

## Application of Short Story in Foreign Language Class: A Case Study of a Public Sector University of Karachi, Sindh

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### Abstract

*This study employed a qualitative research design, with semi-structured interviews conducted with a group of undergraduate students enrolled at a public-sector university in Karachi. Each interview lasted approximately 25 to 30 minutes and was concluded once data saturation was achieved. The interviews found that literature serves as an effective and meaningful resource for foreign language instruction. Among literary genres, the short story was given particular emphasis due to its concise nature and language-focused style. Students responded positively to several instructional practices, including role-playing activities, the grammar-translation method, and emotional engagement with the text. However, they also reported certain challenges, particularly with unfamiliar foreign cultural elements and teaching approaches. Additionally, learners face difficulties when studying short stories under the direct method and within limited instructional time. Based on these findings, the study recommends that teachers integrate more short stories into their teaching plans, as they are effective in developing all four language skills.*

**Keywords:** Short story, pedagogy, language, Literature

### INTRODUCTION:

In Pakistan, English is taught primarily as a foreign language. Over time, scholars and educators have proposed a range of methods for foreign language instruction. Babae and Yahya (2015), citing Hall and Cook (2012), note that language teaching theories shaped by linguistic, psychological, political, and educational objectives have been practiced for nearly a century. However, during the last two decades, literature has gained recognition as a key resource in the teaching of foreign languages (Irene, 2014). The inclusion of literary texts in language curricula has sparked considerable debate over their purpose and effectiveness. Sage (1987) argues that the use of literature in classroom settings is both motivating and pedagogically valuable.

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The present study is conducted within the Pakistani educational context, where English is taught as a compulsory subject from primary to higher education, despite its status as an official language of the country. A significant portion of the English curriculum relies on literary texts. Given the wide range of literary genres, these texts serve as effective instructional materials for language learning. Nevertheless, this study places particular emphasis on short stories, as they play a crucial role in foreign language learning. According to Rodríguez (2017), short stories provide authentic communicative contexts that facilitate language development, cultural understanding, and knowledge acquisition.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

Teaching literature as part of foreign language instruction is a common practice worldwide. Over the last two decades, literature has been recognized as an important pedagogical resource, particularly as language teaching has moved away from an exclusive reliance on the Grammar-Translation Method. Literary texts contribute to the development of all four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing, while also supporting key language components such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. More importantly, scholarly attention has increasingly focused on effective ways of integrating literature into language lesson planning. Many educators consider literature to be both an engaging and productive approach to language teaching (Sage, 1987). Midhin (2015) further emphasizes that literary texts offer rich material for language-learning activities conducted both in and out of the classroom.

A number of researchers have identified several advantages of using literature in language education, benefiting both teachers and learners. Collie and Slater (1993) outline four major reasons for incorporating literature into language learning: it promotes personal engagement, enhances cultural understanding, enriches linguistic competence, and provides exposure to authentic language use. Similarly, Gangola (2015) highlights the importance of authenticity and cultural representation in literary texts. In addition, Maley (1989) presents multiple reasons for viewing literature as a powerful instructional resource, including its variety, ability to generate interest, economy of expression, suggestive power, universality, meaningful content, personal relevance, and interpretative ambiguity. Hişmanoğlu (2005) also notes that literature exposes learners to diverse language varieties such as sociolects, regional dialects, jargon, and idiolects due to its wide range of characters and themes. From a

linguistic perspective, these features contribute significantly to the development of learners' sociolinguistic competence.

### **Relationship of Literature with Language:**

Language and literature share a deep and enduring relationship, with each supporting and enriching the other. Brumfit and Carter (1986) describe literature as a supportive partner in language learning. Numerous scholars, including Povey (1965), Brumfit and Carter (1986), Gangola (2015), Ghasemi and Hajizadeh (2011), and Shah (unpublished), strongly advocate integrating literary texts into language classrooms. Povey (1965) argues that grammar-focused language instruction alone lacks a clear purpose for achieving meaningful language learning, suggesting that the inclusion of literary content is crucial for advancing language development. He further maintains that literature can be effectively utilized as a teaching resource at all stages of language learning.

