



THE EFFECT OF READING SHORT STORIES ON GRAMMAR LEARNING IN INTERMEDIATE EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract:

This study investigated the effect of reading short stories on grammar acquisition among intermediate EFL learners in Afghanistan. While prior research has primarily focused on reading comprehension or vocabulary, limited attention has been given to grammar learning through short stories in the Afghan EFL context. To achieve this purpose, twenty-six intermediate EFL learners aged 18-28 were divided into two groups. A pre-test and post-test on advanced English verb tenses were administered. The experimental group received grammar instruction through short stories, while the control group used non-literary materials. Statistical analysis using a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant improvement in the experimental group. The p-value was found to be lower than 0.05, showing a significant difference between the groups and supporting the effectiveness of short stories for grammar instruction.

Keywords: short story, grammar, EFL Learners, second language acquisition, language teaching

1. Introduction

Language plays a central role in human communication. Through language, humans are able to express their emotions, thoughts and cultural values. Grammar provides the structural rules that allow for effective communication and language analysis. Grammar is commonly defined as the classification of word types and structures that make up sentences, not only in English but also in all languages (Maryam Yavarian, 2015). According to Rutherford (as cited in Larsen-Freeman, 1991), grammar is an essential component of any language teaching program. Richards and Renandya (2002) emphasized that grammar should not be disregarded in language teaching, as without a comprehensive knowledge of grammar, learners' language development will be limited.

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As Erkaya (2005) mentioned, the use of literary texts in the teaching and learning of language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) and language components (vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) is especially important in the field of foreign language education. Literary texts are more advantageous than informative materials to motivate the language acquisition process, as they provide a meaningful context for the processing of new language. Moreover, literary texts expand learners' knowledge of the target language and improve their proficiency in all language skills (Povey, 1967).

However, Krishna and Sandhya (2015) stated that short stories are among the most suitable authentic literary texts for teaching and learning a foreign language. According to them, the integration of literature into the curriculum is both possible and essential in the field of second language (SL) or foreign language (FL) teaching over the past few decades. In recent decades, there has been considerable discussion about the benefits of teaching literary texts such as poetry, drama, novels, and short stories as part of the English syllabus. Recent investigations show the significant advantages of using short stories in both ESL and EFL contexts.

Although literature-based instruction has received considerable attention in recent years, the specific effect of short stories on grammar learning has not been sufficiently investigated. This study, therefore, aims to examine how short story reading may influence grammar development in intermediate EFL learners.

1.1 Statement of Problem

Grammar has long been recognized as a central component of foreign language education. This prominence has also sparked ongoing debates about grammar instruction (Yavarian, 2015). Taylor (1983, pp. 70-71) claimed that "*students cannot use their mental understanding of grammar in real communication*". In many classrooms, learners tend to produce responses they believe the teacher expects, rather than engaging in spontaneous communication. Tengku Nazatul Shima Tengku Paris & Rahmah Lob Yussof (2012) noted that the major problem among students in the pre-test phase is understanding the grammar rules and applying them in their everyday lives. They are often unable to distinguish between tenses such as the present tense, present progressive, past progressive, present perfect and past perfect tense, i.e. they cannot express themselves exactly and with certainty. The motivation for this study stems from the importance of short stories in improving grammar understanding. While some studies have explored the use of literature in language instruction, the specific effects of short stories on grammar learning remain under-investigated.

1.2 Research Question

Therefore, the objectives of this research are to develop the grammar skills of intermediate EFL learners through the use of literary texts. The research question guiding this study is:

- To what extent does the use of short stories affect grammar learning among intermediate EFL learners?

1.3 Research Purpose

The purpose of the present study is to investigate how short stories can enhance the grammar skills of intermediate EFL learners. To achieve this aim, the study examines two groups of intermediate students from the English Language and Computer Learning Center (ELCLC) at the faculty of Education, Herat University. One group reads literary texts, while the other group reads non-literary texts. Their performance will be compared based on grammar use in writing tasks.

