



## Impact of Teaching Short Stories on EFL Sudanese Learners' Vocabulary learning

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### Abstract

The current study aimed to explore the relationship between teaching short stories and the improvement of the learners' vocabulary in the Sudanese EFL context. The study used a descriptive and analytical research design. It used a pre-test and post-test for 20 students from Khartoum University and was divided into two groups- an experimental group and a control group, with 10 participants in each group. Using statistical analysis, the findings showed that the participants who were taught using short stories improved their vocabulary in terms of increasing their word count and usage that the participants in the control group. That is to say using short stories motivates the learners to learn new words and enables them to use such vocabulary in sentences. Reading a short story can improve students' vocabulary. With this significant result, it can be said that short stories develop learners' vocabulary and this helps EFL learners, like many other similar contexts, to develop their vocabulary through the teaching of short stories.

**Keywords:** ELT, EFL learners, Short stories, Sudanese Context, Vocabulary

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## Introduction

Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) has changed since the advent of the twenty-first century. English teaching aims now to help students communicate fluently in the target language. As a result, teachers and trainers have started to seek new ways of integrating literature into EFL classes because literature has an essential role in teaching English (Povey, 1967). When used appropriately, literary genres are functional tools for language classes for all levels with their authentic nature. Oster (1989) and McKay (1982) affirm that literature helps students write more creatively. Instructors can create various writing activities to help students develop their writing skills. They can ask students to write conversations or more writing activities if students have reached a high level of language proficiency (Murdoch, 2002, p. 9). With this new era, short stories found their way to EFL classes as appropriate tasks and activities designed for language classes. Short stories have been widely acknowledged as an invaluable teaching strategy (Al-Dersi, 2013; Nazara, 2019; Parvareshbar & Ghoorchaei, 2016; Walters, 2006).

This present study attends to the topic in the Sudanese EFL context to improve Sudanese EFL learners' vocabulary at the university level. With this end in mind, the study set out to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the general attitude of Sudanese EFL learners towards short stories?
2. To what extent do short stories develop Sudanese EFL learners' vocabulary?

## Literature Review

Using short stories in teaching a foreign language, e.g., English, has been a topic of much interest to several researchers (e.g., Erkaya, 2005; Satitpor, 1995). These authors approached the topic from usage, meaning and spelling. As for meaning, it can be divided according to its form. It can be divided into lexical, morphological, and syntactic types. Lexical is the meaning that attaches to words as a word. For instance, the meaning of a building for human habitation is connected to a house (lexical). Morphological is the meaning that attaches to a morpheme. A morpheme is the smallest unit that carries information about function meaning. The meaning attached to a word structure in a sentence is the syntactic meaning. For example, the question linked to the word arrangement in the sentence "is he a student" (Lado, 1964). A word's meaning can also be known by its relation to the other word. It should also know the denotation and connotation of a word to understand the negative or positive meanings.

Spelling is the writing of a word or words with the importance of letters and diacritics present in an accepted standard order and an arrangement of letters that form a word or part of a word. According to Ur (1996), some critical points should be considered when teaching vocabulary forms (pronunciation and spelling). The learners have to know what a word's sound is like (its pronunciation) and what it looks like (it's the spelling).

Some studies on the topic could be helpful to cite here. They appear in the following section chronologically. One of the earliest studies was by Hopkins and Davis (1982), who conducted a study on the effect of short stories on the Hispanic EFL learner's general English improvement. The results showed that short stories have a significant impact on improving the subjects' general English proficiency.

In 1995, Satitpor surveyed the effects of short stories on enhancing learners' ability to acquire vocabulary and influencing the motivation of Thai EFL learners. In the study, the participants were divided into two groups: an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group was taught using short stories, while the control group was

taught through traditional textbooks. The study found that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the post-test.

Over the last two decades, there are worthwhile studies that provided support to the current investigation. Bell (2001) carried out a study on using short stories on reading speed and reading comprehension. 26 elementary students participated in the study. The researcher divided the participants into experimental and control groups. It was found that learners in the experimental group who used short stories made more significant gains in reading speed than the control reading. Moreover, Tutwisoot (2003) conducted a study to see if short stories could enhance reading comprehension of EFL Thai learners' vocabulary. The results showed that after taking a short story reading course, the mean score of the experimental was considerably higher than that of the control on the reading comprehension test to learn vocabulary in EFL learners. Erkaya (2005) stated that the short story helps the instructor teach literature, culture, and higher thinking aspects in addition to the four skills. The author found that short stories should be integrated into the curriculum to help EFL students learn various elements.

