

"Exploring The Impact Of Short Stories On Vocabulary Development In Moroccan EFL Classrooms: Perspectives From Teachers And Students"

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Abstract

Language is fundamentally built on its vocabulary, which is essential for communication, knowledge exchange, and relationship building. English Foreign language (EFL) students, like young children, initially use single words before progressing to complex structures, making vocabulary acquisition crucial for effective communication. David Wilkins (1972) aptly noted, "Without grammar, very little can be conveyed. Without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed" (as cited in Kurgat (2014) p. 111). In EFL classrooms, teaching and learning vocabulary is vital. This study investigates the attitudes of teachers and students toward using short stories to enhance vocabulary acquisition. Utilizing a qualitative research approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with twenty participants—ten teachers and ten students. Findings reveal that both educators and learners view short stories as a significant tool for improving language skills, particularly speaking. Additionally, there were no notable differences in the perceptions of the two groups. The study underscores the importance of short stories in EFL education and suggests their integration into the curriculum to facilitate vocabulary development.

Keywords: EFL Learner, Vocabulary, speaking, Short-stories.

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I. Introduction

The English language, as universally acknowledged, serves as the globe Lingua Franca of the world, contributing to the feeling that the world is more interconnected due to its widespread usage. Therefore, the significance of English as a universal medium of communication cannot be ignored, as it has facilitated communication among people from diverse cultures and nations. Consequently, EFL teachers around the globe are consistently adapting, adjusting, or even replacing approaches, strategies, and materials to meet the evolving and diverse requirements of learners. This switch primarily stems from instructors seeking more reasonable methods to enable their students to develop proficiency and fluency across all language levels.

The key element in teaching and learning a foreign language is vocabulary instruction. This is because the number of words a learner of foreign language knows and uses determines their proficiency. As a matter of fact, vocabulary knowledge is important in learning the four main language skills (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) and especially the productive ones, which are writing and speaking. To become a good listener, reader, writer, and speaker, one must have baggage and knowledge about the necessary vocabulary. Yet, learners who don't have a good vocabulary repertoire have problems with these four skills. Therefore, both the teachers and students must give vocabulary teaching special consideration. Hence, expanding the vocabulary of EFL learners requires a purposeful and organized method. This entails that EFL teachers must use the proper approach, strategies, and resources. Still, the outcomes that each approach, tactic, and resource used while accomplishing the specified objectives are what define their success.

The primary goal of teaching and learning a foreign language is to help students become competent speakers who can communicate effectively in the target language and become autonomous learners. This paper explores what EFL high school teachers and students' views are about using short stories to improve their vocabulary repertoire and enhance their speaking skills.

Vocabulary

The comprehension of written or spoken words is referred to as *vocabulary*. This understanding suggests conceptual word knowledge that extends ordinary dictionary descriptions. Actually, gaining such cognition is a process that takes time as pupils learn how to connect words, study examples and related words, and correctly utilize the words in sentences.

There are two types of vocabulary EFL students should develop proficiency at: oral and written vocabulary; productive and receptive. These two categories of vocabulary were distinguished by Nation (1990) (as cited in Heidari, 2019). Productive vocabulary refers to the words that students have been taught and are expected to be able to use in both speaking and writing. In contrast, receptive vocabulary consists of words that students can understand when they encounter them in listening or reading, but may not necessarily be able to produce in speaking or writing.

The importance of vocabulary for EFL learners

As the major objective of any foreign language teaching and learning process is leading successful and meaningful conversations. Therefore, vocabulary acquisition is very important and crucial in teaching and learning in an EFL classroom. As a matter of fact, vocabulary knowledge enables EFL learners to discover the beauty of a language through the wide range of new words. Furthermore, it aids in the process of comparing and contrasting the learner's mother tongue and the foreign language. By comprehending the linguistic system of the two languages, it also aids in acquiring language in the true meaning of the word and helps in appreciating the similarities and contrasts between the two languages. That is to say, vocabulary is the basis of any language learning, which leads to effective communication and allows EFL learners to express themselves in the target language. A learner who has proficiency in vocabulary is a good and effective speaker; A learner who has poor vocabulary or lacks vocabulary is being lexically challenged. Poor vocabulary repertoire could limit EFL learners and put them in a dilemma, where they find themselves in a difficult situation because this prevents them from having the opportunity to use the language and communicate with others.

