

DEVELOPING EFL LEARNERS' NARRATIVE WRITING THROUGH USING SHORT STORIES- THE CASE OF AL-BAHA UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT: *The current study is intended to help enhance Saudi university students to develop writing narrative essays and promote story telling skills. The study attempts to explore the correlation between teaching short stories and improvement of the students' narrative writing. The objective of this paper is to relate teaching short stories and its efficiency in improving EFL Learners' narrative essay writing. Two selected short stories were used in this study as supporting material. 60 students have participated 30 students in the experimental group and 30 in the control group by adopting test retest method. Pre-test is used as a diagnostic test and post-test after student being taught the selected material. The researcher used SPSS to analyze the collected data. The analysis of the tests' result shows that students have developed their narrative writing techniques. This indicates that using short stories in the EFL class room positively contributes to the progress of the students' narrative writing.*

KEYWORDS: Short Stories, Narrative Writing, Storytelling, Teaching Literature, Essay Writing

INTRODUCTION

The impact of teaching literature on EFL learners' general Knowledge is a useful way of enriching the learners' language and self-development as a whole. Literature provides opportunities for the students to express their own points of view, emotions and reactions. Therefore, short stories, as a genre of literature can be used as a vehicle to improve students' narrative writing. This is because teaching short stories can provide and introduce students to the important elements that are essential in narrative writing. Short stories can also develop students' imaginative thinking by introducing fictional characters and imaginative stories.

Narrative writing is one of the four basic essays writing that are to be learnt and developed among EFL learners. Teaching literature in general promotes language skills and language use, while fiction develops students' imagination as though it can contribute positively to enhancing students' abilities in writing stories that is narrative writing.

This study attempts to explore the significance of teaching short stories in developing EFL learners' narrative writing at Al-Baha University.

Narrative writing is one of the most essential writing skills that English language major students have to command. There are many benefits of developing narrative writing. First, it helps students develop imaginative thinking and participates in literary understanding as a whole.

Narrative writing is extremely important in the field of education, culture and in our lives as stated by the educational psychologist Jerome Bruner (2007). Hence narrative writing is very significant in our lives, help students develop imaginatively and develop bridging the cultural gaps.

Statement of the research problem

Writing good essays are to be signs for EFL learner's language command. However, students are found to have some difficulties in writing good essays. In the process of pursuing learners' development it is observed that students have problems with writing narrative essays and stories. This can be attributed to different learning factors or teaching environments. To overcome these difficulties it is essential to search for other tools that can enhance students' narrative writing. This obligates to reconsider the methods of teaching and the curriculum of teaching students' narrative writing. Therefore, the researcher attempts to correlate between teaching short stories and enhancement of students' narrative writing. It is also relevant to find out the implicit relationships that may exist between teaching fictional stories and development of EFL learners' narrative writing skills. The aim behind is to improve students' essay writing in general and narrative writing in particular. Developing students writing skills will participate positively to successful academic future and professional career.

Significance of the study

This study is intended to contribute to the field of English language pedagogy. It is expected to assist English language and literature departments and teachers at Al-Baha University to adopt new strategies and methods in improving students' narrative writing. It also can help language educators around the globe to overcome difficulties of narrative essay writing by adopting the same or similar methods where English is taught as a second or foreign language.

The objectives of the Study

This study attempts:

- a. To show the significance of teaching short stories in developing students narrative writing.
- b. To highlight the importance of narrative writing as well as other types of writing.
- c. To explore different ways to enhance students narrative writing skills rather than relying on existing traditional methods.

Questions of the study

1. To what extent teaching short stories develops students' narrative writing?
2. To what extent teaching short stories promotes the correct use of elements of the story?
3. To what extent teaching short stories helps students to relate events chronologically in their writing?

Hypotheses

1. Teaching short stories positively contributes to enhancing students' narrative writing of essays and stories.
- 2- Since teaching short stories focuses on characterization, plot, point of view, themes and other elements it can add to students' knowledge of these elements.
- 3- Teaching stories help students to relate events as they happen because almost all fictions relate events chronologically.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Using literature in the EFL classes is expected to be a fruitful method of developing different language skills, because literature provides students with excellent opportunities to gain meaning from the text. Literature also helps students to express the feelings and emotions.

Among the genres of literature, short stories can be a useful tool that can help enhance EFL learners' narrative writing. Because short stories are shorter than other genres and the elements that it contains are very useful in developing students writing development.

As defined by Baldick (2008) a short story is "a fictional prose tale of no specified length, but too short to be published as a volume on its own. A short story will normally concentrate on a single event with only one or two characters, more economically than a novel's sustained exploration of social background"(page: 307).

Short story could be an important element as motivational source for narrative writing, both as a model and as subject matter. On this regard, Oster (1989) stated that literature provide students with more opportunities to write more creatively. Short story can be used as a model for students' writing and this usually occurs when students' writing is relevant or nearly similar to the work of art or imitation of its style, theme, content, or organization. On the other hand, short story can be used as a subject matter when students' include interpretation or analysis, or sometimes when students are stimulated by the reading of short stories.

