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## Enhancing EFL Learning Through Short Stories and Narratives: Enriching Vocabulary and Improving the Learning Process

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### Abstract

The significance of vocabulary in the academic lives of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners cannot be denied. Insufficient vocabulary can lead to significant issues in other language skills. David Wilkins (2007, P. 111) rightly emphasizes that "Without grammar, very little can be conveyed. Without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed." Therefore, teaching and learning vocabulary in EFL classrooms is crucial, and various methods and strategies are used for this purpose. However, the success of these methods and strategies depends on the nature of the material and EFL learners' perceptions towards them. This paper aims to investigate the role of short stories in enhancing the vocabulary of EFL learners. Individuals Learning English as a Foreign Language, Employment of Brief Narratives, Approaches for Teaching Vocabulary, Language Proficiency in English as a Foreign Language.

Finally, enjoyable learning is more memorable, and short-stories are an enjoyable way to learn and develop vocabulary in EFL. This makes vocabulary learning more engaging and memorable for learners. Furthermore, it ensures a feeling of accomplishment among individuals learning English as a foreign language, which can contribute to boosting their drive to pursue further learning.

**Keywords:** Vocabulary Development, EFL Learners, Use of Short-stories, Vocabulary Teaching Strategies, Foreign Language Skills.

### Introduction

The importance of teaching and learning vocabulary is crucial in foreign language education, as it determines a learner's proficiency level and impacts their listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities. A strong grasp of vocabulary can make a learner effective in all four language skills, while a weak vocabulary can significantly hinder their language abilities. Therefore, both teachers and learners should prioritize the intentional and organized instruction of vocabulary. To achieve this, EFL teachers should employ appropriate methods,

materials, and strategies to enrich learners' vocabulary. However, the success of these methods is ultimately determined by their ability to achieve the aims and objectives of foreign language education, which are to develop learners' competence and autonomy in successful communication. To this end, this paper explores the use of short-stories as a means of developing EFL learners' vocabulary and increasing their competence and autonomy.

**The concept of vocabulary pertains to a student's comprehension of spoken and written language.**

#### **Vocabulary: Meaning & Types**

This comprehension requires more than a simple definition found in a dictionary and instead involves a deeper understanding of the word's meaning. Building this understanding is a gradual process as students connect words to one another, learn examples and non-examples of the word and related words, and use the words accurately within sentences (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). EFL learners need to learn and use two types of vocabulary: oral and print. Oral vocabulary includes words used in listening and speaking, while print vocabulary includes words used in reading and writing. Vocabulary can also be categorized as receptive or productive, depending on a person's ability to recognize or use words. Receptive vocabulary involves words that one can recognize when we hear or see them. Productive vocabulary, on the other hand, includes those words that we use when we speak or write. It is also argued and believed that our receptive vocabulary is typically larger than our productive vocabulary.

#### **The significance of vocabulary in EFL.**

Acquiring and mastering target language vocabulary is essential for foreign language learning and teaching. Knowing vocabulary helps EFL learners to communicate effectively, which is the primary objective of any language teaching. Furthermore, it enables learners to discover the beauty of the language through new words and assists in comparing and contrasting the foreign language with their mother tongue. Understanding the similarities and differences between the two languages aids in truly grasping the language systems of both. In essence, words are the fundamental components of language and assist foreign language learners in expressing themselves efficiently. Effective communication is possible when learners have a good command of vocabulary, whereas a lack of vocabulary leads to unsuccessful communication. EFL learners with a limited vocabulary face difficulty, as they miss out on opportunities to extend their vocabulary by not

reading more advanced texts and also find it challenging to employ strategies for word learning. Expanding the lexicon of individuals learning English as a foreign language is crucial as it impacts all other language competencies, which can suffer if vocabulary is inadequate or insufficient. Inadequate vocabulary is recognized as a primary cause of EFL learners' inability to communicate successfully in both written and oral forms. Typically, students who struggle with reading have limited vocabularies. A solid grasp of necessary vocabulary assists EFL learners in communicating through speech and writing, while insufficient vocabulary often leads to ineffective communication. Consequently, it is essential to make every effort to enhance EFL learners' vocabulary. This is why many scholars and experts in English Language Teaching, such as Linda Taylor (1990), stress the importance of a conscious effort to cultivate the vocabulary of EFL learners.

