

THE USE OF SHORT STORIES TO IMPROVE EFL LEARNERS' READING COMPREHENSION

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ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ КОРОТКИХ РАССКАЗОВ ДЛЯ РАЗВИТИЯ НАВЫКОВ ЧТЕНИЯ И ПОНИМАНИЯ ТЕКСТА У ИЗУЧАЮЩИХ АНГЛИЙСКИЙ ЯЗЫК КАК ИНОСТРАННЫЙ

QISQA HIKOYALAR ORQALI INGLIZ TILINI XORIJIY TIL SIFATIDA O'RGANUVCHILARNING O'QIB TUSHUNISH KO'NIKMASINI RIVOJLANTIRISH

Abstract

This article explores the use of short stories as a teaching resource for improving reading comprehension among learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It focuses on how narrative texts can support learners in understanding meaning, interpreting unfamiliar vocabulary, and identifying important information. The article discusses the role of carefully selected literary texts and structured reading activities in English language teaching. Particular attention is given to the relationship between text difficulty, learner engagement, and comprehension development. The analysis suggests that short stories can provide meaningful opportunities for practising reading strategies when they are appropriate to learners' proficiency levels and supported by effective teaching methods. The article highlights the need for further classroom-based research to examine the effectiveness of short-story-based instruction in different EFL learning contexts.

Keywords: short stories, reading comprehension, EFL learners, reading strategies, English language teaching.

Аннотация

В статье рассматривается использование коротких рассказов в качестве учебного материала для развития навыков чтения и понимания текста у изучающих английский язык как иностранный. Особое внимание уделяется тому, как повествовательные тексты помогают учащимся понимать смысл

прочитанного, интерпретировать незнакомую лексику и определять важную информацию. В статье анализируется роль правильно подобранных литературных текстов и структурированных заданий по чтению в обучении английскому языку. Отдельно рассматривается взаимосвязь между сложностью текста, вовлечённостью учащихся и развитием навыков понимания прочитанного. Отмечается, что короткие рассказы создают благоприятные условия для практики стратегий чтения, если они соответствуют уровню владения языком и сопровождаются эффективными методами обучения. Подчёркивается необходимость дальнейших практических исследований для оценки эффективности использования коротких рассказов в различных условиях обучения английскому языку как иностранному.

Ключевые слова: короткие рассказы, понимание прочитанного, изучающие английский язык как иностранный, стратегии чтения, преподавание английского языка.

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqolada ingliz tilini xorijiy til sifatida o'rganuvchilarning o'qib tushunish ko'nikmasini rivojlantirishda qisqa hikoyalardan o'quv materialini sifatida foydalanish masalasi yoritiladi. Unda hikoya matnlari o'quvchilarga matn mazmunini tushunish, notanish so'zlarni izohlash va muhim ma'lumotlarni aniqlashda qanday yordam berishi ko'rib chiqiladi. Shuningdek, ingliz tilini o'qitishda adabiy matnlarni to'g'ri tanlash va o'qish jarayoniga yo'naltirilgan topshiriqlarning ahamiyati tahlil qilinadi. Matnning murakkabligi, o'quvchilarning darsga jalb etilishi va o'qib tushunish ko'nikmasining rivojlanishi o'rtasidagi bog'liqlikka alohida e'tibor qaratiladi. Tahlil natijalari qisqa hikoyalar o'quvchilarning til bilish darajasiga mos tanlanib, samarali o'qitish usullari bilan birgalikda qo'llanilganda, o'qish strategiyalarini mashq qilish uchun qulay imkoniyat yaratishini ko'rsatadi. Maqolada qisqa hikoyalarga asoslangan ta'lim usulining turli o'quv sharoitlaridagi samaradorligini aniqlash uchun qo'shimcha amaliy tadqiqotlar o'tkazish zarurligi ta'kidlanadi.

Kalit so'zlar: qisqa hikoyalar, o'qib tushunish, ingliz tilini xorijiy til sifatida o'rganuvchilar, o'qish strategiyalari, ingliz tilini o'qitish.

Introduction

Reading comprehension is an important aspect of foreign language learning because it enables students to understand written information, interpret ideas, and construct meaning from texts. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms,

developing this ability requires more than recognising vocabulary and grammatical structures. Learners must also understand relationships between ideas, distinguish relevant information from less important details, and interpret meanings that are not explicitly stated. One challenge in reading instruction is that students sometimes approach a text as a collection of separate sentences rather than as a connected message. They may understand individual words but fail to explain why an event occurred or how one paragraph relates to another. Such difficulties indicate the need for teaching approaches that encourage learners to consider the overall meaning of a text. Short stories offer one possible way of addressing this issue. Their relatively compact structure allows learners to follow a complete narrative and examine the relationships between characters, events, and outcomes. In addition, stories can provide situations in which learners need to interpret information rather than simply reproduce it. The educational value of literary texts in language teaching has been discussed by several researchers. Pardede (2021), for example, reviewed action research concerning the use of short stories in English language teaching. Research on extensive reading has also considered the relationship between sustained reading practice and the development of comprehension skills (Taye & Teshome, 2025). However, the selection of a suitable story alone does not guarantee successful learning. Teachers need to establish clear reading objectives and design tasks that encourage learners to examine the text carefully.

The purpose of this article is to examine how short stories can be incorporated into EFL reading instruction, with particular attention to meaning construction, the use of textual evidence, and the development of independent reading strategies. The study addresses three questions:

1. How can short stories support the development of reading comprehension among EFL learners?
2. What classroom activities can encourage deeper understanding of narrative texts?
3. What factors should teachers consider when incorporating short stories into reading lessons?