Research by Ghasemi and Hajizadeh (2011) demonstrates that the use of literature significantly supports both EFL and ESL instruction. In addition, Midhin (2015) emphasizes that literary texts encourage learners to engage in multiple levels of thinking, including literal understanding, inference, analysis, and evaluation. Through this process, students develop the ability to question, interpret, relate ideas, and explore meanings more deeply. Consequently, language learning becomes both intellectually stimulating and rewarding.

### **Genres of Literature:**

The richness of literature lies in its diversity, as it employs both poetry and prose to express ideas and emotions in an aesthetically refined manner. Prose communicates meaning through genres such as essays, novels, plays, and short stories. While essays and books are primarily read, plays and short stories can be either read aloud or performed. Poetry, on the other hand, may take subjective forms such as odes, sonnets, and elegies, or objective forms including epics, ballads, and folktales, all of which are used to convey emotional experiences.

This study primarily focuses on the role of short stories as a literary genre in foreign language teaching. Scholars such as Collie and Slater (1991), Ghasemi and Hajizadeh (2011), Pardede (n.d.), Aziz (2012), Irene (2015), and Midhin (2015) define a short story as a brief narrative designed to be read in one or two sittings. Despite their brevity, short stories offer rich, focused content that supports the development of all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Effective use of short stories in the classroom depends on the

teacher's creativity, enthusiasm, and pedagogical expertise in designing skill-enhancing activities.

What makes short stories particularly attractive in language instruction is their distinctive nature. Midhin (2015) argues that short stories are among the most effective tools for foreign language teaching because they capture learners' attention and increase motivation. Their manageable length further encourages students to engage more actively in reading and comprehension (Babae & Yahya, 2015). In addition, the application of Boas' *Personal Growth Model* supports independent reading and promotes a deeper understanding of life experiences, social situations, and human relationships.

Moreover, short stories often draw on real-life events, reflecting human experiences from around the world. Sage (1987) notes that characters in short stories function both realistically and symbolically, much like individuals in everyday life, thereby reflecting and illuminating human existence. Another distinctive feature of short stories is their tendency to end with open-ended conclusions, allowing readers to construct their own interpretations and strengthen critical thinking skills. Similar to other literary genres, short stories enhance learners' cognitive and analytical abilities (Sage, 1987; Babae & Yahya, 2014). Irene (2014) further describes short stories as a powerful source of both language learning and life lessons. Through exposure to diverse narratives, learners gain insight into different cultures, explore universal themes, and reflect on their own attitudes and perspectives.

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

- To comprehend the significance of using short stories as a form of literature in a foreign language class.
- To address the difficulties students experience when reading short stories in a foreign language learning class.

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

- Q1. What qualities of short stories benefit in learning a foreign language at a public university in Karachi, Sindh?
- Q2. What obstacles do students have when learning a foreign language through a short story at a public university in Karachi, Sindh?

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

As literature, particularly short stories, reflects human thoughts, emotions, and lived experiences, it provides valuable insight into students' experiences learning a foreign language. To explore these experiences, the present study adopted a qualitative research design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with undergraduate students enrolled at a public sector university in Karachi, Sindh. The collected data were analyzed using Saldana's (2009) coding framework. Initially, descriptive and in vivo codes were identified and organized into related categories. These categories were then synthesized, allowing broader themes to emerge from patterns of similarity.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

**Q#1. What qualities of short stories benefit in learning a foreign language at a public university in Karachi, Sindh?**

The interviews revealed three main themes: style, which included the following subthemes: role-playing, language, social environment, teaching technique, brevity, and grammatical translation method. The third significant subject was emotional impact.

**Style:**

Style is a general term for how a story is portrayed; it can refer to the use of language, proverbs, idioms, figures of speech, background, and cultural environment, also known as the social milieu. Language, social context, and brevity are the sub-themes.

