

Developing Students' Writing Skills Through Short Story in ELT

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Abstract

This study examines the effect of the appearance-based approach in enhancing students' short story writing skills at MA Model Zainul Hasan. The research highlights challenges such as low literacy rates and limited English vocabulary, particularly in Islamic boarding schools, which hinder students' writing development. The study aims to address these issues by integrating innovative methods to improve literacy and writing skills. Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through classroom observations and interviews. The findings reveal that the appearance-based approach significantly enhances students' ability to organize and express ideas creatively. It also boosts their confidence in public speaking through storytelling exercises. Furthermore, the method fosters collaboration among students and supports the development of critical thinking and creativity. The study concludes that short story writing, supported by appearance-based techniques, is an effective strategy for overcoming language barriers and improving literacy. The implications suggest that educators should adopt similar innovative approaches to nurture students' motivation, creativity, and engagement in writing activities. This research contributes to the development of practical teaching strategies in contexts with limited exposure to English.

Keywords: *Short stories, writing skills, learning motivation, vocabulary*

Introduction

Improving students' writing abilities is a fundamental and essential goal in English Language Teaching (ELT), as writing plays a crucial role in developing language proficiency. Short stories are a particularly valuable tool for accomplishing this goal. Their rich vocabulary, diverse sentence structures, and well-organized narratives make short stories an accessible and effective literary form for language learners. By reading and analyzing short stories, students are exposed to a variety of linguistic elements, such as idiomatic expressions and stylistic features, that they can adapt and incorporate into their own writing.

Writing is a crucial language skill that encompasses various cognitive and creative processes. In Indonesian language learning, writing story texts, including short stories, is particularly important as it allows students to explore both language and creativity simultaneously (Hastuti et al., 2023; Halawa & Lase, 2022). Short story texts are narrative prose pieces with relatively concise yet engaging storylines (Kottacheruvu, 2023). Their brevity stems from their focus on a single problem or conflict, which provides an opportunity for students to craft stories that are compelling and meaningful. Creative students can tap into innovative ideas to craft these narratives, developing both their technical writing skills and their imagination (Ranabumi et al., 2017). According to Sholeh and Afriani (2016), short story writing skills refer to the ability of individuals to produce short, dense works of imaginative art, by effectively composing sentences that are full of creativity and attention to detail.

Short stories are widely considered to be the most effective literary genre for EFL classrooms due to several distinct advantages. Unlike poems, which often use complex and abstract language, dramas that require long preparations and performances, or novels that take a long time to read, short stories offer a more practical and easily digestible approach for students. Although sometimes utilizing archaic language or connotative meanings, the majority of expressions in short stories are colloquial, making them more accessible and understandable to students, either independently or with minimal assistance from teachers. Short stories are relatively short in length, usually focusing on a single theme, storyline, and a limited number of characters, which allows students to complete discussions within one or two class sessions. Additionally, short stories are originally written for native speakers, providing excellent examples of language use in context and offering cultural references that can enhance students' cultural awareness and sensitivity. Furthermore, as short stories often explore common human experiences, students can easily relate to their content, fostering empathy and a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives. The diverse range of topics,

themes, and writing styles found in short stories enables teachers to select works that align with their students' needs, interests, and preferences (Pardede, 2021). Therefore, one of the primary goals of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) is to help learners acquire effective writing skills and enable them to write in an engaging, confident, and articulate manner.

Previous research has thoroughly examined how short stories can be utilized to improve different skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), particularly in enhancing writing abilities. For instance, (Marwa, Aly, and Mervat., 2016) concentrated on enhancing creative writing abilities, which include fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration, by using short stories in educational programs. In the same vein, (Senem, 2014) looked into how incorporating literary texts like short stories in EFL classes can boost students' communication skills, placing an emphasis on both linguistic and literary analysis. These studies clearly demonstrate the educational advantages of short stories in fostering creative thinking, critical engagement, and communicative skills among EFL students.

However, there is still a significant gap in analyzing how short stories influence both sentence structure and vocabulary learning in EFL writing practices. While earlier studies highlight the encouraging influence of short stories in various aspects of language acquisition, there has been little investigation into how these narratives specifically tackle the issues of fostering student engagement and alleviating the perception of writing as a challenging or tedious task. Many students view writing as a difficult and burdensome activity, and finding ways to enhance their motivation and engagement is an ongoing challenge for educators.