In addition to the abovementioned studies, some other studies over the last decades are discussed at this point. In 2011, David explored teaching vocabulary through short stories. He started teaching language by using short stories to help students learn vocabulary effectively. The researcher also found that short stories could easily help students understand English words. Add to that Handayani (2013), who studied the short story to enrich students' vocabulary using a qualitative approach which used a classroom action research design. In this research, Handayani found short stories to improve students' vocabulary. From all instruments, it is shown that the use of short stories improved the ability of students to understand the text better and learn more vocabulary.

Kharaghani (2013) studied short stories to enhance Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension ability. Using an experimental research design, the study showed that the experimental group taught short stories performed better than the control group that did not undergo the experiment. In another study in the Iranian context, Ajideh (2013) investigated the effect of short stories on EFL learners' vocabulary learning, showing that the experimental group performed better than the control group in terms of vocabulary learning. In a similar vein, Palupi (2016) investigated enriching vocabulary via teaching short stories. They found that teaching short stories improved students' vocabulary. In a subsequent study,

Quite recently, some other short story researchers were interested in teaching vocabulary through short stories. A significant recent study is that of Ismail (2019). The study showed the influence of reading local folktales on EFL students' English vocabulary among the second-year students of SMA Muhammadiyah Kalosi-Enrekang. The research form used is classroom action research which is expected to explain the application of reading folktales to improve students' vocabulary comprised of two cycles. Every cycle consists of four stages. The participants in this study were from class X-B in the 2015-2016 academic years with 30 students. In another yet relevant study conducted by Musleh, Ibrahim, and Altakhaineh in 2020 examined non-native speakers' attitudes towards Arabic stories in language classes. The participants in the study (n=128) had positive attitudes towards short stories in language learning. They found such a strategy supportive and encouraging. Likewise, Khamroeva (2021) showcased the importance of teaching and learning vocabulary in a foreign language classroom. EFL learners applied a variety of strategies to develop their

English vocabulary. It was found that teaching literature to students increased their motivation and engagement (Alkhodimi & Al Ahdal 2019).

When put together, the literature shows that teaching short stories has been advantageous for learning vocabulary in various EFL contexts. Following this sting of previous studies, it is worthwhile to explore the topic in the Sudanese EFL context where studies of teaching vocabulary through short stories have been scant. This research paper intends to investigate how short stories develop EFL learners' vocabulary at the university level.

### Method

This study addressed the research problem using the experimental research design. It deals with numeric data to test the hypotheses raised in the introduction of this paper. The study took place in the Sudanese setting, viz the context of Khartoum University.

### Participants

A sample of 20 EFL university students (aged between 19 and 22) at the faculty of Education (third level), Khartoum University, was selected and assigned into two groups. The first group is the experimental group, and the other group is the control group, with ten learners in each group. The experiment group was taught vocabulary through short stories, and the control group was not a target of this experiment. The participants level of EFL learning was more or less identical.

### Vocabulary Test

A vocabulary test was prepared to measure the participants' improvement in English vocabulary. The test was made of 10 questions in light of a short story. The test consisted of 10 multiple choices questions (see Appendix). The reliability and validity of the test were checked. Reliability is the extent to which any measurement procedure has the same result on reported trails. Validity is the extent to which instrument measures what it purports to measure and calculates represented coefficient in many ways.

Table 1. Paired Samples Correlations

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	pre & post	10	.667	.035

### Procedures

Before the experiment, formal approval was obtained to conduct the study. The participants were informed that the investigation would not affect their academic records, and the experiment was used for this research only. The researcher managed the experiment and took assistance from a statistician to do the analysis using the SPSS. The data were analyzed statistically, and the results of statistical measures are arranged in tables with adequate interpretation in so far as the theme of this paper is cornered.

### Results and Discussion

The results obtained from the statistical measurements are outlined in Table 2, 3 and 4 below. Before the experiment, eight learners pass the test and two failed and the posttest results showed that nine passed the test and only one failed. According to Table 3 and 3 a t-test was used to estimate the students' performance in the experimental and

control groups in the pre-test and post-test. As the table shows, the mean score of the pre-test for the experimental group is (1.08), while for the control group is (1.12), which means the two groups were at the same level. The post-test tests noticed that the two groups improved, and the mean of the post-test was higher than that of the pre-test. The difference between the two means for the experimental group was (1.12), from (1.08), and the standard deviation was (.198). The difference was (.274) the standard deviation for the control group. The t-value ranged from (-1.43) to (-2.06).