Lazar (1993) pointed out that the study of short stories in the language classroom makes them as the content or the subject of the study. While the use of short stories as a resource, makes short stories as a source among many sources for developing language skills and activities. Lazar also stated that short stories facilitate language acquisition by providing meaningful and memorable contexts for processing and interpreting new language.

Being the shortest genre of fiction, short stories can be the most useful tool in developing students' narrative writing. Compared to other genres of fiction, short story is the most preferred genre among the students of English as a foreign language. This is because students find other genres are difficult to follow and needs different strategies to read than those of short stories. (Arikan, 2005, p.33) pointed out that the students found reading and understanding short stories is simpler than and not as complex as other genres of literature. Arif Saricoban (2011:p160) stated that:

...a short story with its setting, characters and compelling plot, captures and holds the attention of the learners which is an important part of the learning process. The use of short stories to teach English has several other benefits including motivational, literary, cultural and higher –order thinking benefits.

As stated above short stories, captures the learners' attention by its setting, characters and compelling plot. Using short stories in language teaching has also other outcomes such as motivation for learning the language, develops literary understanding. Short stories are also can be used as tools to enhance cultural and higher order thinking benefits.

As stated earlier short stories help enhance teaching the four language skills to different levels of language learning. For example, Murdoch (2002: 9) pointed out that "short stories can, if selected and exploited appropriately, provide quality text content which will greatly enhance ELT courses for learners at intermediate levels of proficiency". He believes that, short story is a very useful method in teaching and learning different activities including writing.

The process of Narrative Writing

Narrative writing can be defined as a story writing or report of events, personal experiences, or any similar incidents, whether they are real or fictitious. As defined by Baldick, C.(2008) narrative is:

...telling of some true or fictitious event or connected sequence of events, recounted by a narrator to a narratee. Narratives are to be distinguished from descriptions qualities, states or situations, and also from dramatic enactments of events recounted in a process of narration. The narrative will consist of a set of events in which the events are selected and arranged in a particular order.

Narrative writing is the most interesting type of essay writing among EFL learners, because it is about writing stories. Because students are naturally inclined to write stories of their interests more than other types of writing, writing narrative story will be of great importance for EFL learners.. Through writing stories students can express their emotions and feelings.

On the same trend, Harmer (2004:86) points out that the process of writing is influenced by constraints of genres. Therefore, these important elements are to be provided in learning activities that are dealing with writing. Writing is a process with different stages that needs planning and preparation. This view is stated by Boardman (2002: 11) is that writing is a process of thinking and organizing, rethinking, and reorganizing. Therefore, writing a narrative essay needs planning and models that can help students to write good stories.

METHODOLOGY

Data gathering tools

This study adopts descriptive analytical research method. Pre-test and post-tests are used to answer the research questions. Students first given pre-test as diagnostic test before teaching the selected text of short story and post-test will be administered after students having been taught the selected curriculum of the short story. Students were asked to read two short stories by Earnest Hemingway (The Snows of Kilimanjaro and Indian Camp).Sixty English major students at AL-Mikhwa College of Arts and Science participated in this study.

The criteria of the test assessment will be on how students use the following elements while writing their stories. In the pre-test students' use of the following elements are checked and be compared with the post test and decide whether there is a progress or not in their achievements. The elements are: a protagonist and an antagonist, point of view, use and format dialogue correctly, describe the setting, relate the story as they happen and Resolution

Subject characteristics

The original population of this study is all English major students at Al-Baha University. The participants are the third year university students. The participants have been taught many literature and language courses including essay writing, which includes writing narrative essays.

Sampling procedure and sample size

Sixty English major students participated in this study. Students were divided into two groups. There are thirty students in experimental group and thirty students in the control group.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In the following the test results will be analyzed and discussed in details. As mentioned earlier students were divided into two groups. Experimental group who are participated in the application of the teaching short stories and control group who are not included in the experiment but are used to compare the test results of the two groups in order to decide the usefulness of teaching short stories in developing EFL learners narrative writing.

Table (1): Pre-test and post test ranks of control group:

	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Rank
Negative Ranks	6	9.50	57.00
Positive Ranks	20	14.70	294.00
Ties	4		
Total	30		

As shown on the table one above there is no significant difference between the two tests, because there are negative ranks 9.50 when compared to positive ranks 14.70 which resembles 20 students from the total number of students 30.

Table (2): Pre-Test and Post-Test Ranks of Experimental group

	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Rank
Negative Ranks	0	.00	.00
Positive Ranks	30	15.50	465.00
Ties	0		
Total	30		

As shown on the table two above there is a significant difference between the two tests, because there are no negative ranks and 100% positive ranks where the mean rank is 15.50 including all thirty students who participated in the pre-test and post-test of the experimental group.