Enriching the vocabulary of EFL learners is crucial since a weakness in vocabulary can negatively impact all other language skills. And The major factor that is considered to be responsible for EFL learners' inability to create effective oral or written communication is a lack of baggage in vocabulary. It is consistently observed that students with reading difficulties have inadequate vocabulary. While a shortage in vocabulary frequently leads to a lack of effective communication, having a solid understanding of important terminology aids EFL learners in speaking and writing. As a result, every effort should be taken to help EFL learners expand their vocabulary. For this reason, a number of academics and eminent ELT experts, such as Hiebert and Kamil, (2005), stress the importance of making a deliberate effort to expand the vocabulary of EFL learners to success in communication.

It has been long acknowledged in language pedagogy that vocabulary is a very important component in language learning and teaching. It is the cornerstone of communication, facilitating speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills to enhance language proficiency, as highlighted by Al Qahtani (2015). Moreover, some scholars explicitly stated that mastering vocabulary is just as crucial as mastering grammar. According to Caro and Mandinueta (2017) lexical competence and linguistic use have a synergistic connection in which language use encourages the acquisition of new lexical knowledge.

Consequently, the basic element for learners' language excelling is the acquisition of new vocabulary both consciously and unconsciously. Thus, it's advisable for EFL teachers to make efforts to expand their students' vocabulary and help in the development of their communication skills using it.

Ways, methods and strategies for developing vocabulary of EFL Learners

The traditional way of teaching vocabulary in an EFL classroom is through brainstorming, using objects or realia, drilling, and pictures or drawing, and mostly it is taught separately from the other skills. During a vocabulary lesson, the teacher engages students in a discussion to draw out or elicit vocabulary related to a specific theme. This involves asking questions and encouraging students to recall and use words they already know that are connected to the topic. Additionally, the teacher introduces a few new words to expand the students' vocabulary. The goal is for students to learn and practice these new words by actively using them in exercises that range from tightly guided (controlled) to somewhat freer (semi-controlled), where they have some room to make choices about how to use the vocabulary. Memorizing a list of new words by jotting them down without any actual context practice is what is considered to be teaching vocabulary. This method frequently proves to be ineffective since EFL learners who learn this way are unable to convey the information in a suitable manner. Kember (2016) argues for the importance of integrating both memorization and understanding in the learning process. He proposes that a hybrid approach where memorization supports understanding and vice versa, can enhance learning outcomes. It is discouraged by many academics to learn vocabulary by memorization. Words shouldn't be learned in isolation or just by memory without comprehension, as Krashen (1985) discusses the

importance of comprehensible input and that language acquisition occurs naturally through exposure to comprehensible input rather than through conscious memorization or explicit instruction. In other words, it takes more than just memorizing vocabulary words to add them to one's repertoire; understanding when and how to utilize them in suitable contexts is also essential. Here's where vocabulary-learning techniques come into play. For this reason, using stories to acquire vocabulary in an EFL environment is considered a useful strategy. This is because teachers can create a variety of scenarios in which students are required to utilize the language for communication, information sharing, and opinion expression by using narratives. Therefore, it is essential to look into the effectiveness of learning vocabulary through reading short stories. So, the primary focus of the upcoming parts will be on the use of short stories in teaching, learning, and mastering vocabulary for EFL students.

Reading and vocabulary

Even though there are numerous approaches and techniques for teaching and expanding the vocabulary of EFL learners, extensive reading is viewed as crucial to the development of these learners' vocabulary. Knowing words and understanding texts are strongly correlated, as confirmed by a large amount of research on vocabulary knowledge and processing texts. Actually, scientific data suggests that exposure to written texts is a major factor in the acquisition of new vocabulary by learners of EFL as claimed by Herman, Nagy, and Anderson (1985) and Sternberg (1987). Acquiring new words is one aspect of effective reading teaching; another is helping students retain those words once training is over and recall them when reading new material (Martin-Chang, Levy, and O'Neil, 2007). The relationship between reading and vocabulary is interdependent, with each influencing and enhancing the other. For both EFL teachers and students, using short stories has numerous advantages. Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) emphasize the benefits of using short stories for enhancing the vocabulary of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, such as that short stories provide rich contexts for encountering new vocabulary words. According to Ilham and Brigui (2024), "a short story is one of the most useful ways to help improve learners' speaking skills, as it helps students to evolve their abilities to exchange ideas, express themselves, and debate, and also to increase their vocabulary repertoire" (p. 54). Also, short stories frequently utilize vocabulary words repeatedly throughout the narrative. This repetition reinforces the learners' understanding and memory of the words, making them more likely to remember and use them in the future. In addition, when reading short stories, learners often need to infer the meanings of unfamiliar words based on context clues. This process encourages active engagement with the text and develops learners' ability to guess word meanings, a valuable skill for independent language learning. Moreover, short stories reflect authentic language use in natural contexts, exposing learners to idiomatic expressions, colloquialisms, and grammatical structures as they occur in real-life communication. This exposure enhances learners' understanding of how words are used in authentic language contexts. Another thing is that short stories often incorporate cultural elements, such as customs, traditions, and societal norms, providing learners with insights into the cultural aspects of the language they are learning. Understanding cultural context can deepen learners' comprehension of vocabulary words and promote cultural awareness. Finally, short stories are engaging and enjoyable to read, which motivates learners to actively participate in the language-learning process. Increased motivation and engagement can lead to more effective vocabulary acquisition and overall language proficiency.

