐ b. Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ d. Rarely ☐ e. Never ☐

8. When reading a text/book, do you find it:

a. Easy to understand/comprehend ☐

b. Somehow difficult ☐

c. Difficult to understand / comprehend ☐

9. In case you have difficulties in understanding the text, is it because of:

a. Difficult vocabulary ☐

b. Intended meaning (the meaning is not clear; you have to read between the lines) ☐

c. The use of idioms/slang/metaphors (you do not know their meaning/use) ☐

d. other reason(s):

.....

10. In your classroom, how do you usually learn reading?

a. reading aloud ☐ b. silent reading ☐ c. guided reading ☐ d. analysing stories and texts ☐

e. Others, please specify.....

.....

11. While analyzing stories and texts, are you motivated to do the task?

a. Yes ☐ b. No ☐

Section Three: Short Stories in the EFL Classroom**12. How often does your teacher use short stories?**

a. Always ☐ b. Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ e. Never ☐

13. How important do you think short stories are in EFL classes?

a. Very important ☐ b. important ☐ c. Less important ☐ Unimportant ☐

14. Do short stories help you enhance your reading skills?

a. Yes ☐

b. No ☐

15. If yes, how?.....

.....

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix Two: Teachers' Interview

Dear teachers,

This Interview is an attempt to collect information to accomplish a Master's dissertation about "The Role of Short Stories in Improving EFL Students' Reading Skills". Therefore, you are kindly requested to answer the following questions. Your contribution is of great importance to the success of this research work. Be sure that your responses will be anonymous and will be used for research purposes only.

Thank you for your time and cooperation

Q1. What is your qualification/ degree?

Q2. How long have you been teaching English at the university?

Q3. How long have you been teaching the module of reading and text analysis? Which level?

Q4. Based on your experience, what challenges do second-year English students face in this module?

Q5. Do you use some strategies to help them overcome those challenges? Mention them.

Q6. In case of short stories, how often do you use them and why?

Q7. What factors do you consider when selecting short stories for classroom use?

Q8. Do you think that using short stories is effective in teaching reading courses?

Q9. What types of short stories do you find most effective in engaging second-year students?

Q10. Are there any specific areas (e.g., vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, fluency...) where you've noticed improvement after using short stories?

ملخص

تناول هذا البحث دور القصص القصيرة في تحسين مهارات القراءة لدى طلبة السنة الثانية. وقد هدف إلى استكشاف آراء كل من الطلبة والأساتذة حول ما إذا كانت القصص القصيرة تسهم في تنمية هذه المهارة الاستقبالية. وفي هذا السياق، افترضنا أنه إذا قام أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بإدماج القصص القصيرة في أقسامهم، فإن ذلك سيساعد الطلبة على تحسين مهاراتهم في القراءة. ولتحقيق هذه الأهداف، تم اعتماد منهج بحثي مختلط، استند إلى تحليل البيانات التي تم جمعها من خلال استبيان وُزِعَ على 150 طالبًا، ومقابلة شبه مهيكلة أُجريت مع 7 أساتذة يدرّسون مقياس القراءة وتحليل النصوص. وقد أظهرت النتائج أن القصص القصيرة تُعد أداة تعليمية فعّالة في تحسين دافعية الطلبة للقراءة، وفهم المقروء، والطلاقة، والاستدلال، وتطوير المفردات، ومهارات التفكير النقدي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: القصص القصيرة؛ مهارات القراءة؛ طلبة السنة الثانية بجامعة بسكرة؛ أساتذة مقياس القراءة وتحليل النصوص؛ منهج البحث المختلط.