



THE IMPACT OF SHORT STORIES ON TEACHING OF ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

Among literary genres in educational curriculum of ESL/EFL, Short stories seem to be the most suitable choice for enhancing students' LSRW skills. Most of the students are in the position to comprehend the content and improve their vocabulary competency, as there is an easy flow of language in short stories. Short stories cover a wide range of fields such as language, arts, social studies and social issues, science and technology, plants and animals, etc. Any branch of knowledge can be dealt through short stories in more flexible ways. Short stories play an important role in shifting learning model to acquisition model. So, pedagogists advocate the incorporation of short stories in the syllabus. The purpose of this article is to familiarize EFL instructors with the effectiveness of using short stories in EFL instruction.

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INTRODUCTION

Though story telling is one of the oldest teaching tools in the world, it has occupied a prominent place in teaching of English at primary and secondary level. An effective teacher undoubtedly creates an indelible impression on the minds of children. Short stories are flexible enough to address a range of modern concerns as well. The National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF) recommended short stories to be included in the syllabus as the main literary genre. So, the incorporation of literature in the curriculum is possibly one of the most prominent issues in the field of Second Language (SL) or Foreign Language (FL) teaching for a few decades. It has been resurrected as an essential component of English language programmes at primary and secondary level throughout India. Over the past few decades, there has been much discussion on the benefits of attempting to teach any kind of literature, whether it is poetry, drama, novel or short story, as part of English language syllabus. Though every genre has its prominence in the syllabus, the recent research indicates that the incorporation of short - stories in both ESL and EFL is highly Advantageous. The studies indicate that teaching poetry, drama and novel for the students are impractical and problematical to use in the classes which have limited time and relatively big number of students. Many a student thinks that poetry is figurative and novels are lengthy. Dramas are lengthy and difficult to act out in crowded classes with in limited time. The scholars and the instructors have realized that short fiction can be used to reinforce the skills and complement language teaching. Telling stories promote language practice, reading comprehension and possible aesthetic appreciation. Moreover students can gain insight into literature by gaining entrance to a world, familiar or unfamiliar to them through the cultural aspects of stories, and taking a Voyage from the literary text to their own minds to find for ideas, leading to critical thinking.

THE OBJECTIVES OF SHORT STORIES IN TEACHING LANGUAGE SKILLS

Short stories are found to be the most suitable authentic literary genre to teach and improve learner's communicative competencies easily and effectively. One of the most prominent reasons is its brevity. Abrams (1970:158) defines it as a narrative that can be read at one sitting of one and half hour to two hours, and that is limited to a certain unique or single effect, to which way detail is subordinate. So the objectives of using short stories are:

- 1) Short stories are simple and practical.
- 2) Their length is short enough to cover very quickly.
- 3) Theme and plot are not too complicated for the students to understand during listening or reading on their own.
- 4) Variety of choices is available according to the students' interest.
- 5) They motivate the readers and promote imaginative and critical thinking skill.
- 6) Moral, mysterious and / or humorous stories' become valuable tools in the attainment of cultural knowledge.
- 7) Finally, short stories are available for all levels from the beginner to advanced learner, as well as for all ages from young learners to adults.

USES OF SHORT STORIES

REINFORCING THE FOURFOLD SKILLS (LSRW)

Short stories make the task easier for the language educators to teach the four skills at all levels of language proficiency for the students to engage themselves in different activities, such as group discussion (GD), character role play, criticism and interpretation of the theme, content, organization style and so on. To enrich the concept, Murdoch (2002:9) adds: "Short stories can, if selected and exploited appropriately, provide quality text content which will greatly enhance English language teaching courses for learners at intermediate levels of proficiency".

Listening and Reading short stories motivate the students not only to develop their reading skills, but also their imaginative skills. It further improves students' vocabulary by changing words from one



form to another form, for example, changing a word from verb to noun, noun to adjective and verb to adverb. And other learning activities include listening (Oral) comprehension, reading comprehension, finding synonyms and antonyms for the difficult words from the paragraphs. Guessing suitable words in the given blanks, matching the words with its appropriate meaning and analysis of particular statement improve both reading and writing skills. So the activities cultivate the reader's analytical thinking that leads to an understanding of the language in a better way. Finally, lower and average students attain rich benefits from the content of literary texts (short stories). Telling stories makes the students' mind evolved and their mouth becomes more and more flexible. Reading skill provides them with an opportunity to speak the language in a more imaginative way and discusses everyone's perspective. The focal point of literature enlarges students' vision and moves things along by way of dramatizing the situation in various ways.

MOTIVATING STUDENTS

Since short stories usually have beginning, middle and an end, they encourage students at all levels of language proficiency to continue reading them until the end to find out how the conflict is resolved. Elliott (1990: 197), for example, affirms that literature motivates advanced students "motivationally effective if students can engage with its thoughts and emotions and appreciate its aesthetic qualities". He stresses the importance of developing students' response (individual and group levels) and competence in literature.

