

The impact of using short stories on learning English vocabulary by Sudanese EFL basic school students

Wafaa Abdulgadir Elbtraï Mohammed¹, Dr. Taj Eldeen Othman Mohammed Salih²

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of English, College of Science and Arts (Balgarn), University of Bisha, Saudi Arabia

² Assistant Professor, Department of English, College of Science and Arts (Balgarn), University of Bisha, Sudan

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of using short stories on vocabulary achievement of basic school students. It also attempted to reveal female students attitudes towards using short stories in enhancing vocabulary learning. The sample consisted of 70 EFL female students assigned in two groups: the control group and the experimental group. Besides, the data of the study were collected via two instruments: vocabulary pre-posttest, and a five-point Likert scale questionnaire. These instruments were validated by five EFL university professors. Similarity, the reliability of the test and the questionnaire were achieved by calculating Cronbach Alpha formula. The SPSS program was used to analyze the data of the study. The findings of the study revealed that there were statistically significant differences between the achievement of the experimental group and the control group on the post vocabulary test which indicated the effectiveness of using short stories in learning English vocabulary. Furthermore, the result of the study showed the positive attitudes of the experimental group students towards using short stories in learning English vocabulary. In addition, using short stories in Learning English vocabulary was useful, enjoyable, and motivating. Finally, the study concluded that short stories enrich female students' vocabulary.

Keywords: short stories, vocabulary, experimental, control, questionnaire, data

Introduction

Language is a communication system that differentiates human from other species. Vocabulary is the basic of communication. Ghabanchi and Anbarestani (2008) ^[8] state that acquiring and learning L2 new vocabulary turns out to be one of the most significant takes for EFL learners who seek fluently in the second language. Moreover, Anglin (1993) ^[4] found that school children acquire vocabulary very rapidly. By the time children are six years old, they will know around 10000 words.

There has been a lot of research conducted on how children learn new vocabulary from different languages exposures such as parents reading aloud to their children. Scarborough and Dobrich (1994) ^[16] point out that story reading is positively associated with vocabulary learning. Similarly, Pemberton and Watkins (1987) also state that when adults read to children in an interactive manner, they serve a didactic function and thus support language acquisition. Besides, Alna, (1999) ^[3] suggests that story reading increases children's vocabulary in both native and language being learnt. Story reading is an ancient art, used by humans for centuries. It is an effective tool that allows children to learn about the world around them. Children enjoy stories as they take them to a magical world and allow them to use their imagination. This makes incorporation of stories into a classroom easy as children find them enjoyable. Story reading allows young learners to develop their listening skills, reading skills, speaking skills and writing skills from context.

Stories present language that is grammatically sound and new vocabulary in context therefore making them easier to understand and more memorable.

Review of Literature

The importance of learning English vocabulary

Vocabulary Knowledge is the basis of oral and written communication .EFL students cannot master the four skills without mastering the English vocabulary. For example, they stop understanding a reading or a listening text if they face many new difficult words; they fail to speak or write if they lack the necessary vocabulary items. Al-Dersi (2013) confirms "Learning and mastering of target language vocabulary plays a very important role in any foreign language teaching and learning. The knowledge of vocabulary enables an EFL learner to establish and achieve successful communication which is the main goal of any foreign language teaching and learning. The knowledge of vocabulary also helps an EFL learner to explore the beauty of that language through a great variety of new words. Knowledge of vocabulary also helps an EFL learner to compare and contrast the foreign language and the mother tongue. It also helps in understanding the similarities and differences between the two languages and helps in learning language in true sense of of the term by understanding the language systems of the both languages "p.74. Bakhodirovna (2015) ^[5] claims, "Without some knowledge of vocabulary, neither language production nor language comprehension would be possible. Thus the growth of vocabulary knowledge is one of the essential pre-requisites for language acquisition and his growth of vocabulary knowledge can only be possible when teachers employ effective vocabulary teaching and learning strategies "(p.55). In addition, Nation (2001) ^[14] describes the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and language use as complementary: Knowledge of vocabulary enables

language use and, conversely, language use leads to an increase in vocabulary knowledge.

Mirkamali (2013) ^[13] adds, “vocabulary is an inseparable part of any language learning process. It would be impossible to learn a language without vocabulary” (p.147). Punch and Robinson (1992) ^[15] considered words as the fundamental elements of communication, and argued that they should be enhanced in the classroom. Vocabulary instruction is a vital focus for teaching at the elementary level. Hamer (1993) points out, “If language structure make up the skeleton of language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital oranges and the flesh” (p.153).