2. Literature Review

Many studies have discussed the benefits of using literature in language classes. For example, Maley (1983, as cited in Hismanoglu, 2005) identifies the following reasons for using literature in the language classroom:

- 1) universality,
- 2) non-triviality,
- 3) personal relevance,
- 4) variety,
- 5) interest,
- 6) economy and suggestive power,
- 7) ambiguity.

Although many scholars have identified various advantages of using literature in language classes, these benefits are often underutilized in grammar instruction. Chiang (2007) and Collie and Slater (1991) highlighted four major factors that support the integration of literature into language teaching. They emphasize that using literature in language classrooms is very useful and has several benefits. The first factor is the use of literature as an authentic source for language instruction.

Nurhayati & Sedubun (2024) conducted a systematic review and concluded that short stories provide meaningful context for grammar instruction, foster engagement, and the development of critical thinking. Aniuranti *et al.* (2021) conducted a significant development of post-test in grammar scoring following the exposure to the literary texts. Kahraman & Senturk (2022) implemented a quasi-experimental design with Turkish middle school students and found positive effects of short stories on grammar proficiency. According to Khan *et al.* (2021), through a corpus-based analysis of poems demonstrated that literary texts can support the learning of grammatical structures such as conditional forms and tenses. Kurdi & Nizam (2022) emphasized through critical analysis, that properly selected short stories enhance grammar acquisition, motivation, and foster creative thinking. As Hismanoglu (2005) mentioned, literary texts are written for native speakers and not specifically for educational purposes. Secondly, studying literary texts provides opportunities to improve language skills. Thirdly, literary texts can improve cultural awareness. Finally, the use of literature in the classroom can increase interaction. As Collie & Slater (1991) reported, using literary texts such as short stories for teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) and second language (ESL) is

highly inspiring. Literature holds a high status in many cultures and countries. As a result, students can feel a realistic sense of achievement by understanding a piece of literature, Murali Krishna & Sandhya (2015). In addition, Hirvela and Boyle (1988) reported that researchers in Hong Kong Chinese used four genres of literary texts with students (drama, short story, novel and poetry). Short stories were the easiest and most approachable literary genre for the students, allowing them to read with enjoyment and confidence. Collie and Slater (1991, p. 196) listed four advantages of short stories for learning and teaching. First, short stories are suitable due to their length. Second, short stories are not intricate or divided into diverse sections dealing with different concerns and styles. Third, we can use short stories for all levels (beginner to advanced), ages (young learners to adults) and classes (morning, afternoon, or evening classes). They have been shown to improve all four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking). Lao and Krashan (2000), in a study conducted in Hong Kong, showed that a group that read literary texts showed improvement in vocabulary and reading. Reading literary text can help students become critical thinkers. When students read, they interact with the text and analyze what they read, which leads to deeper understanding. As Richards and Rodgers (2001) mentioned, the main purpose of foreign language study is to learn a language in order to read literature or to benefit from the mental discipline. In fact, rehearsal in classrooms was memorization of grammar rules, vocabulary and translation of sentences and literary texts into the native language.

As Mustafa Mubarak Pathan (2012) mentioned, the stories from the Holy Quran and other Islamic stories like stories about the life of the Holy Prophet [peace and blessing be upon him], and the other religious and moral stories are highly effective not only in learning foreign language skills but also in improving students' moral character. Parлиндungan Pardede (2011) reported that short stories provide different processes for Reading, Listening, Writing and speaking classes and create meaningful texts to teach different aspects of the language to improve the students' interpretive strategies, and some stories can also function as other language skills like vocabulary development. Fatemeh Parvareshbar and Behrooz Ghoorchaei (2016), in a study conducted in Gorgan, Iran, investigated the effect of short stories on vocabulary acquisition, and the participants were in two groups of 25 students each. The results showed a significant difference between the groups, and using short stories can enhance learners' vocabulary performance. Khin Khin Aye and Khin Lay Phyu (2015) conducted the investigation at Yangon University with twelve learners who had studied English for the first year. Claimed that the results of their research showed that short stories help to improve students' spoken fluency and the cultivation of interest in literature. By using short stories as a tool to create significant opportunities for the students to practice verbal skills, this study proved that not only did the students become fluent in the target language, but their understanding of the literature was also promoted, and by selecting short stories, they learned vocabulary and grammar too. As Abbas Khorashadyzadeh (2014) mentioned, in a study conducted by him at Farhangian University in Birjand, Iran. He chose 172 learners from T.T.C. for this experimental research. The research design of this

study was an interview, and the results of this study showed that learners can enhance their independent English language learning and improve their oral skills by reading short stories. Meanwhile, the results of this investigation demonstrated that the participants' vocabulary and syntactic knowledge can also be improved by using short stories.