**(a) Brevity:**

The most effective approach to teaching a foreign language is to use short stories. Plot, characters, language, themes, social environment, and other elements contribute to their composition. The story's short length is mostly due to its unique popularity, such as its conciseness. Because short stories are brief and have little repetition, students find studying them in the syllabus to be the most engaging and inspiring.

Student S1 expressed that the English syllabus includes various components such as reading and comprehension passages, poems, and short stories. However, the student showed a clear preference for short stories, describing them as more engaging and interesting than other textual materials.

Similarly, Student S2 reported that when short stories are read aloud by the teacher, they become deeply absorbed in the narrative. The student also mentioned that the brevity of short stories often leaves them wanting to continue reading, as the stories end quickly.

Student S3 suggested that the syllabus should primarily consist of short stories, with related grammatical activities. According to this student, short stories make language classes more enjoyable because they can be completed in one or two sessions, preventing monotony. The student emphasized that the brevity of short stories makes them the most appealing part of the syllabus.

Overall, students' enjoyment of varied classroom activities—particularly in foreign language learning—reflects their individual interests and learning preferences. Similarly, learners tend to favor short stories over lengthy novels, as extended texts may lead to boredom, whereas shorter narratives maintain attention and interest.

**(b) Language:**

The language used in short stories frequently includes idiomatic expressions, proverbs, and unfamiliar vocabulary (Abdalrahman, 2022, pp. 7–15). Such language is not commonly encountered in everyday communication (Luís, 2020), which makes short stories more engaging for learners while simultaneously expanding their linguistic repertoire. In addition, exposure to this type of language helps learners understand the language's culture. The perspectives of several students further illustrate this point.

Student S5 stated that short stories are particularly appealing in language classes because they consistently introduce new vocabulary. The student explained that learning vocabulary through stories is more enjoyable and effective than memorizing words through rote learning or descriptive teaching methods, as it allows learners to actively use and retain new terms.

Similarly, Student S6 viewed short stories as a highly effective tool for language learning, especially for acquiring proverbs and idioms. The student noted that short stories help learners recognize similarities between idiomatic expressions across different languages and expressed enjoyment in using such expressions in daily communication.

Student S7 also noted that writers often incorporate idioms and proverbs into short stories, which makes them enjoyable to read. The student pointed out that such expressions are less common in poetry, making short stories a more appealing genre for encountering this type of language.

### **Teaching Strategy:**

According to interviews with research participants, teaching methods have a significant influence on learning a foreign language. In this regard, students believed that reading comprehension improved significantly through exercises such as role-playing and the grammar-translation approach. Here are some opinions expressed by the students:

#### **(a) Role Playing:**

One factor contributing to students' increased confidence is role-playing. Teachers create exercises in which "they involve their students in role-playing activities." They get the chance to stand up in front of their fellows and showcase themselves. In addition to having fun, students learn a lot about paralinguistics.

Student S3 expressed a positive attitude toward short stories because they provide opportunities for stage performance, which helps build confidence in speaking a foreign language. The student highlighted that acting out stories encourages courage and reduces hesitation when using the target language.

In a similar view, Student S4 explained that teachers actively involve students in dramatizing short stories from the textbook. Through these performances, learners gain insight into how characters behave in specific situations, allowing them to imagine themselves in those roles. The student emphasized that role-play makes learning enjoyable because it enables students to assume temporary roles, such as kings or queens. Additionally, using character-specific phrases and proverbs during performances helps students remember and apply them in real-life contexts.

Student S5 regarded role-playing as an effective strategy for foreign language learning, noting that it enhances confidence and spoken proficiency. The student also stated that role-play enables learners to understand characters' struggles and the universal themes

presented in short stories. According to the student, this practice helps reduce anxiety and fear associated with public speaking.