Furthermore, Lewis (1993) ^[12] supports this elaboration when he explains that lexis is the basis of language, and so it should be at the core of language teaching. Besides, lexis is misunderstood in language teaching because of the prevailing assumption that grammar is the basis of language and that mastery of the grammatical system is a prerequisite for effective communication.

Similarly, Schmitt (2000) ^[17] confirms, “Lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language” (p.55).

Lack of vocabulary knowledge is one of the serious problems for EFL learners Sudanese students especially sixth-grade students. In my opinion Sudanese EFL face difficulty in speaking due to their inability to understand the meaning of words because most vocabulary items are introduced to students in wordlists not in context.

Therefore, EFL Sudanese teachers should employ various efficient engaging techniques and strategies for teaching vocabulary to their students especially in the secondary stage. One of those techniques is teaching vocabulary via short stories. Finally, the teacher should be careful in choosing the appropriate stories paying attention to the length of the story. Bakhodirovna (2015) ^[5] explains “story selection is indeed one of the most important roles of the teacher. Since the lengths of short –stories quite vary; choose a story short enough to handle within course hours.

The shortness of the text is important for the students because they will see that they can read, understand and finish something in English .and it will give the students a feeling of achievement and self –confidence” (p.56).

The Merits of Using Short Stories in Learning Vocabulary
Using short stories in learning a foreign language especially for learning vocabulary is fruitful. Collie and Slater (1991) ^[7] illustrate that the benefits of using short stories in learning a foreign language .Include first of all, short stories are practical as their length is suitable to be used in the classroom environment; secondly, short stories do not consist of complex matters for the learners to work on their own; thirdly, short stories have a variety of choices for different needs and interests; and finally, short stories can be used for all levels all ages and all classes.

EFL professionals support the strategy of using short stories in teaching and learning vocabulary for EFL students. Wright, Betteridge and Bucky (1989) claim that using short stories in an effective way to learn vocabulary in EFL context. They argue that with the use of short stories teachers can create different context where students should use the language to communicate, exchange information and express their ideas .Similarly, Huang (1996) expresses that learning through short stories could encourage the operation of certain psychological and intellectual factors which can

promote communication, enhance self-esteem, motivation and spontaneity boosting learning vocabulary. As a result, it seems to be important to explore and investigate if EFL learners can learn vocabulary efficiently through stories.

The Role of storytelling in Language Learning

In the past five decades a lot of researches were carried out on storytelling and story reading in relation to language acquisition. Some studies focused on specific skills and others on language skills as a whole. Hus (2010) conducted a 10- week study looking at the effects if story telling in the development of speaking skills. In his study he used 25 fifth grades and 25 sixth grades. All the subjects were native Taiwanese speakers and were learning English as a second language.

The subjects were divided into an experimental group and a control group. Both groups received a test looking at their oral language complexity and no significant difference was found between the two. The experimental groups where then given instructions through the use of storytelling activities. The control on the other hand received instructions via English textbooks. In the post-test the experimental group has the ability to produce longer and more complex oral sentences in comparison with the control group. Hsu suggested that this was not only because the learners listened passively but because they also contributed by retelling the stories and hence were able to practice new vocabulary and sentences structures that were introduced to them.

Afrilyasanit and Basthomi (2011) carried out a study to investigate the role of digital storytelling in enhancing the oral production of EFL Eight graders. The students attended seven after school meeting, they had the opportunity to tell their stories and retell them several times. Students were also able to record themselves and listen to their recordings. The researchers found that with time the learners were able to tell their stories with smooth speech and in a very intelligible manner. It concluded that the opportunity to tell and retell a story gave students the chance to practice their vocabulary and pronunciation. I t also observed that the use digital story telling prompted the learner to ask more questions and show greater interest and participate in more oral discussions. It therefore concluded that the use of digital storytelling encourages learners to activity participate in speaking activities as well as help improve vocabulary and pronunciation.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims at investigating if the use of short stories helps children acquire language easier and quicker. The aim of the study is to achieve the following:

1. Investigating the effectiveness of using short stories on vocabulary achievement seventh grade students.
2. Investigating Sudanese seventh grade students' attitude towards learning English vocabulary via short stories.