According to B. Harrold Allen (1965), after many years of teaching English in foreign countries, educators began to recognize the value of using literature in the learning process, and the short story is one of those literary genres that is good for teaching English. Teachers who prefer traditional textbook-based methods, such as the Grammar Translation Method, can also incorporate short stories to enrich grammar and vocabulary instruction. Grammar and vocabulary in this situation are part of English, which can be taught interactively through short stories. It is essential for teachers to use short stories to teach grammar, build students' character and increase students' vocabulary and students' knowledge. Short stories offer an interactive way to teach grammar, as they naturally contain various grammatical structures in meaningful contexts.

3. Research Methods

The main research design used in this study is a quasi-experimental design. Quasi-experimental designs allow partial control over variables and enable the researcher to examine causal relationships, even without full random assignment to treatment conditions. Like true experimental designs, they are also used to test causal hypotheses. It is also sometimes referred to as a pre-post investigation design (UNICEF, 2014, Quasi-Experimental Design and Methods).

3.1 Participants

The participants in this study were 26 intermediate-level Afghan EFL learners (male and female) who were studying at ELCLC (English Language and Computer Learning Center) in Herat University Education Faculty. ELCLC is an educational training center that focuses on EFL university students. Participants in this study were divided into two groups: the control group and the experimental group. There were 13 students in each class. Their ages were between 18 and 28. Among them, 8 were male and 18 were female. All students have been learning English for two or three years in ELCLC classes. They were able to read, and their comprehension of texts was fairly good. Although identifying verb tenses from a short story was difficult for students in the experimental group, they showed interest in the task. Table 1 presents the participants' demographic data.

3.2 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Herat University. All participants provided informed consent and were assured that their

data would remain confidential and would be used solely for research purposes. Participation was voluntary, and students could withdraw at any time without penalty.

Table 1: Demographic Data of the Participants

Age	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
18	0	2	2
19	0	3	3
20	2	6	8
21	2	6	8
22	2	0	2
23	1	0	1
24	1	0	1
28	0	1	1
Total	8	17	26

3.3 Instrument

In order to answer the research question, a short story titled “John has always traveled a lot” by Kenneth Beare was selected according to the students’ proficiency level. This story was chosen because it contained multiple verb tenses appropriate for intermediate learners. The story was used in the pre-test (see appendix). The pre-test was provided to both groups before the treatment was given to the experimental group. Both groups were tested using the same short story, which contained various verb tenses. The test focused on six verb tenses that students had previously studied. The post-test was identical to the pre-test. Both the pre-test and post-test were based on a short story containing 12 verb tenses, but students were required to identify only six specific tenses from the text: Simple Present, Simple Past, Present Progressive, Past Progressive, Present Perfect, and Past Perfect. Based on the study’s objectives, students were asked to identify 24 verb forms that were in the short story.

The materials provided to the two groups differed. The experimental group received 12 short stories as instructional materials, while the control group used flashcards with different questions. Both groups participated in traditional teaching techniques such as group work and pair work.

3.4 Procedure

The participants (N=26) were EFL learners, aged between 18 and 28, studying at the English Language and Computer Learning Center (ELCLC) at Herat University. Participants were selected through convenience sampling after taking a placement test using a sample text by *Kenneth Beare* to ensure appropriate proficiency levels. The study was conducted on two groups of students from ELCLC, Afghanistan. Both groups were at the same proficiency level, as confirmed by their placement test scores. The number of subjects in both groups was 13. Both classes were taught by the researcher over a period of four weeks (two sessions per week). During each session, both the experimental group and control group engaged in classroom activities. At the beginning of each session, a

short review of the relevant tenses was conducted. Then, students participated in an activity, which was different for each group. Finally, students worked in groups to complete the activity and discussed what they had learned regarding that particular tense. And the material used for the control class was selected from various sources, such as grammar books and reputable online materials. In contrast, the experimental class was taught grammar tenses through the use of short stories.