Similarly, Student S10 reported that teachers encourage students to perform short stories included in the syllabus. Role-playing, according to the student, helps uncover and develop performance-related talents that might otherwise remain unexplored. It also sustains learners' motivation to study a foreign language. Rehearsing and delivering dialogues familiarizes students with new vocabulary, which they gradually adopt and incorporate into their everyday language use.

Overall, role-playing emerges as one of the most effective techniques for teaching foreign languages. By integrating it into lesson plans, teachers motivate students to enact diverse characters, which enhances linguistic competence, builds self-confidence, and helps learners better understand real-life situations.

**(b) Grammar Translation Method:**

The Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) is commonly used in foreign language instruction, particularly when the primary focus is on reading comprehension. Although many participants were unfamiliar with the formal term "Grammar Translation Method," their responses clearly indicated that they were referring to this instructional approach.

Student S7 mentioned that learners at the early stages of language acquisition often struggle with comprehension. They noted that their understanding and enjoyment of lessons or short stories increases when the teacher provides translations. Similarly, Student S8 emphasized the need for guidance during language learning. When encountering difficult words or phrases, having the teacher translate them enables comprehension and facilitates learning, making the reading experience more enjoyable. Student S9 also expressed that understanding short stories is challenging without the teacher's translations, and that occasional translations by the instructor significantly enhance comprehension and learning effectiveness.

These responses highlight that, for students with limited language proficiency, the Grammar-Translation Method remains a useful strategy for supporting comprehension and engagement with literary texts.

**Emotional Impact and Sentimental Attachment with the text**

It is often observed that students become deeply absorbed in short stories, reacting emotionally to the characters' experiences—they smile at moments of happiness and may even express sorrow when characters suffer. In literary terms, this phenomenon is referred to as the "willing suspension of disbelief."

Student S2 reported that listening to short stories in class creates a strong sense of connection with the characters, making them feel as if they are witnessing real-life events. The student noted that beyond language learning, these stories provide valuable lessons and insights. Similarly, Student S4 recalled being emotionally moved while reading a story about a young girl sold due to poverty. Both the student and their classmates cried during the reading, temporarily forgetting that the story was fictional. According to the student, this emotional engagement helps them learn to express feelings effectively.

Student S5 shared that short stories are the highlight of language classes because the natural depiction of the plot, setting, and characters makes them feel part of the narrative. The student enjoys the sense of immersion and attachment to the text. Student S6 also noted that the brevity and emotional intensity of short stories allow them to enter a state of willing suspension of disbelief, motivating them to read more while simultaneously enhancing their reading skills.

Overall, engagement with short stories not only exposes students to new vocabulary, sentence structures, figures of speech, and writing styles but also helps them develop a better understanding of the world. The universal themes presented in the stories encourage critical thinking, logical reasoning, and practical reflection on life. When teachers incorporate activities and involve students in performing or delivering the stories in class, the learning experience becomes even more interactive and engaging.

**Q 2. What obstacles do students have when learning a foreign language through short stories at a public university in Karachi, Sindh?**

Without preparation and techniques, integrating literature into a language class is definitely challenging and rarely goes well. Lesson plans must be created by teachers based on students' requirements. Despite these attempts, there are always difficulties in the language

class. Students and instructors both deal with a variety of problems. Teaching strategy, foreign culture, time limits, and other issues were identified throughout the interviews.

### **Teaching Strategy: Direct Method**

The teaching approach plays a crucial role in foreign language instruction. During this study, several students expressed the need for continuous teacher support to understand course material, even when it involved short texts such as short stories. They noted that comprehension was significantly easier when the teacher provided simultaneous translation into their native language. Conversely, students reported that lessons taught exclusively through the direct method, without translation, were difficult to follow and less effective for learning.

For instance, Student S7 emphasized that because English is a foreign language, teaching solely in English during short story lessons often prevented comprehension and learning. The student argued that the direct method alone does not achieve the intended learning outcomes. Similarly, Student S8 described feeling demotivated and bored when the teacher relied entirely on the direct method, noting that unfamiliar vocabulary made it impossible to understand the story. Student S6 also highlighted the importance of translation for vocabulary acquisition, explaining that learning new words with translation support is more effective than relying solely on direct teaching.