II. Methodology

A qualitative research approach was used to find out EFL high school teachers and students views about using short tales to improve their vocabulary repertoire and enhance their speaking skills. In order to do this, a semi-structured interview was employed, during which questions about the conventional approach to teaching English as a foreign language as well as their varied perspectives regarding the employment of short tales in the teaching and learning of vocabulary and language acquisition in general were asked.

Participants

The study's objective was to gather views from EFL teachers and students about how short stories impact the development of word knowledge; therefore, the participants were divided into two groups. The first group was composed of 10 students (5 males and 5 females). All of these students had some prior exposure to the English language and belong to 2nd baccalaureate classes. The second group was composed of 10 EFL teachers (five males and five females). All teachers are working in public high schools in Morocco, and the years that each teacher had spent instructing English varied. Furthermore, some of them asserted that they had taught literary texts at some time in their teaching careers and that they had included various teaching strategies and resources into their classes.

Research Questions

1. What are the teachers and students' general attitudes regarding the use of short stories in the EFL classroom to expand vocabulary repertoire?

2. What differences exist between the teachers and students' perspectives and opinions?

Data Collection and Analysis

As previously indicated, two sets of open-ended questions, one for each of the teachers and students, were utilized in a semi-structured interview to gather data. It is not an easy undertaking to analyze qualitative data. Because of the nature of the data, its analysis should be done with the utmost care due to partiality and personal perspective. For the purpose of analyzing the data that has been gathered, I made sure to make the greatest effort and seek the advice of another authority on the subject. To achieve this, the data were first transcribed, and each participant's transcript was assigned a label corresponding to their role: teacher (T1, T2, T3, etc.) or student (S1, S2, S3, etc.). Following a thorough study of the transcripts, they were categorized and condensed into five main topics, which are: 1) interest in reading, 2) alteration in teaching strategies and resources, 3) stimulate motivation and performance 4) Use of short stories to boost vocabulary and facilitate speaking, 5) representation of the target language's culture. This allowed for a better understanding of the participants' responses and reactions.

Outcomes

Interest in Reading

The purpose of the researcher's first question is to ask: What do you like to read, and how often do you read? was to find out how frequently people read and what kinds of books they enjoy reading. Also, to measure the participants' level of interest in reading, which would have an impact on their future teaching and learning. Upon reviewing all of the participants' responses, it was found that seventeen out of twenty enjoyed reading frequently, and remarkably, fifteen of them stated they like reading "self-development books," or "Manga books," as some called it. A student even brought up the following justifications for picking up to read manga:

Participant 3, S3, "Uhm, actually. As you can see, I'm sort of busy right now because I have the national exam ahead, but generally speaking, I try to find time to read, even if I am busy. I enjoy reading manga because it encourages me to follow the events with great enthusiasm, and it is easy to stick with the ideas. For me, manga inspires me to push through when I don't feel like doing so. I always make time to read."

Participant 10, T6, "*I used to read a lot, but right now, I read every now and then. I like to read romance, poetry, and mystery. Sometimes I read other genres, depending on the content and my mood.*"

Participant 18, S8, "*I can't say that I read all the time, but whenever I have time, I try to read. It is very difficult to find free time for reading. As a baccalaureate student, you know the assignments and the exam. Well, when I surf on the net sometimes I read short stories, which I enjoy and find better because they are shorter and can be completed in a short amount of time while also learning something valuable from them.*"

We can conclude that readers can embody and become a part of the story through reading experiences, which have a profound impact and reflection on their lives. Therefore, language teachers and learners can benefit from reading experiences when they use them creatively in order to see how language is portrayed in written text, especially narratives, and also to examine the relationship between reading and other language skills, especially speaking. Bright and McGregor (1970) recognize that reading is the most pleasant route to command of the language, because it is through reading that the student is most likely to find words used memorably with force and point (as cited in Mart, 2012, p. 91). It appears that reading is a key factor in language learning,

Alteration in teaching strategies and resources.