Table (3): Narrative writing test performance pre-test and post-test of experimental and control Group

	Control Group		Experimental Group	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Mean	9.50	10.50	9.50	15.00
n	30	30	30	30
df	27	26	24	22
Standard deviation	3.330	3.400	4.365	4.500
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000*	.001*	.000*	.000*

* Significant difference

The test result shows that there is a significant difference between Pre-test and post-Test of the experimental group. The mean in the pre-Test is 9.50 while in the post-test 15.00. This indicates that there is a progress of the students' achievement in the post-test of narrative writing.

On the other hand, the test results of the control group there is no clear significant differences between the results of the pre-Test and Post-Test. The mean in the pre-test is about 9.50 similar to that of the experimental group but in the post- test there is no reliable development in the students' achievement since the mean is only 10.50.

Table (4) Percentages of test achievements:

Test achievements	Control Group		Experimental group	
	Pre-test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test
a protagonist& Antagonist	21.0	22.0	25.0	35.0
point of view	11.0	17.0	33.0	80.0
setting	20.0	22.0	26.0	77.0
dialogue	18.0	23.0	20.0	60.0
Chronological order	17.0	18.0	18.0	50.0
Resolution	16.0	18.0	19.0	27.0

With the reference to the table (4) above there are evidences that show there is development in students' performance in the post-test of the experimental group when compared to the control group. This development may be attributed to the teaching of the short stories to the experimental group.

Regarding creating characters by students when writing stories, students created better protagonists and antagonists in the post-test (35.0) of the experimental group than the pre-test (25.0). While there is no much development in the control group between the pre-Test (21.0) and post-test (22.0) when compared to the control group results. This result supports the hypothesis that indicates teaching short stories help enhance writing narrative essay in terms of characterization and making of simple characters.

Concerning point of view, students identified their narrative techniques and used clear narrative structure in the post-test of the experimental group (80.0) than the pre-test (33.0). On the other hand, there is no significant difference between the control group results of pre-test (11.0) and post-test (17.0) when compared to the experimental group results.

The setting is also stated and described more effectively in the post-test by the students of the experimental group (77.0) than the pre-test performance (26.0). On the other hand, there is no great difference between post-test (22.0) and pre-test (20.0) of the control group performance. This result indicates that students who have taught additional materials of the short stories are better performed than the control group who did not study short stories.

Regarding the use of formal dialogue, students in the experimental group developed a good communicative dialogue while writing their stories in the post-test (60.0) than the pre-test (20.0). On the other hand, there is no a significant difference between students' performance of the post-test (23.0) and pre-test (18.0) of the control group. This result denotes that teaching and reading short stories have enhanced students' dialogue format in the process of writing their stories.

Regarding the chronological order of the events of the story telling many students of the experimental group have developed the time line of their stories in the post-test (50.0) than the pre-test (18.0). While there is no significant difference in results of control group, the post-test result is (18.0) when compared to pre-test result (17.0). This result shows that the students in

the experimental group are performed better than the students in the control group. This positive result can be attributed to the reading and teaching of the selected short stories to the experimental group as supporting material in addition to the prescribed courses at the university.

Concerning resolution, some students have developed the style of writing with effect of making conclusion to their stories in the post-test of the experimental group. The result of experimental group's post-test is (27.0) while the result of the pre-test is (19.0). On the other hand, the result of the control group is consistent. Which means although there is slight difference between the results of the post-test (18.0) and pre-test (16.0). This result indicates that experimental group students' performance in the post-test is better than the same test of the control group. Hence teaching short stories help develop students narrative writing.

As the result of the post test students have developed the method of their essay writing. Students better used the characters than the pre-test some of them used the main character as the protagonist of the story. However, in some rare cases students used the antagonist and some minor characters. In the post- test the experimental group has described though was not that perfect setting description it was better than the pre-test achievements.

In terms of the dialogue students have used better dialogue in the post-test than before. They also related the story systematically as they happen in the chronological order. The post-test results confirm and support that teaching short story develops students artistic expressions which help enhance students narrative essay writing.

FINDINGS

1. Teaching short stories develops students' narrative writing.
2. Reading short stories enhance writing skills.
3. Short stories are good tools that can be used as a remedy to eliminate the difficulty that students face through their writing process.
4. Reading short stories develops understanding of the elements of the story.
5. Reading fictional stories develops students' imaginative thinking.
6. Teaching and reading stories develops students' vocabulary.

CONCLUSION

By referring to the findings of this study, it can be concluded that writing narrative essays are very important for English major university students. Hence, using short stories is an effective tool that can be adopted by language educators to develop their students' narrative writing and other language skills. It is also worth noting that writing essays develops other language skills and higher order thinking abilities. Furthermore, reading short stories develops students' imaginative thinking abilities. Hence, teaching short stories is advisably helpful for students' language learning process including vocabulary building and other language skills development

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The course designers should include sample short stories in the essay writing courses.

2. English departments have to implement new methods of teaching short stories in the curriculum of the essay writing.
3. Short stories are to be included in the curriculum of English literature courses at Al-Baha University.

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