

The Use of Short-stories in EFL Classroom: Advantages and Implications

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Abstract: Today, the foreign language teaching professions and intellectuals are strongly advocating and recommending the use of short-stories in EFL contexts as this use is said to contribute not only in the effective fostering of foreign language skills but also in multi-faceted, socio-cultural, cognitive, emotional as well as personal growth of foreign language learners. The use of short-stories in EFL classroom, thus, promises, the much needed and constantly sought, the true aim of teaching and learning of any foreign language, which is the linguistic and socio-cultural as well as personal development of foreign language learners as 'linguistically competent, open-minded, responsible citizens of this culturally diverse world'. Such multidimensional advantages and benefits of the use of short-stories, and their implications in EFL context, are discussed, both from theoretical and practical perspectives, in this paper.

Keywords: EFL Learner, Language learning, Story telling

Introduction: Literary texts, in general, and short stories, in particular, have been an important source of teaching and learning materials for EFL classes for ages as they demonstrate a wide range of language use in authentic contexts. Stories, being the product of creative writers, are rich in language and have many pedagogical benefits for EFL teachers and learners. They arouse interest and love for reading among the EFL learners and can offer maximum exposure of functional and situational use of language, which is considered not only essential, in foreign language teaching and learning context, but also very important to understand and master the intricacies and nuances of the target language like English. Along with such infinite linguistic benefits, stories also possess many social, moral, cognitive as well as emotional and personal benefits that can contribute a great deal to the socio-cultural, emotional, cognitive and personal growth of EFL learners. Probably it is this understanding, of such advantages underlying in the use of short-stories in the foreign language context, has made many professions and pedagogues in the field to advocate their use for developing not only the language skills but also other personal traits.

1. Advantages of Using Short-stories in EFL Classroom and their Implications: The use of short-stories in EFL classroom, for developing language skills, has always been the topic of academic debates and discussions for ELT professions and pedagogues. Therefore, it is not surprise that we find plenty of literature on the topic, discussing various aspect of such use. These debates, discussions and research studies, on the potential advantages of the use of short-stories in the EFL classrooms and their implications for EFL teachers and learners, have often ended on recommending this use for effective teaching and learning of foreign

language skills as well as other essential personal traits. Short-stories offer numerous benefits for EFL teachers and learners. And if selected and used wisely, they can transform the whole process of teaching and learning of foreign language tremendously making it not only easy but also pleasurable and worth undertaking. Due to such benefits, embedded in the use of short-stories, intellectuals like Wright (2003:7) believe that 'in using stories in language teaching, we are using something much bigger and more important than language teaching itself.' And that is why scholars like Garvie (1990) propose that foreign language learning be led by story. Such strong arguments, for the use of short-stories, for effective teaching and learning of foreign language like English, are not just linguistic ones, but also include socio-cultural, emotional, cognitive, aesthetic and personal ones. These multi-faceted pedagogical benefits of the use of short-stories, along with the arguments in their support, and their implications in EFL context, are discussed in the following sections of the paper, both from theoretical and practical perspectives.

2.1 Linguistic benefits embedded in the use of short-stories: Short-stories are strongly recommended, as one of the best methods, for effective teaching of foreign language skills by many intellectuals like Brumfit, C. and Carter, S. (1986); Collie, J. and Slater, S. (1991); Lazar, G. (1993); Murdoch, G. (2002); Kim, M. (2004); and Mourão, S. (2009) etc., to mention a very few, due to infinite linguistic benefits embedded in their use. The use of short-stories, for developing language skills, can be more beneficial than any other informational materials as stories help in stimulating the acquisition process. They provide authentic contexts for processing new language. Since the stories, and other literary texts, contain language intended for native speakers, according to Collie, J. and Slater, S. (1991: 4), 'they can serve as a model for language learners to become familiar with different forms and conventions' in that language. Stories can be the vehicle to improve students' overall language skills. They can also expose EFL learners to a wide variety of styles as one can find the resources of the language most fully and skillfully used, and exploited, in literature. Short-stories also help in improving communicative competence of EFL learners. This argument is discussed by Bretz (1990, pp. 335-338) in quite detail. The use of short-stories, in foreign language teaching, according to Bretz, provides 'a springboard for the development of critical thinking and aesthetic appreciation'. Another eminent advocate of the use of short-stories in ELT, for developing language skills, Lazar, G. (1993 PP. 17-18), believes that stories can provide the teaching and learning material which is 'motivating, authentic and has great educational value'. Such material, in foreign language classrooms, also develops EFL learners' interpretative abilities and expands their language awareness. This use of short-stories can also make the foreign language learning a fun by bringing a bit of spice and excitement to a classroom. Other linguistic benefits, of the use of short-stories in EFL classroom, include- the simplicity of sentence structures and vocabulary used in context. Stories also command the reader's attention more effectively and can play a very important role in arousing love and liking for reading among the EFL learners; which is very crucial in foreign language context for developing reading skill, as EFL learners