The majority of teachers and learners supported the proposition of replacing the material(s) and teaching strategies used in the EFL class with more modern approaches in order to guarantee that the teaching and learning styles align with more contemporary views. The participants' responses indicated that 16 out of 20 approve the substitution of new resources and teaching strategies for the class. Additionally, the majority of participants emphasize that modern learners prefer to be actively engaged in their education and not to be passive, which, according to them, is the main characteristic of the traditional practice of teaching and learning. And this is because of the textbook used, in which learners are supposed to learn about the language and not to learn the language itself and use it, exclusively for the aim of passing exams or tests and ignoring the main objective of teaching a language, which is to use language to communicate.

Participant 12, T5, "*I think the textbook activities adopt old ways of teaching where the students are passive most of the time, which make TTT higher than STT, so the students are not concentrated or participating, and this is because of a lack of motivation. However, when using cooperative or group work and tackling topics they are interested in, you can see that they are more involved in the teaching/learning process, yet you can feel that they are limited because of the lack of vocabulary, thus they cannot express themselves enough.*"

One learner, however, as shown in the speech below, mentioned that more authentic materials and inputs should be introduced.

Participant 1, S11, *"In our first-year bac or even now (second year baccalaureate), most of the words presented are related to issues and topics that are not used in our daily life conversations. For instance, sustainable development, brain drain, types of education, etc. Maybe it would be better to use or read stories that have morals and give lessons in life and also use vocabulary that we will need in our daily life interactions."*

Stimulate motivation and performance

All participants supported the fact that using literature or short stories encourages students and improves their performance later in the learning process. Given that the questions from the teachers and the students are completely different, certain questions talked about the overall issue without specifically naming it, such in this case, "motivation" or "performance." Among the questions that were asked to the students were: *How do you feel about using short stories in learning English? And how do you think literature, in this case "short stories," would help in developing the English language?*

On the other hand, the terms "motivation" and "performance" were addressed directly in the teacher's questions.

Participant 6, T1, *"Short stories naturally arouse the interest of learners, who are primarily curious about the unfolding and resolution of the story. Consequently, I think picking up good and suitable guidance can serve to motivate learners... Stories are different from novels and books, which might take longer to read and can be boring and challenging to finish quickly. In addition to teaching students about paragraphing and cohesiveness, short stories will provide them with the grammatical structures and literary techniques they may want for language development."*

Participant 8, S2, *"In my opinion, it is pretty helpful. In addition to coming across new words, I really enjoy reading short stories. I find that vocabulary is boring on its own, but short stories spice things up. It's quite successful, in my opinion, because the learners won't grow bored, even if they don't enjoy reading, and who knows, maybe this may make them like it as well. That is why I think it works so well. Short stories are a good method for them to practice the language."*

Short stories can significantly boost motivation and performance quickly, as demonstrated by teachers' and students' responses. According to Cunningham (1998) "The more reading you will do, the more you will increase your exposure to vocabulary that doesn't usually make its way into the spoken language" (as cited in Akbar, 2014, p. 95). Also, Amira and Nessrine (2022) highlights how the brevity, thematic diversity, and narrative richness of short stories can serve to engage and motivate students in their language learning journey. She further points out that utilizing the unique attributes of short stories, teachers can create dynamic and engaging language learning experiences that captivate students' interest, enhance their linguistic competence, and foster a lifelong appreciation for literature and language.

Use of short stories to boost vocabulary and facilitate speaking

According to the responses, eighteen participants said that short stories improved their language competencies, especially enriched their vocabulary, while almost all the participants said that using short stories in EFL classes helped them improve their other language skills as well.

For instance, a teacher stressed that:

Participant 19, T12, *"If we provide activities that are relevant to the short stories' setting, I believe we can utilize them to teach all four language skills and subskills. We can formulate discussion questions to improve their speaking skills. To improve their writing abilities, we can assist them in creating a brief play. To improve listening skills, we can play the short story's audio version."*

Likewise, a student (Participant 9) stated that: *"In my opinion, it can be quite helpful. We can read aloud in groups and work on our pronunciation. I believe that reading stories can help us catch up on new vocabulary and comprehend the world around us, so I will be glad if it's part of our curriculum and if our teachers are skilled at using it."* After being asked, what are your thoughts about changing the activities on the textbooks with short stories to improve your language competence, especially lexical competence?

