

## DEVELOPING STUDENTS' LANGUAGE SKILLS THROUGH SHORT STORIES

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**Abstract:** The main goal of this article is to describe the impact of developing students' linguistic competence through listening and reading short stories. The main theoretical aspects that support this article are: English teaching and literature, teaching English through short stories, and encouraging student speaking by using short stories. This article also fosters students' awareness of literature.

**Keywords:** short stories; foreign language teaching and learning; language skills; cultural enrichment

The demands of education in recent years have demonstrated the need to learn English in order to be competitive in different fields (education, economy, science, and technology, among others). In reply, our government has established joint programs such as "English Speaking Nation" with the American Council and "Future English in Uzbekistan" with the British Council. Implementing programs like these means that not only institutions, but also teachers must be involved in the improvement of education in English learning. If we really want to see changes, research and implementation of different materials, strategies, and activities are ways to achieve better results. In fact, the government and institutions are looking to improve people's communication. As an EFL teacher I am interested in looking for new ways to motivate students to learn the English language, because some students are tired of current methodologies; for example, the use of textbooks that in many cases have a strong emphasis on grammar, but not on the development of communicative skills. These textbooks are, however, mandatory for the educational institutions. In other cases, teachers work with isolated activities that do not contribute in a meaningful way to the learning process. This article proposes some actions based on short stories as academic material to contribute to and reinforce the development of students' language skills. This article was supported by the works of authors like [Custodio and Sutton \[2, pp 19-23\]](#), [Elliot \[3, pp 191-198\]](#), [Riwes \[8, pp 1-16\]](#), [Koutsompou \[6,](#)

pp 74-79], and others who have worked with short stories in their academic practices.

Short stories are suitable for teaching a foreign language; however, teachers must choose appropriate materials according to their students' language ability. Otherwise, reading could be a very difficult task for them. In this regard, [Hişmanoğlu \[4, pp 53-66\]](#) argues: "When selecting the literary texts to be used in language classes, the language teacher should take into account needs, motivation, interests, cultural background and language level of the students" (p. 57). In fact, it is necessary for teachers to learn to know and understand their students in order to guide activities in a meaningful way, which can contribute to guaranteeing the success of academic work. The use of short stories in English classes is a way to find methods that motivate students' language learning because stories provide numerous benefits for teaching; the language used in these stories is commonly understandable for students and facilitates their engagement in reading. Likewise, [Kohan and Pourkalhor \[6, pp 52-60\]](#) mention some advantages of teaching English through short stories: "they make the students' reading task easier, they help students to be more creative, they raise cultural awareness, they reduce students' anxiety and help them feel more relaxed, they manage universal language and they involve fiction" (p. 3). In fact, these ideas guide teachers' work with meaningful activities that contribute greatly to students' learning.

In addition, [Pardede \[7, p.22\]](#) found in his research that short stories are interesting to use as material for personal enjoyment and also help students achieve better mastery in the development of language skills. Hence, teachers can implement activities that involve student motivations as a way to improve their language acquisition. When students are immersed in a story, language is seen as a natural process through which they can identify the functions of words in the sentences. [Sakthivel, Phil, and Kavidha \[10, pp 228, 238\]](#) observe that by reading a piece of literature learners can understand the diverse use of words, phrases, phrasal verbs, multiple meanings, idioms, among others" (p. 230). These

arguments evidence how teachers can use short stories because they encourage interactive language work which is both meaningful and interesting for students. Learning a second language requires a specific environment. We learn English as a foreign language, and the interest people have in another language depends on their personal goals. This study chooses listening and reading as means to encourage students to speak because the goal in a language learning process is for students to learn how to communicate. In this sense, [Pardede \[7, p.22\]](#) argues: "Short stories can also be a powerful and motivating source for teaching both speaking and listening. Oral reading, dramatization, improvisation, role-playing, reenactment, and discussion are more effective learning". This recommendation illustrates the importance of developing language skills in the classroom to strengthen students' self-confidence to form relationships through language use.

Specifically, [Chamot \[1, pp 14-26\]](#) believes that speaking is the most important skill to acquire and that it is relevant to assessing students' progress in terms of accomplishments. She likewise describes three areas of knowledge which are essential to language learning, as follows:

Mechanics, which involve grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary: the use of the right words in the right order and with correct pronunciation.

Functions related to transaction and interaction and how clearly and precisely the message is given in good communication.

Social and cultural rules, which involve turn-taking and the length of pauses between speakers, as well as the role and relationship between the speaker and the listener.

All of these aspects are important to demonstrating students' oral production and should be taken into account by teachers when planning activities. In addition to speaking, this article encourages to implement listening and reading as a way to encourage the development of language skills because these activities are considered authentic models of language use. Through them, students can internalize structure and pronunciation at the same time. Likewise, listening

exercises help students to develop their aural comprehension, which is essential to communication. Through activities students have the opportunity to identify and report relevant information and give their opinion about the different stories studied. During listening and speaking activities, the teacher's role is important not only in planning and performing the activities, but also in providing appropriate feedback that motivates students' language use. Richards [9, p.12] argues that feedback is necessary during or after the activities to correct grammar, pronunciation, coherence, and cohesion. This process also helps students create their own improvement plan, considering that mistakes should not be an obstacle to communication, but rather a normal way to improve language use.

In conclusion, listening to and reading short stories in the foreign language engage students in developing their language skills. Thus, practicing reading, listening, writing, and speaking simultaneously is strength in language acquisition because it simulates real-life communication. The long listening and reading sessions offer students important exposure to the target language, which serve as a model for their production. The written compositions which focus on different activities, allow students create a draft to prepare their oral reports and improve it with the development of support guides. Short stories are a language model for students to understand the function of the language and improve grammar use, cohesion, and coherence. Moreover, the acquisition of vocabulary and expressions strengthens students' communication, and this makes them feel greater self-confidence, especially during the oral interventions. In addition, students have fun because the stories capture their attention from beginning to end. Finally, considering the positive results of different studies, it is recommended that teachers use short stories very often in the English classroom as a way to motivate students' language practice.

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