Table 4 the probability (Sig.) values were less than the significance level (0.00). This shows that a significant difference was found between the two groups. The experimental group achieved the highest scores. The results of the analysis confirm the research hypotheses and that there are some benefits of reading a short story to improve EFL learners' vocabulary. Reading is considered a major productive language skill that learners need to master during their schooling to achieve language and communicative competence.

**Table 2. One-Sample Test**

	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Pre	9.000	9	.000	1.200	.90	1.50
Post	11.000	9	.000	1.100	.87	1.33

**Table 3. Paired Samples Statistics**

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	Pre	1.08	50	.274	.039
	Post	1.12	50	.328	.046
Control	Pre	1.12	50	.328	.046
	Post	1.20	50	.404	.057

**Table 4. Comparison of students' performance on the pre-test and post-test**

Group	Test	Means scores	Difference of means	Std. Deviation	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental group	Pre	1.08	-.040	.198	-1.43	.000
	Post	1.12				
Control group	Pre	1.12	-.080	.274	-2.06	.000
	Post	1.20				

Despite the small size of the sample in the current investigation, relying on data in the Tables 2,3, and 4 illustrate the significance of short stories in learning vocabulary. The positive effects of the current study are in line with and reinforces previous research findings (Satitpor, 1995; Bell, 2001; Tutwisoot, 2003, Erkaya, 2005; Ekayanti & Palupi, 2009). Researchers who encouraged incorporation of short stories in vocabulary learning and teaching included David (2011) and Handayani (2013) and Kharaghani (2013) and Khamroeva, (2021). Aligning these studies to the context at hand, it can be said that short stories are advantageous to learning and teaching vocabulary not only in the Sudanese

context but also in some other relevant context that adopt English as their second or foreign language. For a better understanding of using short stories in vocabulary teaching, the teachers and interested research may refer to Sophie King (2008) and Ur (1996) among others.

Based on the findings and insightful ideas in the previous studies, the researcher recommends EFL teachers to consider developing learners' vocabulary through reading short stories. It engages them with the text they read, giving them broader context to the meaning of certain vocabularies, collect their thoughts and emotions as well as enable them to appreciate aesthetic qualities in a given text.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined the relationship between short story teaching and vocabulary enhancements in the Sudanese EFL context. The descriptive and analytical research design, the study reported some benefits of reading short stories for boosting EFL learners' vocabulary. Hence, reading short stories is one of the reading teaching strategies that EFL teachers can use to enhance their learners' vocabulary. Nevertheless, the current study results need to be strengthened by further research to explore the importance of learning vocabulary. More research on vocabulary learning, including different teaching methods, would provide more insights into developing students' vocabulary. Future researchers may also study short stories' strategies and techniques to upgrade learners' vocabulary. In the end of this study teachers and students must know the importance of teaching short stories to develop EFL learners' vocabulary. Researcher recommended that teachers may teach short stories in the classroom and also students pay attention to develop their vocabulary.

### **Disclosure Statement:**

I (the author of this paper) hereby declare that research ethics and citing principles have been considered in all the stages of this paper. I take full responsibility for the content of the paper in case of dispute.

### **conflict of interest:**

I have no conflict of interest to declare.

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## Appendix

### Vocabulary test

- 1- Learning new \_\_\_\_\_ is an important part of learning a new language.  
a- grammar    b- phrases    c- words    d- sentences
- 2- Learning some words & phrases in a new language allows people to start \_\_\_\_\_.  
a- reading    b- listening    c- writing    d- communicating
- 3- \_\_\_\_\_ has become increasingly central to the language teaching.  
a- vocabulary    b- communicating    c- paraphrasing    d- grammar
- 4- It is \_\_\_\_\_ for the teacher to teach large number of words.  
a- suitable    b- possible    c- impossible    d- adequate
- 5- How to develop your vocabulary? \_\_\_\_\_  
a- by practicing activities    b- by writing    c- by reading    d- by speaking
- 6- The teacher elicits words from the learning by giving \_\_\_\_\_  
a- examples    b- meanings    c- definitions    d- new words
- 7- In my country, this person is a hero because he was a great \_\_\_\_\_  
a- terrorists    b- arrogant    c- freedom fighter    d- daman
- 8- The relations between the words ( been and bean) is \_\_\_\_\_  
a- homophone    b- homo graph    c- antonyms    d- synonyms
- 9- The relation between the words (huge – massive – enormous - big) is \_\_\_\_\_  
a- homophone    b- homo graph    c- antonyms    d- synonyms
- 10- The relation between the words (park – park ) is \_\_\_\_\_  
a- homophone    b- homo graph    c- antonyms    d- synonyms