Using short stories as part of literature in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (FL)/ Second Language (SL) is highly motivating. Literature holds high status in many cultures and countries. For this reason, students can feel a real sense of achievement by understanding a piece of highly respected literature. While selecting short stories, the instructors must pay attention to the level of proficiency of the students and those of the stories that play a vital role in motivating the students. For example, telling "The Brave Potter", a humorous Telugu folk tale translated by Marguerite Siek, the

students are highly motivated and they are curious about 'The leak' an invisible creature in the story. An unflinching interest of the students goes on throughout the story.

SHORT STORIES REFLECT CULTURE

Short stories are effective when teaching culture to EFL students. They transmit the culture of the people about whom the stories were written. By teaching short stories, the students learn about the culture, past and present and their tradition. Culture teaches students to understand and respect people's differences. When using literary texts, instructors must be aware of the culture of the people (if different from that of the students) for whom the text was written. As students face new culture, they become more aware of their own culture. They start comparing their culture to the other culture to see whether they find similarities or differences between the two cultures. Misinterpretation may occur due to differences between the two cultures as Gajdusk (1998: 232) explains: "To avoid misinterpretation, instructors should introduce the culture to the students or ask them to find relevant information about it".

The short story "The Violin" written by Chaganti Somayajulu, (known as Chaso) portrays the loving relationship of middle-class Indian couples. The lasting marital love of a clerk and his wife even in the extremity of adverse circumstances is realistically presented. While telling the story, the teacher can ask the students questions like: "Why did Venkatappayya sell the Violin?", "What did he buy with the money?" to excavate inner responses of the students and enhance their communicative abilities.

DEVELOP HIGHER – ORDER THINKING

Of all the benefits of short stories, higher-order thinking is the most exciting one. High intermediate/ advanced students can analyze what they read, therefore they start thinking critically when they read stories. Young (1996) discusses the use of children's stories to introduce critical thinking to college students. Howie (1993) points out that instructors have the responsibility to help the students to develop cognitive skills because everyone needs to "make judgments, be decisive, come to



conclusion, synthesize information, organize, evaluate, predict and apply knowledge”.

According to Bloom (1956) thinking skills are included in cognitive domain. They include both lower-order and higher-order thinking. Depending on the students' level of proficiency, instructors can activate students' lower-order and higher-order thinking. Beginners are able to recall information and respond to questions about dates, events, and places. Thus, when asked questions about names of characters, setting and plot of the story, they will have no difficulties in responding to the questions. This is level-1 of the taxonomy – knowledge. As students become more proficient in the language, they can move to level-2 – comprehension. At this level, they must demonstrate their comprehension by comparing, interpreting, giving description and stating main ideas. When students become even more proficient, they move to level-3 – application. In level-3, students try to solve problems by using the knowledge they have about the story. In level-4 – analysis – students must have reached the high intermediate level of proficiency to succeed. The reason is that the students must analyze, compare, contrast, explain, and infer etc., facts/ideas about the story. Upon reaching the advanced level of proficiency, students can synthesize and evaluate what they read; the instructors can then ask questions of last two levels of the taxonomy such as application, synthesis and evaluation.

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

Though there exist many methods and strategies of teaching and developing vocabulary of EFL learners, the short stories play a crucial role in developing vocabulary of the students. The students acquire the vocabulary through oral comprehension of story. It is argued that students who read widely have extensive vocabularies. Story telling bridges the decreasing gaps of vocabulary and comprehension. As use of language in short stories is simple, students can engage in meaning making and guessing through comprehension. This leads them to acquire vocabulary and its usage in a greater way. Students construct knowledge, when vocabulary is developed through immersion in language activities.

So, vocabulary is one of the most important parts of language acquisition. So, EFL teachers should attempt to develop the students' vocabulary and help them develop their communicative competence with it.

STORY TELLING BY STUDENTS

By selecting suitable stories keeping in mind the level of the students, the teacher can motivate the students and prepare them as story tellers. When children start telling stories, they grow in many ways. Normally, story telling improves the students' language skills but it promotes the self-esteem of the students also. The teachers should guide the children while they tell stories. Storytellers tell in many ways, let them celebrate the differences. Most of the students have creative thinking but they need to choose a story that they really enjoy, and one that feels right to tell. Children's telling can be improved by offering a variety of audiences. Telling to classmates is nice, but telling to younger listeners, community members or in other schools, etc. is even better. As children tell to new audiences, their confidence grows dramatically.

CONCLUSION

It is undoubtedly argued that short stories cover a wide range of fields such as language, arts, social studies and social issues, science and technology, plants and animals, etc. Short stories help instructors to teach literary, cultural and higher-order thinking aspects. Short stories have the power of motivating and inspiring capacities. They promote language skills as well as vocabulary development. There is a lot of scope for language acquisition. So, the incorporation of short stories as part of literature in the school curriculum is essentially encouraged. To make this success the teachers should select authentic materials on the basis of learners' needs and expectations, proficiency of the learner, interests, age and gender and different levels of learners. By doing this, the teaching-learning process becomes learner-centered. So, it has been eventually realized that the selection of short stories and their proper induction into ESL classroom teaching can definitely improve not only students' communicative competence in their target language, but also build



up their cultural identity which automatically encourages students to excel in all the fields.

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