The present study fills this gap by utilizing short stories to improve students' writing abilities, specifically concentrating on vocabulary acquisition, writing methods, and motivational outcomes. Additionally, it aims to examine the relevance and effectiveness of this method for learners who have limited exposure to English outside of the classroom, an aspect that has been largely ignored in current research. By focusing on this group of learners, the study hopes to uncover insights into how short stories can be leveraged to support language acquisition in non-native environments.

This research seeks to better understand students' abilities in writing, focusing on vocabulary development and writing methods used to enhance students' writing skills. It also explores how short stories influence students' overall writing abilities, including how much short stories can boost students' enthusiasm and motivation for EFL writing tasks, which are frequently seen as challenging or tedious by many learners. Each of these research goals may

yield practical insights that can inform and improve teaching methods, enhance student learning outcomes, and contribute to the overall effectiveness of writing instruction in EFL classrooms.

Literature Review

The development of writing skills in students is an important aspect of language education, which influences their ability to convey ideas, communicate well, and understand academic materials. One method that has been shown to be effective in improving writing skills is to use short stories. Short stories give students the opportunity to imagine, analyze narrative structures, and develop their writing skills through creativity and idea development (Hinkel, 2018).

(Amiri and Shafie, 2013) stated that short stories allow students to practice writing skills in interesting and non-boring contexts. Short stories serve as examples of clear narrative structures, which can help students understand how to compose stories, create characters, and develop plots. This is important because one of the main challenges in writing is the ability to understand and implement good structures in their writing (Mohan & Slater, 2014).

Recent studies have shown that the application of short stories to language learning can help enrich students' vocabulary and improve their writing skills. Short stories provide opportunities for students to become familiar with various sentence structures, the use of tenses, and grammatical rules in relevant contexts. By reading and analyzing stories, students not only deepen their mastery of language, but also understand how language is used in real-life situations (Mohamed, M. A. A., 2024).

One of the great advantages of using short stories is that students can more easily relate themselves to the material they write. Short stories often depict relevant situations and everyday experiences, which make it easier for students to understand the material, (Murray, 2015). Thus, short stories allow students to write in more authentic ways, associate their learning with reality, and increase their participation in the writing process.

(Adnan and Rizvi, 2017) also showed that short story-based learning can enrich students' vocabulary. When students analyze and write short stories, they are introduced to different types of vocabulary and sentence structures that improve their language abilities. By recognizing new words and using them in writing, students learn to integrate more complex language elements into their work, which in turn improves their writing skills.

Short story-based methods also support the development of students' critical and creative thinking skills. (Lin and Chien, 2019) explained that writing short stories requires students to think creatively and critically, not only in creating stories, but also in understanding the deeper meaning of the text. Students are expected to organize their ideas in a structured way and convey their stories interestingly.

Although many benefits can be derived from the use of short stories in writing learning, some studies suggest that the application of this method requires an organized approach and proper guidance from teachers. (Al-Shboul, Al-Omari, and Qudah, 2021) revealed that inadequate teaching in helping students understand the basic elements of the story could limit the effectiveness of this method.

Method

This research applied a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of students' English as a foreign language (EFL) writing abilities and the influence of short stories on these skills. This approach was selected as it allows for a thorough exploration of student reactions to short stories and provides insights into how these stories can enhance their motivation to improve their English writing skills. The study was conducted at MA Model Zainul Hasan, a pesantren where the use of English is limited in daily life. The study population included students at this institution, focusing particularly on those struggling with EFL writing.

The sample for this study was chosen using purposive sampling, ensuring that selected two students met two key criteria: they faced difficulties in EFL writing and were willing to participate. Additionally, an English teacher was involved to offer a broader perspective on the teaching process and the challenges students encounter in writing short stories in English. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with two students and an English teacher. The interviews aimed to investigate the students' experiences with short story writing, the impact on their writing skills, and the role of short story-based methods in motivating them to continue improving their English writing.

The instructional procedure for this study involved three sessions, during which students were tasked with creating and presenting their short stories in front of the class. This approach aimed to enhance both their writing skills and their public speaking confidence. Following data collection, the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher identified key themes emerging from the interviews and linked these findings to the objectives of the study.

Findings and Discussion

A short story is a literary work in written form that tells the story of a fictional story packaged in short, clear and concise ways. In short stories, it usually only tells a short story about the problem experienced by only one character. Short stories can also be referred to as prose fiction because the story focuses on only one conflict of problems experienced by the characters from character recognition to the solution of the character (Hartati, 2017). Short stories are stories consisting of no more than 10,000 words. The contents of the short story are very easy to understand because of the relatively very short story. Therefore, quite a few readers like short, uncomplicated stories as in short stories.