Methods

This article uses a narrative literature review to examine the educational applications of short stories in EFL reading instruction. Relevant academic publications concerning literary texts, reading comprehension, and extensive reading were considered to establish a conceptual basis for the discussion. The literature was examined with attention to three main areas: the interpretation of narrative meaning, the development of reading strategies, and the design of

classroom activities. These areas were used to organise the discussion and formulate practical recommendations for teachers.

The analysis also considered the conditions that may influence the usefulness of short stories, including linguistic difficulty, familiarity with the subject, and the level of support provided by the teacher. This approach is intended to synthesise relevant ideas and develop instructional implications. It does not involve a newly conducted classroom experiment, and no original student performance data were collected for this article. Consequently, the discussion identifies potential educational benefits rather than claiming to demonstrate a new causal effect.

Results

The literature review highlights several instructional opportunities associated with the use of short stories. These opportunities concern learners' ability to reconstruct meaning, support interpretations with textual evidence, and become more independent readers.

Reconstructing meaning from a narrative. Understanding a story involves more than remembering the order of events. Readers must identify connections between actions, recognise changes in a character's behaviour, and understand how particular events contribute to the outcome. Teachers can develop this ability by asking students to explain the relationship between two events instead of merely identifying what happened. For example, learners may be asked why a character changed a decision or how an earlier event influenced a later action. Such tasks encourage students to integrate information from different parts of the text. They also help teachers identify whether learners understand the narrative as a whole or rely mainly on isolated details. Another useful activity is asking students to summarise a story in a limited number of sentences. This requires them to distinguish essential information from minor details and express the central message in their own words.

Using textual evidence to support interpretation. A further opportunity lies in developing learners' ability to justify their interpretations. Students may sometimes answer comprehension questions by guessing or relying on personal assumptions. Although personal responses can contribute to classroom discussion, interpretations should also be supported by information in the text. For example, after reading a story, students can be asked to describe a character's attitude and identify a sentence or event that supports their opinion. If two students interpret the same character differently, they can compare the evidence on which their conclusions are based. This approach encourages careful reading and introduces learners to a fundamental academic practice: supporting claims with relevant evidence.

It can also help teachers distinguish between literal comprehension and inferential comprehension. Literal questions concern information stated directly in the text, whereas inferential questions require readers to draw conclusions from available clues. A balanced reading lesson should include both types of questions so that learners can develop a broader range of comprehension skills.

Encouraging independent reading strategies. Short stories can also be used to help learners become more independent when they encounter unfamiliar words or difficult passages. Instead of immediately providing a translation, teachers can encourage students to examine the surrounding sentences, consider the actions of the characters, and identify clues that may clarify the meaning. Learners can then compare their interpretations with dictionary definitions or explanations provided by the teacher. Another useful technique is to pause at selected points and ask students to predict what might happen next. After continuing the reading, they can evaluate whether their predictions were supported by the text. These activities encourage learners to monitor their own understanding. When a prediction proves incorrect or a passage remains unclear, students have an opportunity to reconsider their interpretation and reread the relevant section. Nevertheless, independent reading does not mean that teacher support is unnecessary. Appropriate guidance is particularly important for learners who have limited vocabulary or difficulty recognising relationships between sentences.

Discussion

The analysis suggests that the contribution of short stories to reading instruction depends largely on how learners interact with the text. Reading activities become more meaningful when students are expected to explain relationships, evaluate interpretations, and support their answers with evidence. This perspective is consistent with the broader understanding of reading as an active process of constructing meaning. It also suggests that the usefulness of short stories should not be evaluated solely by whether students enjoy reading them. Teachers need to consider whether the activities help learners develop specific comprehension abilities. One practical implication is that comprehension tasks should move beyond questions requiring simple recall. Questions about causes, consequences, character motivation, and implied meaning can encourage students to examine the text more carefully. At the same time, tasks should remain appropriate to learners' proficiency levels.

Text selection is another important consideration. A story with unfamiliar cultural references or excessively complex language may prevent learners from concentrating on comprehension. Teachers should therefore consider readability, subject familiarity, length, and the learning objectives of the lesson. Short stories

can also be combined with other reading materials. Literary narratives provide opportunities to explore characters and events, while informational texts help learners practise interpreting explanations, arguments, and factual descriptions. Using different genres can prevent reading instruction from becoming limited to a single text type. The discussion has several limitations. As the article is based on a narrative literature review, its conclusions are not derived from a controlled classroom experiment. Furthermore, findings from different educational settings may not apply equally to all learners. Differences in proficiency, teaching practices, and access to reading materials can influence learning outcomes.

Future research could examine the use of short stories in Uzbek EFL classrooms. Researchers could compare students' performance before and after a structured reading programme and analyse changes in literal, inferential, and evaluative comprehension. Classroom observations and learner interviews could provide additional information about how students respond to different reading activities.

Such research would help determine which instructional practices are most useful for particular groups of learners and provide a stronger empirical basis for classroom recommendations.

Conclusion

Short stories can provide a meaningful resource for developing reading comprehension among EFL learners. Their narrative structure allows students to examine relationships between events, interpret characters' actions, and construct an understanding of a complete text.

The analysis indicates that teachers can make short-story activities more purposeful by encouraging learners to summarise information, justify interpretations with textual evidence, predict events, and monitor their understanding. These practices can support the development of more active and independent reading habits. However, the effectiveness of short-story-based instruction depends on appropriate text selection, clearly defined learning objectives, and suitable teacher guidance. Short stories should therefore complement rather than replace other forms of reading instruction. Further empirical research is needed to investigate how these approaches work in different educational contexts, particularly among learners studying English in Uzbekistan. Classroom-based studies could provide evidence about changes in comprehension performance and help teachers adapt reading activities to learners' specific needs.

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