Throughout the history of language pedagogy, the significance of vocabulary has been acknowledged. Wilkins (1972), a prominent proponent of the communicative approach, highlighted that mastering vocabulary is just as crucial as mastering grammar. The ability to use collocations effectively is seen as an indicator of a learner's near-native proficiency. It is widely argued that lexical competence is at the core of communicative competence, and Verhallen & Schoonen (1998) suggest that it can even predict academic success. Allen (1983) echoes this sentiment by stating that communication frequently breaks down due to lexical issues. As a result, it is widely accepted that vocabulary should be the central focus of EFL classrooms. Vocabulary acquisition is a critical aspect of language learning, and both conscious and subconscious learning of new words are essential for learners' progress. Therefore, EFL teachers should prioritize developing their students' vocabulary to enhance their communicative competence.

**Different approaches, techniques, and plans to enhance the lexicon of students who are learning English as a foreign language.**

In the past, students were not explicitly taught vocabulary as a separate subject but rather

learned it through activities related to speaking, listening, reading, and writing. These activities involved the use of the students' existing vocabulary as well as the introduction of new words by the teacher and other students which were then applied in classroom tasks. Some English Language Teaching (ELT) learners view vocabulary learning as simply memorizing a list of new words. The lack of contextual practice in their mother tongue often results in EFL learners having to confront unfamiliar vocabulary during the language acquisition process. When faced with a new word, EFL learners usually resort to looking up its definition in a bilingual dictionary and jotting down lists of new words without understanding their contextual usage. However, this approach is generally inadequate as it leads to difficulties in comprehending and conveying messages effectively. In some cases, EFL learners attribute their failure to establish successful communication to their poor memorization skills, as noted by Gnoinska (1998:12).

Many scholars have discouraged learning vocabulary by memorizing new words. Decarrico (2001) states that words should not be learnt separately or by memorization without understanding. This is because the vocabulary learned in this way often results in the neglecting of lexical aspect. In other words, learners just know how to use the vocabulary in an exact form, but they do not know how to use it with different shades of meanings in real life communication. According to Nation (2000) "learning new words is a cumulative process, with words enriched and established as they are met again" (P.6).

There are various other strategies and approaches also used for developing vocabularies of EFL learners by EFL teachers. First, the knowledge of words can be acquired incidentally, where vocabulary is developed through immersion in language activities. Words can also be learned through direct instruction, where students learn words through a structured approach. EFL teachers can also promote the use of dictionaries, thesauruses and spelling investigations to extend the range of words used. EFL teachers can also give their students a vocabulary notebook in which they

can be asked to record unfamiliar or newly discovered words which can be stored until they need to use them. Even playing word games can also be encouraged. Interactive working walls can be created and displayed so that pupils can capture new, exciting and unusual vocabulary. Michael Graves (2006) offers a framework for successful vocabulary programs that supports effective teaching and learners' development of word knowledge. The foundation of his instructional program includes a four-part approach to developing robust vocabularies: (1) Provide rich and varied language experiences, (2) teach individual words, (3) teach word-learning strategies, and (4) foster word consciousness (p. 4).

According to Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby (1984), using stories is a useful approach to learning vocabulary in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment. This is because stories provide a variety of situations in which students must use language to communicate, exchange information, and express their opinions. Huang (1996) holds a similar view, stating that "learning through tales" can enhance various psychological and intellectual aspects that promote communication, self-esteem, motivation, spontaneity, and ultimately, confidence (p.85). These ideas emphasize the importance of incorporating stories into teaching, learning, and mastering vocabulary. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate whether EFL learners can effectively acquire vocabulary through stories. Hence, the subsequent sections will focus on using short stories as a technique for teaching, learning, and mastering vocabulary among EFL learners.

### **The correlation between one's vocabulary and reading abilities.**

The skills of vocabulary and reading comprehension are closely linked to each other, and they both play a crucial role in achieving success in reading. However, these skills heavily depend on each other. This connection between them will be elaborated on in the next section.

**Covers the topics of Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension.**

Many studies have shown that a student's vocabulary knowledge is strongly linked to their reading comprehension skills. Harmon (2002) found that "many students have difficulty comprehending text because they lack the necessary vocabulary knowledge and do not use effective strategies to learn new words."

The National Reading Panel (NRP) reviewed scientific research and found that readers' understanding of text is closely connected to their vocabulary. Other studies by Jitendra, Edwards, Sacks, & Jacobson, Bromley, Martin-Chang, Levy, and O'Neil, and Manzo, Manzo, and Thomas all support this conclusion and highlight the importance of vocabulary in reading comprehension, fluency, and academic achievement. Lubliner and Smetana emphasize that children with larger vocabularies have an easier time reading, read more extensively, and perform better in school. For EFL learners, reading comprehension is a crucial language skill as it provides exposure to the target language. Therefore, EFL teachers and learners should prioritize overcoming any obstacles to reading comprehension, including vocabulary deficiencies.