Representation of the target language's culture

The teachers were the only ones to respond on this final but crucial issue because they were the ones who were asked the question directly. *In what ways do short stories help in the comprehension of the target language culture?* The 10 teachers expressed agreement toward short stories as a useful tool for interpreting or illustrating the target language (TL) culture; all of them believed that language and culture are inseparable for a variety of reasons, which are:

Participant 5, T7, *"I believe that short stories capture the core of the culture of the target language since they provide an extensive number of scenes of cultural examples and samples. As a result, learners can learn more and increase their understanding about TL culture by reading short stories."*

Participant 8, T2, *"Learning a language means learning the culture of that language since language is culture. Learners will first recognize or become familiar with the functional or sociolinguistic side of the language through short stories, after which they can identify the numerous cultural factors that are pertinent to the target language."*

Participant 10, T6, *"This question is the most important one. Since language and culture have an unbreakable connection, teachers of EFL must also address cultural issues that significantly affect students' ability to communicate, especially when it comes to comprehension. I think that every literary work, but especially short stories, reflects the culture of the setting. Short stories in particular, in my opinion, are literary works that reflect the context's culture. In order to help students get familiar with these difficulties, teachers should provide a short narrative that is rich in TL cultural issues."*

Several scholars have argued that literature provides detailed and profound understanding of target language (TL) cultures by presenting real-world experiences, often revealing cultural details and complexities that other means may not be able to convey as clearly. Such as Carter and McRae (1996) and McKay (2001) affirm that teaching literature in an EFL context can greatly enhance students' learning in two primary areas. Firstly, because literature uses authentic language, through which learners can develop their language proficiency. Secondly, literature serves as a medium for students to gain comprehension of literature as well as reading and interpretation abilities by negotiating various interpretations.

III. Findings Regarding The Research Questions And Discussion

To answer the study questions, *"What are the teachers and students' general attitudes towards using short stories in the EFL classroom to expand vocabulary repertoire?"* and *"What differences exist between teachers' and students' perspectives and opinions on the use of short stories in the EFL classroom for expanding vocabulary repertoire?"* After a general analysis of the responses, it was found that most of the participants had favorable opinions and attitudes toward the use of short stories to boost vocabulary when teaching and learning English as a foreign language. Similarly, it was found that there is no noticeable difference between the responses provided by teachers and students on how beneficial short stories help with teaching and learning English as a foreign language. According to Lazar (2016), literature is a great way to engage pupils in language learning because it is entertaining, inspiring, and frequently included in curricula. He emphasizes that literature, including short stories, can engage students emotionally and intellectually, subsequently making vocabulary learning more meaningful and memorable. She highlights the depth and range of vocabulary that literary texts offer. Moreover, Nunan (2004) promotes task-based approaches as an alternative to traditional coursebook-driven instruction. He argues that authentic tasks and real-world language use provide more meaningful and effective language learning experiences compared to the often-artificial contexts presented in coursebooks.

IV. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to enhance vocabulary development in Moroccan EFL classrooms through the use of short stories. For teachers, it is suggested to encourage the regular use of short stories to enhance vocabulary learning and to integrate these stories with other language skills such as speaking, listening, and writing. Teachers should also use a variety of culturally relevant short stories to engage students, providing additional vocabulary exercises and discussions that stem from these stories. Furthermore, creating a classroom environment that supports active participation and critical thinking through storytelling can significantly benefit vocabulary learning. For curriculum developers, it is recommended to incorporate short stories as a central component in the EFL curriculum for vocabulary development. Selecting age-appropriate and culturally sensitive short stories can make the material more relatable

and effective. Additionally, providing professional development opportunities for teachers on the effective use of short stories can enhance their teaching strategies.

V. Conclusion

The results of this study support existing perspectives on EFL teaching and learning, demonstrating that both teachers and students generally have positive views on using short stories to enhance vocabulary. Almost all 20 participants expressed favorable opinions, suggesting that literature, especially short stories, should be integrated into EFL curricula more frequently. This approach provides a fresh and creative method for teachers to facilitate improved language skills across all areas, not just vocabulary. The study underscores the value of short stories in offering authentic language exposure and making content relatable to students. Literature can connect learners to real-life themes like justice, society, freedom, and hope, making language learning more engaging and meaningful. These findings align with previous research, reinforcing the growing trend of incorporating literature into EFL classrooms. However, the study has limitations, as it only examined the perspectives of teachers and students on using short stories for vocabulary improvement. Future research should explore the long-term effects of short stories on vocabulary retention and compare the impact of different types

of short stories, such as contemporary versus classic. Additionally, investigating the role of digital storytelling in vocabulary development could provide new insights, blending modern tools with traditional methods to enhance learning outcomes.

In summary, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by highlighting the positive impact of short stories on vocabulary acquisition in EFL settings and advocating for their increased use in curricula to foster better language development.

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