### **Foreign Culture:**

Literature provides a window to the wider world, allowing readers to experience places, cultures, and ways of life that they might never encounter in reality. Through books, students can observe foreign societies, customs, and lifestyles. However, learning a new language through literature, particularly short stories, can be challenging for many learners, especially when the cultural context is unfamiliar. Several students shared their perspectives on this issue.

Student S2 explained that they enjoy reading short stories in English when the stories reflect local cultural contexts, as this makes comprehension easier and learning more enjoyable. The student noted that stories set in foreign contexts are often more complex, making independent study difficult. Student S4 observed that translated stories with local contexts are more accessible and understandable than those written by foreign authors, whose cultural references may be unfamiliar. They also noted that even teachers sometimes struggle

to clarify concepts that do not exist within the students' local context. Similarly, Student S6 highlighted that short stories grounded in local contexts are more engaging and easier to understand, as learners can use contextual clues to make sense of the narrative. In contrast, stories set in foreign contexts are often perceived as less interesting. For this reason, students suggested that translated works reflecting local culture may be more effective for learning a foreign language.

**Time Constraints:**

From elementary to higher education, English is a compulsory subject, but it is often allotted less time compared to major degree-focused courses. Consequently, students study English primarily as a supplementary subject, and the curriculum does not provide sufficient instructional hours. Many students expressed a desire for more time, especially because they find English classes enjoyable and engaging.

For example, Student S10 emphasized the importance of learning English and noted that the current time allocation is insufficient. The student suggested that more time should be dedicated to English lessons, particularly for short stories, which help learners acquire new vocabulary and sentence structures. Similarly, Student S9 highlighted that, as English is a foreign language, it requires adequate instructional time. The student mentioned that with only three hours per week, the time is limited, and increasing it would allow for more effective learning, especially through literature. Short stories, in particular, were identified as an engaging and effective tool for language acquisition, reinforcing the need for extended class hours.

**Results and Discussions:**

The interviews indicate that short stories can be highly effective tools for learning a foreign language. Most participants expressed a preference for classes that incorporated short stories, highlighting their usefulness in developing all four language skills—speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Beyond language acquisition, short stories also support the development of cognitive abilities, critical thinking, creativity, and skills such as oratory and performance.

The findings further suggest that students often form emotional connections with the narratives and characters. This underscores the importance of teachers and curriculum designers selecting instructional materials, such as short stories, that match learners'

comprehension levels. Additionally, the linguistic features, grammar, and style of the texts should be appropriate for students' proficiency levels.

Another critical aspect is teacher preparedness. Effective implementation of literature-based lessons requires well-trained, knowledgeable instructors who are familiar with literature, particularly short stories, which can integrate multiple language skills. Teachers should also design lesson plans with clear objectives in mind to ensure that activities are purposeful and aligned with learning outcomes.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation:**

Reading literature has been shown to be a highly helpful resource for learning a foreign language. The literature offers real-world examples of language and provides sufficient space for students to study, discuss, express, and communicate, according to generally acknowledged studies. Similarly, short stories have enormous potential to inspire language learners. Since it is brief, as its name implies, it is a useful and recommended work of literature for a foreign language class. It applies to all standards and levels because it is brief. But it's also critical to understand students' needs and preferences so classes can be designed with those in mind.

Both students and teachers raised important concerns regarding teaching approaches. The Grammar-Translation Method may be more effective than the Direct Method in certain contexts. Short stories, when used in language instruction, serve the primary purpose of teaching foreign-language elements, including vocabulary, idioms, proverbs, and the registers associated with the story's social setting. Therefore, learners must understand the psychological, social, and cultural context embedded in the text. While cross-cultural awareness is valuable, the main objective remains language acquisition. Accordingly, if translated stories effectively support this goal, they should constitute a substantial part of the curriculum.

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