**Enhancing Reading Comprehension and Improving Vocabulary Skills.**

Recognizing the importance of wide reading for vocabulary development and English language learning, it is widely accepted that EFL learners benefit from exposure to vocabulary that is not commonly used in spoken language. Independent reading allows learners to encounter such vocabulary in context, making it easier to understand. The ability to learn words from context is an important skill that should be taught and practiced in the classroom. EFL teachers can incorporate contextual vocabulary instruction by teaching students how to use contextual clues to infer word meanings. Nash & Snowling (2006) have described this process as teaching students to use contextual cues to derive meaning from target words. By training students to recognize and utilize these cues, they can develop their vocabulary skills.

The contextual techniques don't demand any particular resources or specialized instruction for the educator, and can be effortlessly integrated into EFL classrooms.

The idea that exposure to language is crucial for incidental learning is supported, and it is suggested that in input-poor environments like Libya, having students read more is the best way to achieve this. Research has shown that incidental learning from reading can accumulate significantly over time and can help develop and enrich vocabulary that is only partially known. EFL teachers can take a proactive approach to maximizing incidental learning by implementing an extensive reading program, which has been shown in various studies to be highly effective in promoting vocabulary growth. In fact, Horst's study (2005) found that participants learned over half of the unfamiliar words they encountered in graded readers. Additionally, reading can improve reading speed and attitudes towards reading. These arguments support the idea of incorporating short stories into EFL classrooms to enhance the vocabulary development of learners, which will be discussed further in the following section of the paper.

**The function of brief narratives in enhancing one's lexicon."vocabulary development"**

Various approaches and techniques can be utilized to teach and enhance the vocabulary of EFL students. However, the significance of extensive reading in the enhancement of EFL learners' vocabulary cannot be overstated, as noted by (Nagy and Anderson) (1984). Short-stories are considered an effective method to achieve this objective and offer many advantages for both EFL teachers and students, according to (Pathan and Al-Dersi (2013, pp. 04-06). The use of short-stories aids in making reading comprehension more accessible, intriguing, and enjoyable while also contributing to the development of EFL learners' vocabulary. Studies suggest that students who read extensively have a broad range of vocabulary (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2004). Brabham and Villaume (2002) emphasize that instruction should enable all students to learn and use strategies that help them explore and deepen

their understanding of words while reading independently to effectively decrease gaps in vocabulary and comprehension. Utilizing short-stories to enhance EFL learners' vocabulary provides the advantage of teaching vocabulary in context. "Using context" refers to the process of finding hints within a sentence that can provide insights into the intended definition of a particular word. The effect of visual and verbal cues on acquiring new vocabulary through context has been investigated by researchers. For example, Walters (2006) observed that 11 ESL students, aged between 17 and 47, who were enrolled in an English language program and taught techniques for deciphering the meaning of unfamiliar words using contextual clues, demonstrated improved reading comprehension.

According to research, word meanings are remembered better when they are used in various classroom activities. To truly understand a word, students must be able to use it in writing, speaking, and listening. Short-stories are a useful tool for incorporating vocabulary with other language skills. Studies have shown that teaching vocabulary through context clues in short-stories leads to an increase in word usage compared to traditional word-list instruction. Short-stories also provide a cultural context for language learning, which is necessary for understanding the meaning of words in English. Using selected short-stories in EFL classrooms can help develop students' autonomy in learning. Therefore, the use of short-stories should be considered as it offers many educational advantages.

#### **The advantages of utilizing brief narratives to enhance the vocabulary of learners who are studying English as a foreign language.**

The benefits of using literature, especially short-stories, in English language teaching have been widely recognized. These stories provide an enjoyable and engaging way for EFL learners to improve their English language skills, while also sparking an interest in the culture and language of the target language. In addition, incorporating short-stories into EFL classrooms can help students engage with authentic uses of the foreign language and develop their vocabulary. There are many

approaches to using stories in the foreign language classroom, all of which can be useful for promoting language learning.

The process of acquiring language and developing language awareness among students can be enhanced by using stories. Stories provide a context for learners to interpret and process new language, as well as supplement the limited input provided in the classroom. They also promote a basic understanding of English by facilitating the internalization of vocabulary and grammar patterns, and contribute to the development of reading proficiency, which is crucial for enriching vocabulary in English as a foreign language (EFL).

