

Recent Experimental Research on Short Story Efficacy in EFL Classrooms: A Review

Parlindungan Pardede

parlpard2010@gmail.com

Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Jakarta

In the past decades, there has been a strong belief that short stories are powerful pedagogical tool educators can use to help EFL students optimize their learning, Much has been said about short stories' effectiveness in the reinforcement of language skills development and language components learning. They are also claimed to be more effective than other materials and tools to empower EFL students to use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways as they facilitate students to engage with rich, authentic target language uses (Cameron, 2001) and offer motivating source to transmit information and ideas, nurture values and beliefs, and convey subliminal messages (King, 2001). Yet, available studies still lack essentials like what specific aspects of EFL learning are profited from short story use and how short story efficacies were exactly measured. This review aims at exploring the trend in 35 experimental research on short stories use in EFL classrooms published in 2011-2020, what they say about short stories efficacy, and the identified gaps that future research needs to address. The results will hopefully provide teachers, researchers, curriculum designers, and policymakers with a clearer understanding of short stories use in EFL classrooms.

Keywords:

EFL, experimental research, literature review, short stories

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INTRODUCTION

The current underlying notion accentuating that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning and teaching should not only facilitate students to master English language skills and components but also empower them to use the language in socially and culturally appropriate ways (Liu, 2003) has recently made literature to play essential roles in EFL classrooms. Literary works are strongly believed to have a powerful pedagogical tool as they provide students with linguistic competence, verbal communication skills, socio-cultural awareness, and intercultural skills. Collie and Slater (1991) posited that literature is valuable authentic materials, helps language development, provides cultural enrichment, and encourages personal involvement. Besides promoting communicative competence and cross-cultural awareness, it also creates more interesting, enjoyable, and encouraging learning (Ghosn, 2002; Savvidou, 2004), improves critical thinking, and increases aesthetic appreciation (Parkinson & Thomas, 2000; Ghosn, 2002).

Short stories are regarded as the most effective literary genre to use in EFL classrooms due to several reasons. Unlike poetry which generally includes various connotative words and figurative languages, or a play that requires much preparation to act out, or a novel that necessitates a long time to finish, short stories are more practical and convenient. Although they may include some archaic and connotative words, most expressions in short stories are daily languages students can deal with independently or with minimum teachers' guidance. Short stories are also relatively short. They usually focus only on a theme, a plot and a limited number of characters. This makes it possible for students to deal with a short story in one or two class sessions. Additionally, short stories are initially intended for native speakers so that they offer good examples of language components uses in contexts and cultural loads with which students can increase their cultural awareness. Also, students could easily familiarize themselves with short stories because they generally concern with human experiences in ordinary lives. Moreover, since they cover numerous topics, themes, and styles short stories afford teachers an ample opportunity to select works that meet their students' needs, interests, and tastes (Pardede, 2021).

Due to their practicality, convenience, conciseness, and interesting nature, there is a strong belief that short stories are a powerful tool and motivating source for helping students practice and consolidate language skills and components, to transmit information and ideas, to nurture values and beliefs, or even to convey subliminal messages (King, 2001). Cameron (2001) accentuated that short stories offer a comprehensive approach to language learning and teaching that facilitates an outstanding opportunity for students to engage with rich, authentic target language uses.

However, is there empirical evidence on the effectiveness of short stories use to facilitate EFL learning? What do current studies say about the effectiveness of the learning activities using short stories compared to other EFL teaching activities that do not use short stories? Are short stories effective to use with students at various educational levels? Some literature reviews (e.g. Erkaya, 2003; Pathan, 2013) have attempted to answer these questions. However, they focused more on the multidimensional benefits of short story use and suggested some practical ways to employ short stories in the

classrooms. No study has ever systematically reviewed the results of experimental research on the effectiveness of short stories use to help EFL learners achieve their learning objectives.

This systematic review aims at exploring what experimental studies published between 2011 and 2020 say about the effects of short story use in EFL classrooms. Hopefully, it can lead to new insights for teachers, researchers, curriculum designers, and policymakers who are considering optimizing EFL learning and teaching program through short story integration. Accordingly, this review will address the following questions.