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

The whole data collection process took around 8 days. On the first day, both groups took pre-test in separate rooms and at different times. A pre-test was administered to assess the students' grammar skills and ensure homogeneity between the groups to confirm similar proficiency levels. The test consisted of a short story with 24 verb forms and was administered to both groups. Individual scores for both groups are presented in Table 2. The students were given 10 minutes to complete the pre-test. At the end of the 10 minutes, all pre-test papers were collected by the researcher. From the second day until the seventh day, students in the experimental group were taught grammar involving tenses (Simple present, Simple past, Present progressive, Past progressive, Present perfect, Past perfect) by reading short stories. The main aims were to let the students guess and identify the verb tenses used in the short stories. The students from the control group were taught grammar tenses with various methods for approximately 10 minutes per session. On the eighth day, a 10-minute post-test was conducted in both classes. The data from both groups were analyzed by using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS, Version 22). Data gathered from the pretest and post-test were analyzed by measuring the achievement percentage of the participants' scores.

4. Results

The present study was designed to investigate the effect of reading short stories on grammar learning among intermediate EFL learners. The research question focused on improving the grammar skills of students through short stories. The data were analyzed by using SPSS software (version 22), and a one-way ANOVA was used as the main statistical procedure. Based on the results, the researcher found a significant difference between the outcomes of the two groups.

Table 2: Pre-Test and Post-Test Results

	Group 1 (Control)	Group 2 (Experimental)
Pre-test	5.884615385	9.576923077
Post-test	5.307692308	11.26923077

Before grammar instruction, the experimental and control groups had average pre-test scores of 5.88 and 9.57 to determine prior knowledge of students. After teaching the

tenses with short stories, the researcher found that the experimental group had a significantly higher post-test score.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the pre-test

Groups	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.00	13	5.8846	4.05254
2.00	13	9.5769	4.33420
Total	26	7.7308	4.52157

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of the learners' pre-test results, including the number of participants (N=26), mean scores, and standard deviation. As shown in Table 3, the pre-test mean scores of the control and experimental groups were different. That means there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups.

The standard deviation of the pre-test for the control group was 4.05254, and the standard deviation of the pre-test for the experimental group was 4.33420. This indicates that the pre-test standard deviation of the experimental group was slightly higher than that of the control group.

Table 4: One-way ANOVA: Results of the pre-test scores among groups

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	88.615	1	88.615	5.034	.034
Within Groups	422.500	24	17.604		
Total	511.115	25			

Table 4 shows that the p-value (sig.) is less than 0.05, indicating a significant difference between the performance of the two groups. ($F=5.034$, $P=.034 < 0.05$)

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of the post-test

Groups	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.00	13	5.3077	4.10558
2.00	13	11.2692	4.24075
Total	26	8.2885	5.09544

As shown in Table 5, the mean post-test score of the experimental group was 11.2692, and the control group was 5.3077. This indicates that the experimental group outperformed the control group. Post-test standard deviation of the control group was 4.10558, and post-test standard deviation of the experimental group was 4.24075. The post-test standard deviation of the experimental group is greater than that of the control group. Tables 4 and 5 also indicate that the experimental group outperformed the control group.

Table 6: One-way ANOVA: Results of the post-test scores among groups

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	231.010	1	231.010	13.261	.001
Within Groups	418.077	24	17.420		
Total	649.087	25			

Table 6 presents that there is a significant difference between the groups ($F=13.261$, $p=.001<0.05$). This shows that there is a significant difference in grammar scores between the experimental and control groups when grammar is taught by using short stories.

5. Discussion

Grammar plays a crucial role in language learning, as it provides the basic rules and formal arrangement and relationship of words in a sentence.

The aim of this study was to explore the effect of reading short stories on the learning of grammar of EFL intermediate learners. Returning to the research question, the purpose of this study was to answer this question: Do short stories have an effect on the learning of grammar of EFL intermediate students?