The results of interviews conducted at MA Model Zainul Hasan over strategies or methods that can be used to develop students' short story writing skills, namely using an appearance-based approach, where students are asked to present short stories they make in English. The process takes place during three sessions of the meeting, where students are asked to appear in front of the class to present the short stories they have created.

"For this method of teaching short stories or short stories in English, I use appearances. So, the santri will later appear in three meetings about short stories. So, children will come out front to tell their short stories in English. This I use so that they can not only make, but can tell me the short stories. This method, I think, will be more effective in writing short stories so that they can also present or make what is made real in their short stories."

Said T. This method aims not only to improve students' writing skills, but also to train their courage in speaking and delivering work directly. This appearance-based approach is in line with the concept of storytelling, which has long been known as an effective learning method. (Martin, 2016). Through this activity, students not only honed language skills, but also gained a deeper understanding of the characteristics of the story and expanded their horizons. This method supports the teacher's intention to present the student's story more "live" through a presentation in front of the class. Teachers believe that this approach will make learning to write short stories more effective. By integrating presentation aspects, students are not only invited to pay attention to the structure and content of their story, but also trained to convey the story to the audience. This approach provides students with a comprehensive experience ranging from the writing process to the submission of works. In addition, storytelling also helps students understand more in-depth elements of the story, such as themes, characters, and plots, resulting in more meaningful works.

Regarding the challenges students face in writing short stories, one of the main obstacles is their low literacy rate. Without adequate references or reading habits of books,

short stories, or other forms of literacy, students will find it difficult to produce the maximum amount of work. Therefore, students need to build literacy habits as a source of inspiration in writing short stories. Although the current technology is already highly developed, increasing the interest in reading among students is still a big challenge. Many students prefer visual or audio activities, such as watching or listening, to reading. This is evidenced by the English teacher's statement,

"The challenge is actual literacy, student literacy. Because if they don't have some references or never read books or short stories or other literature, they can still make short stories, but they won't be maximal in making short stories. So students need to build their literature as a source for short stories. Because in these days it is quite easy, there is technology, but it is also very difficult to improve reading literacy. They would rather see or hear directly than read or hear. So literature to read short stories and others is a bit difficult."

Each student faces different challenges in learning to write, as they have unique and special characteristics. However, this challenge is often an obstacle that prevents students from progressing and producing quality writing (Rachel & Maslawati, 2019). In addition to the lack of literacy, another obstacle students face is the limitation of vocabulary, especially because they are in a boarding school environment that rarely uses English. *"Actually, because we live in a boarding school environment that uses only a little English, so we lack vocabulary mastery and that becomes one of the difficulties or challenges I face when I want to make short stories."* said S. This limitation of vocabulary became one of the major obstacles to developing expected writing skills (Misba et al., 2017). Vocabulary is an essential element of sentence building, which is the core of effective writing skills (Asep, 2014). Every day, students use words both verbally and in writing to convey their ideas, beliefs, and feelings to the people around them. A rich vocabulary repertoire can help students convey their thoughts, both through writing and conversation, more effectively and clearly.

In the learning process, motivation has a very important role in achieving educational goals. Students with a high level of motivation will be encouraged to learn, so that learning goals can be achieved. Subini (2012) stated that motivation is an impulse that encourages a person or group of people to do something to achieve what they want. This student's motivation is to find its form in literacy activities, one of which is through short stories, which not only becomes a means of learning but also an effective tool to arouse the spirit of learning and broaden their horizons. Students reveal that through short stories, they not only feel entertained, but also get inspiration and new ideas. They found it challenging to explore

diverse themes and styles of writing. Some students also claim that reading short stories arouse their curiosity about different points of view as well as the lives of the characters in the story. This motivates them to seek additional references, either through books, articles, or online sources, to broaden their horizons. Thus, short stories become the entrance for students to explore the wider world of literacy.

Students reported that short stories helped them understand the narrative structure and good writing techniques. She said, *"From learning to write short stories, I was helped in understanding the structure of sentences and so I knew how to write well and correctly. I'm motivated to further develop my writing skills, not only can I write short stories but others as well."* They feel compelled to try to write their own stories by applying the elements they have learned. This process not only honed their creativity but also improved critical thinking ability, which ultimately contributed to the development of their writing skills. These findings suggest that short stories serve not only as a medium of learning, but also as an effective tool to promote students' development of literacy and writing skills holistically. Research on short story teaching also reveals that this method can increase student motivation. The more various topics in the short story, the better the results are achieved, as students feel more involved and gain new insights from each story they read (Rasha, 2018).