often dislike this language skill. In such situations, where EFL learners dislike reading, short-stories, quite readily, can lend themselves to capturing and holding the attention spans of EFL learners and can develop the love for reading among the EFL learners. Such motivation aspects, embedded in the stories, thus, can contribute in EFL learners' mastery over not only reading but also over the other important language skills like -listening, speaking, and writing as well. Elaborating on this linguistic benefit, Murdoch, G. (2002, P. 9) states that 'stories allow instructors to teach the four language skills to all levels of language proficiency and can enhance ELT courses for learners if selected and exploited appropriately.' The controlled length of short-stories, with the concise writing, and with carefully selected vocabulary and lexis, is another linguistic benefit of the use of short-stories, for EFL teachers and learners that can contribute a lot in developing these language skills. The authentic and natural dialogues, in the stories, can be highly effective not only in maintaining high interest and attention levels of EFL learners but also to use them in real life communication. The idea of the use of short-stories, in EFL classroom, for developing the language skills effectively, is not just theoretical, but according to Collie, J. and Slater, S. (1991: 196), is 'quite practical one'. As the length of short-stories is long enough, to cover entirely in one or two class sessions, and as they can not be complicated for students, to work with on their own, their use in EFL classroom is easily assured.

The working of EFL learners with stories, on their own, also helps in promoting self-dependency among them while learning the target language, which is considered, by many scholars, as very crucial. The variety of choice for different interests and tastes, in the use of short-stories, is another linguistic advantage which can be practically implemented with all levels (beginner to advanced), all ages (young learners to adults), and all types of classes (summer courses to evening classes). Another linguistic advantage of using stories is that they offer motivating and meaningful context for foreign language learning and draw the language learners naturally towards them. Also the narrative, in the stories, provides a wise way of coherently linking events in time which make the use of stories interesting and genial in EFL classroom. Stories are also very enjoyable to read and provide examples of different styles of writing, which represent various authentic uses of the language, and therefore, can be a good basis for vocabulary expansion and for fostering reading and other language skills. Due to such advantages, many pedagogues also consider stories as a valuable variety for EFL classes, which can be used not only as main teaching and learning material for language skill like reading but also as supplement, to the main course materials, for the in-class and out of class activities of teaching, learning and practice. And as mentioned earlier, they can expose EFL learners to rich and authentic language which they, otherwise, would not encounter in foreign language learning context.

2.2 Socio-cultural benefits embedded in the use of short-stories:

The use of short-stories also has many socio-cultural benefits for EFL classrooms. For centuries, stories have been the best method of

transmitting values, principles, and common-sense. Kirschenbaum (1995, P. 68) very correctly sums this argument saying that storytelling is 'one of the effective tools for inculcating morality, especially for the youth, as stories contain powerful images and symbols and operate on both conscious and unconscious levels, conveying intellectual and emotional meaning'. In the modern, culturally barren, world of today, where cultural values are degrading everyday and many evils and tribulations are infecting the young generation, with unthinkable bad habits, immoral deeds, immodest behavior and horrific crimes, in their early tender age, stories can be the best method of inculcating healing cultural and moral values. Stories from the local cultures can best be exploited for this purpose. EFL teachers can test the possibility of incorporating various religious and moral stories as well as myths, legends, fairy tales, fables, and folk tales related to the EFL learners' culture while teaching the foreign language skills. Even the stories from the history, and about the national heritage of the EFL learners, can also be used. Such use will not only make the language learning meaningful and easy for them, due to their familiarity with such stories, but will also rejuvenate their national pride and values among them. Not only the stories from the EFL learners' culture can be interesting and effective, while teaching and learning foreign language skills, but also the stories from target language culture. Such stories, from the target language culture, can provide very essential cultural information about the target language. They can increase EFL learners' insight into the country and the people whose language is being learnt. Such cultural aspect of the use of short-story can also provide opportunities, for EFL learners, for cross-cultural comparison. This, in return, can foster their ability to interpret discourse in different, social and cultural, target language contexts. In that sense, such use of stories, from various cultures, can be highly effective with EFL learners to achieve the true aim of teaching and learning of any foreign language; which is to make them respect and appreciate not only other languages in the world but also other cultures. Thus, such use of stories can help to develop the qualities of respecting and appreciating others' cultures, societies and ideologies among the foreign language learners and can prepare them as broadminded and more responsible citizens of this culturally diverse world we live in. The use of short-stories can also contribute in the development of various social dimensions of EFL learner's personality. As stories provide shared social experiences, language learners laugh together, are happy and sad together. They shout and sing together. This can go a long way in building their confidence and in encouraging their social and emotional development, which, in the end leads to 'their personal growth and intellectual development', as argued by Carter and Long (1991, PP: 2-4).