The results of this study indicate that reading short stories affected the intermediate and language learners' grammar skills. Short stories improve learners' motivation, and this makes them more interested in classroom participation. This outcome is further supported by the statistical results, which show that there was a significant difference between the means of pre-test and post-test. The mean of the post-test was higher than that of the pre-test. And it shows the impact of short stories on learning grammar among EFL learners.

The results of the present study are consistent with Tengku Nazatul Shima Tengku Paris (2012), who found that board games are useful tools in grammar lessons and have positive consequences in grammar classes. By using board games, students become motivated to learn grammar because board games are an interesting and useful method in language classrooms.

Khin Khin Aye and Khin Lay Phyu (2015) claimed that using short stories as a tool creates meaningful opportunities for learners to practice speaking skills. Parlindungan Pardede (2011) mentioned that short stories are very useful in improving learners' vocabulary and reading skills. Based on the findings of this study and by analyzing the data, it was found that using short stories as an instructional tool had a positive effect on grammar classes among English learners in the experimental group.

This study was conducted with intermediate-level learners focusing on grammar skills. Similar studies could be conducted at other levels of language proficiency (elementary, intermediate, and upper-intermediate).

Finally, the present findings confirm the positive impact of reading short stories on learning grammar. This study also demonstrates that literature can not only be studied as a subject but also be used as a valuable resource in language teaching.

6. Conclusion

The objective of this study was to improve the grammar skills of students through literary texts. To achieve this, the researcher selected short stories from literary texts as they are highly beneficial to learn and teaching language skills. Short stories can be used to provide different activities in reading, listening, writing, and speaking classes. This research has shown that literary texts are useful for learning and teaching language skills and language areas. Therefore, literary texts enhance the knowledge of learners.

The findings of this study are helpful for those involved in the process of language teaching and learning within the education system. In many grammar classes, students lack motivation, and they do not have the opportunity to identify grammar points while reading a text. Using short stories as a teaching tool can create opportunities for the students to learn better grammar points. It also shows that students can learn skills and sub-skills with short stories.

Throughout the course, students learned some grammar tenses through selected short stories. This research focuses on grammar skills through reading literary texts. This investigation shows that in language classes, we can use literary texts as a source for language teaching. The administration of the post-test to the experimental and control groups proved that the short stories had a positive effect on developing the grammar skills of intermediate learners.

In conclusion, the use of short stories in EFL classrooms not only supports the acquisition of grammar but also contributes to the development of learners' overall language proficiency. This study provides evidence that using literary texts in grammar teaching can significantly enhance the learning experience for intermediate EFL learners.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author

Ghazala Kakar is an independent researcher from Afghanistan. She holds a BA in English Language and has worked in the fields of education, language learning, and child protection. Her research interests include second language acquisition, grammar instruction, and the use of literature in EFL contexts.

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Appendix

By Kenneth Beare :

“John has always traveled a lot. In fact, when he was only two years old, he first flew to the US. His mother is Italian and his father is American. John was born in France, but his parents had met in Cologne, Germany, after they had been living there for five years. They met one day while John’s father was reading a book in the library, and his mother sat down beside him.

John travels a lot because his parents also travel a lot.

As a matter of fact, John is visiting his parents in France at the moment. He lives in New York now, but has been visiting his parents for the past few weeks. He really enjoys living in New York, but he also loves coming to visit his parents at least once a year.

This year, he has flown over 50,000 miles for his job. He has been working for Jackson & Co. for almost two years now. He’s pretty sure that he’ll be working for them next year as well. His job requires a lot of travel. In fact, by the end of this year, he’ll have traveled over 120,000 miles! His next journey will be to Australia. He really doesn’t like going to Australia because it is so far. This time, he is going to fly from Paris after a meeting with the company’s French partner. He’ll have been sitting for over 18 hours by the time he arrives!

John was talking with his parents earlier this evening when his girlfriend from New York telephoned to let him know that Jackson & Co. had decided to merge with a company in Australia. The two companies had been negotiating for the past month, so it really wasn’t much of a surprise. Of course, this means that John will have to catch the next plane back to New York. He’ll be meeting with his boss at this time tomorrow.”

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