Short story writing activities not only benefit students in understanding narrative structures and writing techniques, but also in line with teachers' expectations to improve students' writing skills so that they can produce works worth writing. The teacher revealed that one of the main goals of this study was to enable students to produce writable works. For example, teachers once compiled a program in which each student in the class was asked to write two short stories, which were later compiled into an anthology. With about 20 students per class, it is expected that each class will produce more than 60 pages of books. This book not only serves as a real testament to the results of learning, but also serves as a motivation for student to continue working.

"From this short story writing lesson, I really hope that their work can be typed and published, maybe that's my hope. So, each class has their own short story, one class with their own book. So, I once planned it, but it hasn't been realized yet, which is making short stories from one class. If there are 20 classes, each of them makes two short stories. The target page can be more than 60 pages or more. So, they could have their own books that I called back in the day were short story anthologies. I wish I was like that and for a second hope, they could improve on literature. The interest of the literature, so that they can get more about the literature." said T.

The teacher also emphasized that each student faces different challenges in the process of learning to write. By giving students the opportunity to express through short stories, they are expected to overcome these obstacles and develop their creative potential. Ultimately, the hope is the birth of a generation of students who not only have good writing skills, but also love literacy, which is an important foundation for their future learning.

The use of short stories as an educational tool presents numerous opportunities for integration across various teaching environments. In language acquisition, short stories are a powerful way to improve both writing and speaking skills. For instance, the appearance-based method, where students present their own short stories to an audience, can be widely adopted in schools to boost students' confidence, creativity, and their grasp of narrative techniques. This approach combines the development of linguistic abilities with essential personal growth, such as improving public speaking and critical thinking. In Islamic boarding schools, where English is not frequently used, short story writing can help bridge the gap between creative expression and language learning. Teachers can introduce storytelling activities in English classes, allowing students to explore a variety of themes and cultures through literature. This method not only aids in vocabulary building but also nurtures cultural awareness, a crucial aspect of modern education. For example, using short stories that explore universal themes can make the content more relatable while also exposing students to different worldviews.

Outside the traditional classroom, the short story method can be extended to extracurricular activities and literacy initiatives. Schools might consider holding short story competitions, organizing writing workshops, or publishing student works, which can inspire students to pursue creative writing either as a hobby or even professionally. Moreover, digital platforms could be used to share stories, expanding students' audiences and creating opportunities for global connections. In broader contexts, storytelling is also valuable in professional development and community education programs. Businesses could incorporate storytelling into team-building exercises and leadership training, while community literacy programs could use short stories to engage people of all ages and encourage reading habits. By exploring how short stories can be implemented in both educational settings and beyond, educators and professionals can fully harness the potential of this flexible literary form, ensuring its relevance and impact across a range of learning and development areas.

Conclusion

The use of short stories as a teaching tool offers promising possibilities for implementation in various educational contexts. In language learning, short stories serve as an effective medium for enhancing students' writing and speaking skills. The appearance-based approach, where students present their short stories in front of an audience, can be widely applied in schools to improve students' confidence, creativity, and understanding of narrative structure. This method fosters a holistic learning experience, combining linguistic skill development with personal growth, such as public speaking and critical thinking.

In Islamic boarding schools, where English exposure is limited, short story writing can bridge the gap between language learning and creativity. Teachers can integrate storytelling activities into English lessons, encouraging students to explore different themes and cultures through literature. This approach not only enhances vocabulary acquisition but also builds cultural awareness, an essential component of modern education. For instance, incorporating short stories with universal themes can help students relate to the material while learning about diverse perspectives.

Beyond the classroom, the short story approach has potential applications in extracurricular activities and literacy programs. Schools can organize short story competitions, workshops, or publication projects, where students collaborate to create anthologies. Such programs can inspire students to pursue creative writing as a hobby or even a career. Additionally, storytelling can be integrated into digital platforms, allowing students to share their works online, expanding their audience and fostering a sense of global connection.

In broader contexts, storytelling can be used in professional training or community programs to develop communication skills and emotional intelligence. For example, businesses could adopt storytelling techniques to improve team-building and leadership training. Similarly, community literacy programs can use short stories to engage participants and promote reading habits across diverse age groups. By exploring the implementation of short stories in both education and other fields, educators and professionals can maximize the potential of this versatile literary genre, ensuring its relevance and impact in various aspects of learning and development.

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