2.3 Personal and emotional benefits embedded in the use of short-stories: The use of short-stories is also recommended and advocated in EFL classroom due to various personal and emotional benefits embedded in them for the EFL learners. Stories have effective emotional, educational, and social appeal. It is the innate human instinct that makes us to tell and hear stories. Human beings take their experiences from

critical life incidents, or what their family imprints on them through telling stories. Thus, reading or listening a well-told story can inspire EFL learners to model and imitate the virtuous behavior of the hero as they can partake in the good feelings of doing good. Intricate struggles and sufferings of the characters, in the stories, can also contribute to the emotional and personal growth of the EFL learners. The use of short-stories can not only familiarize them with such conflicts and struggles but can also prepare them to cope with such conflicts, successfully, in their real life. Through the stories, they can learn various unpredictable ups and downs in life which make it so complex; yet so unique. Thus, complex array of human situations, struggles and conflicts, reflected in the stories, makes the learners to reflect on their own lives and can contribute in their motivation and personal development. Stories can help them to gain understanding of the complexity of our emotional responses, demonstrated by the expressive voices of the characters, speaking eloquently and powerfully of their feelings. Thus, as it is very rightly said, 'we can not teach children emotions, we can only help them reveal them and understand them' through the stories.

2.4 Cognitive benefits embedded in the use of short-stories: The use of short-stories has many cognitive implications as well for the EFL teachers and learners. Experts believe that stories in L1 or L2 are processed using the same cognitive strategies which can help EFL learners not only to master target language easily but also to develop various, individual, learning strategies. Through stories, EFL learners can attempt to get the general meaning by reading or listening to them. While they read the stories, or listen to them, they predict and guess the meaning. Such learning strategies, of predicting and guessing meaning, are regarded as a very crucial and essential in developing foreign language competence. Many promoters of the use of short-stories in EFL classroom also discuss the effectiveness of such use in developing various types of intelligences which form central place in foreign language learning process. The development of emotional intelligence, through the use of stories, is one such example. As the learners read the stories, or listen to them, they enter the realm of imagination, not only involving themselves in the story but sometimes even identifying themselves with the characters in the stories. Such imaginative experience, according to Mourão, S. (2009), 'helps to develop their personal creative powers' and can contribute in the development of their higher level thinking skills as well.

3. Conclusion: The use of short-stories has countless pedagogical advantages and benefits for EFL teachers and learners. Stories can be the source of foreign language teaching and learning material which, as many regard, is rich in language and authentic in context as well as interesting, enjoyable, and motivating. In the foreign language teaching and learning context, where the need of much required language exposure is always felt, for easy and fast fostering of the language skills, stories can render themselves to serve this purpose very effectively. To conclude, the EFL teachers, familiar with such pedagogical benefits of the use of short-stories, and their implications, and wishing to incorporate them in their

classes, if select the stories wisely and appropriately, following variously criteria such as- variety, in themes, forms, writing and narrative styles, authors, cultures, levels of difficulty, interests and preferably those stories that have been made into film, to provide visual interpretation, and use them creatively and professionally in their classroom, then the use of short-stories can be highly effective not only in developing the target language skills but also in the multi-faceted, all round , socio-cultural, emotion, cognitive and personal growth of the foreign language learners. Thus, short-stories can help not only in achieving linguistic goal of foreign language teaching, which is to make the learners efficient in their use of the target language but also in achieving true, broader, universal goal-which is to develop their various personal traits, by which they learn to respect and appreciate others' cultures, societies, ideologies and become open-minded and more responsible citizens of this culturally diverse world we live in.

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