Questions of the Study

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Are there any statistically significant differences between the achievement of the experimental group and the control group on the pre-post vocabulary test?
2. What are the experimental group student' attitudes towards using short stories in learning vocabulary?

Hypotheses of the Study

This study is planned to test the following hypotheses:

1. Short stories are effective techniques in developing EFL learner’s vocabulary.
2. Short stories enhance EFL learners’ awareness about learning new vocabulary item in context.

Significance of the study:

This study attempts to provide EFL practitioners with empirical evidence about the effectiveness of using short stories in enhancing EFL basic school student’ vocabulary learning. Consequently, the researcher hopes that the result of this study will be helpful to EFL teachers, students, supervisors, curricula developers, and administrators. Moreover, this study is an addition to the body of research in the field of vocabulary learning and acquisition.

Material and Method

The researcher used an experimental approach to investigate the effectiveness of using short stories on vocabulary achievement of basic school students. This paper implemented two steps procedures: Data collection and data analysis. Data were gathered from young learners through test. The test targets the two groups. Pre-test designed for control group while; post-test for experimental group.

Subjects

The population of this paper was the pupils at basic

governmental schools. The sample consisted of 70 EFL female students assigned in two groups: the control group and the experimental group. Besides, the data of the study were collected via two instruments: vocabulary pre-posttest, and a five-point Likert scale questionnaire

The Research Instruments

The data of the study were collected via two instruments: vocabulary pre-posttest and a five- point Likert scale questionnaire.

Analysis of questionnaire

Table 1: T-test comparing the Means between the Experimental Group and the Control Group on the Pre-Test

Group	N	M	SD	DF	T	Sig.
Experimental	35	21.94	2.26	68	0.655	0.515
Control	35	21.63	1.72			

Table 2: T-test Result of the Experimental Group and the Control Group on the Post-Test

Group	N	M	SD	DF	T	Sig.
Experimental	35	23.26	1.60	68	-4.28	0.000
Control	35	21.43	1.96			

Table 3: Means and Standard Deviations of the Experimental Group Student’ Responses towards Using “Short Stories “in Learning English Vocabulary.

No	Statement	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
1	I think learning new vocabulary from short stories is useful.	35	169	4.83	0.38	1
2	I think learning new vocabulary from short stories is enjoyable.	35	159	4.54	0.74	2
3	My motivation is increased when I learn vocabulary from short stories.	35	152	4.34	0.87	5
4	My reading comprehension skill is improved when I learn vocabulary from short stories.	35	143	4.09	1.12	10
5	In my opinion, learning new vocabulary from short stories enhances the student’s spelling skills.	35	148	4.23	0.77	8
6	I think learning new vocabulary from short stories exposes the student to the foreign culture.	35	144	4.11	0.87	9
7	I think learning new vocabulary from short stories improves the student’s writing skills.	35	153	4.37	0.77	4
8	Learning new vocabulary from short enhance my independence in learning English.	35	139	3.97	1.04	12
9	Learning new vocabulary from short stories minimizing my fear of making mistakes.	35	149	4.26	0.82	6.5
10	I believe that learning new vocabulary from short stories enhances my oral communicative skills.	35	155	4.43	0.85	3
11	It is easy to guess the meaning of new words from the context in short stories.	35	141	4.03	0.82	11
12	I think learning new vocabulary from short stories improves the student’s listening skills.	35	149	4.26	0.98	6.5

Table 4: Means and Standard Deviations of the Experimental Group towards Using Short Stories in Learning English Vocabulary

Group	N	M	SD
Experimental	35	.51.46	4.21

Table 5: One Sample T-test for the difference between the Mean of students’ Attitudes and the Mean of the Questionnaire

Group	N	M	SD	DF	T	Sig.
Experimental	35	51.46	4.24	34	21.72	0.000

Finding of the study

The findings of the study revealed that there were statistically significant differences between the achievement of the experimental group and the control group on the post vocabulary test which indicated the effectiveness of using short stories in Learning English vocabulary.

Conclusion

This study attempted to investigate the impact of using short stories on Learning English vocabulary by Sudanese Basic school students. In light of the findings of this study, it can be concluded that:

1. 1-Vocabulary is the basis of oral and written communication.
2. 2-EFL students have positive attitude towards using short stories in learning English vocabulary.
3. 3-Short stories enrich EFL students’ learning of English vocabulary.
4. 4-Using short story in learning English vocabulary is enjoyable and motivating.

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