Reading stories has several cognitive benefits for EFL learners, such as increasing vocabulary levels, providing opportunities to practice reading skills, and modeling language patterns. Stories can also enhance all language skills by expanding linguistic knowledge, presenting diverse vocabulary usage, and illustrating complex syntax. To facilitate vocabulary learning, it is important to encourage individual vocabulary learning strategies, such as using short-stories as a means of developing EFL learners' vocabulary. Short-stories provide new words in various contexts, making it easier for learners to understand their meaning and usage.

Repetition is a key principle of vocabulary learning, and short-stories facilitate repetition by providing opportunities for learners to encounter new words multiple times in various forms. This is important because vocabulary knowledge is fragile, and words and phrases need to be recycled frequently to be retained in long-term memory. Reading short-stories not only facilitates repetition, but also helps learners to understand and use the words they have learned in real-life communication.

Finally, enjoyable learning is more memorable, and short-stories are an enjoyable way to learn and develop vocabulary in EFL. This makes vocabulary learning more engaging and memorable for learners. Furthermore, it ensures a feeling of accomplishment among individuals learning English as a foreign language, which can contribute to boosting their drive to pursue further learning.

Researchers have discovered that a strong correlation exists between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. Therefore, if an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher wants their students to acquire vocabulary and succeed in reading, they should be imaginative in their lessons and utilize short-stories as a reading material. Short-stories are beneficial for EFL learners as they facilitate learning by providing easy, independent, motivational, enjoyable, and memorable content. Short-stories offer crucial vocabulary for EFL learners and also help them understand the syntax and discourse functions of words in different communication contexts. Moreover, the engaging contexts presented by short-stories highlight the salient lexical and syntactical features. Several studies, including Justice, Meier, and Walpole (2005), have demonstrated that using short-stories with EFL learners enhances their vocabulary development.

Using short-stories for vocabulary development in EFL learners has several advantages, such as offering numerous opportunities for designing language activities and teaching new words effectively in real-life contexts. Additionally, short-stories not only enrich EFL learners' vocabulary from linguistically rich content but also provide a window into another culture, encouraging interaction and personal discovery. Short-stories are also practical for English language teachers as they are long enough to cover entirely in one or two class sessions, not complicated for students to work on independently, have a variety of choices for different interests and tastes, and can be used in all levels, age groups, and classes. Therefore, EFL teachers can wisely and creatively exploit this benefit to develop and enrich their students' vocabulary.

In conclusion, short-stories are an effective tool for developing vocabulary in EFL learners. They are easy to comprehend, attention-grabbing, and provide language-rich content, making them a useful resource for English language teachers. As argued by Brumfit and Carter (1986), short-stories are also beneficial for developing reading skills and vocabulary in EFL classrooms.

Short-stories have been recommended by several scholars as an effective tool for developing vocabulary in EFL classrooms. The rationale behind this is that short-stories can facilitate vocabulary acquisition by engaging readers in an active guessing process, which enables them to grasp the meaning of new words in context. Additionally, short-stories allow for the practical use of newly learned words in dialogues and provide a framework for understanding the meaning and usage of new words. The use of short-stories also offers opportunities for teachers to integrate vocabulary activities with productive skills like speaking and writing.

Moreover, storytelling can be a creative platform for EFL learners to express themselves and enhance their responsibility through authoring. The use of short-stories is considered an interesting and engaging method for teaching vocabulary, as it not only facilitates vocabulary acquisition, but also helps learners understand culture, moral values, and elements of storytelling, thereby improving their reading comprehension. Given these benefits, the use of short-stories is recommended as a preferred approach for teaching, developing, and enriching the vocabulary of EFL learners.

### **Conclusion**

It is commonly observed that EFL students who struggle with reading also tend to have limited vocabularies. This lack of vocabulary can negatively impact their other language skills, especially their ability to comprehend what they read. On the other hand, mastering vocabulary can greatly benefit EFL learners by improving their speaking, writing, and comprehension skills. Therefore, it is important to provide carefully planned vocabulary instruction to help EFL learners overcome this common challenge.

When designing a vocabulary instruction program, it is important to consider the linguistic richness of the materials as well as the learners' perceptions of them. Short-stories have been found to be a highly effective and enjoyable way to increase EFL learners' vocabulary repertoire, and should be recommended to all EFL teachers and learners. However, short-stories should not replace

other methods of vocabulary teaching, but rather be used in addition to them. EFL teachers should also understand that vocabulary learning is incremental, and an effective program needs to be well-planned and principled. Given the pedagogic benefits of short-stories in promoting EFL learners' vocabulary development, they should be given adequate attention in any program of vocabulary instruction.

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