1. How were short stories administered in the treatments of the experimental studies on the use of short stories in EFL classrooms published in 2011-2020?
2. What are the educational levels of participants involved in the reviewed studies?
3. What topics did the reviewed research focus on?
4. What are the results of the research?
5. What gaps are there in the recent literature that should be addressed by future research?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature in SL/FL Teaching

Literature was a prominent source of material in foreign language teaching under the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) domination. At that time, classwork was focused on grammatical rules learning that were later applied by translating the target language texts—literary works in particular—into and from the students' mother tongue. But when GTM was replaced by Structuralism, an approach accentuating that foreign language is a matter of linguistic, in the 1960s, literature role in EFL curriculums was questioned. Literature kept being ignored when various teaching methods (the Direct Method, Audiolingualism, Community Language Learning, Silent Way, etc.) commanded FL teaching up to the 1980s. The tendency of these methods to employ “usable, practical” materials to facilitate oral language proficiency disregarded literature. However, since the 1980s literature regained a prominent position in FL classrooms as it is regarded to an effective material and tool to facilitate FL students to achieve the core learning objective: to master the target language skills and components and to use the language in socially and culturally appropriate ways as well (Liu, 2003).

More and more researchers and authors in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) have recently posited that literary works are a powerful pedagogical tool for they can be effectively used to help students develop linguistic competence, verbal communication skills, socio-cultural awareness, and intercultural skills. Collie and Slater (1991) highlighted that literary works are valuable authentic materials, help language development, provide cultural enrichment, and encourage personal involvement. Cybil (2015) added that literary works facilitate students to learn language skills in an authentic context, promote critical thinking skills practices, offer various displays of social and cross-cultural issues, and endorse passionate class discussions.

Short Story in EFL Classrooms

Though every literary genre is highly potential to use in EFL classrooms, there is a belief that short stories suit EFL learning and teaching more than poetry, novel, and drama. Compared to poetry which generally contains deviated and figurative languages so that students need a very long time to grasp the meaning, short stories employ daily language. They are less problematic to grasp than poetry. Unlike novels which are commonly too long to finish in the limited class hours, short stories, which is defined by Poe (as cited in Abrams, 1999) as "a narrative that can be read at one sitting of from one-half hour to two hours, and that is limited to 'a certain unique or single effect,' to which every detail is subordinate" (p. 286) are more convenient to use. Short stories are not only short but also include only a plot and a few characters. This enables students to finish reading and discussing a short story independently or with minimum guidance from their teachers in one or two class sessions. Compared to dramas that need some properties and difficult to act out in most public school classrooms within limited course hours, short stories use is very practical because it requires only the text. Additionally, short stories have so many topics, themes, and types so that teachers have a large opportunity to select works that meets their students' language proficiencies, needs, and interests.

Short stories are an exciting and continuously evolving form of storytelling that is central to the human cognitive system as it captures human social interaction core. Through short stories, the authors communicate and sharing information, ideas, feelings, belief, and experiences in a narrative form. They express what the author think, feel, and believe about certain life experience concerning human imagination. This makes short stories not only interesting but also encouraging to listen to, read, talk, and retell orally or in written form. While reading or listening to a short story, he is actively interacting with the text. Then, he can communicate what he gets from that listening or reading to his peers or other people. Thus, short stories not only provide interesting, rich, authentic language uses (Cameron, 2001) but also engage them to interact and communicate, which, in turn, will cater to student-centered learning.

Various language teaching pundits have suggested that using short stories in EFL classrooms offers linguistic, socio-cultural, personal, and emotional benefits (Pathan, 2013) and facilitates students to consolidate language skills and components, transmit information and ideas, nurture values and beliefs, and convey subliminal messages (King, 2001).

METHOD

This systematic review was conducted applying the procedure developed by Kitchenham (2004). It consists of three main phases: planning the review, conducting the review, reporting the review. Google Scholar database was selected as the source to identify the primary research to review for two gainful reasons: (1) it covers about 389 million documents (Gusenbauer, 2019) so that it could provide massive searching results, and (2) it is a good database for searching and retrieving scholarly literature as it facilitates one

to easily identify research articles and other scholarly resources from academic publishers and universities/academic repositories.

The research to review was selected based on four criteria. First, they were published in academic journals, proceedings, or repositories using the standard structure of research articles. Second, they report experimental studies on the effectiveness of short stories use in EFL classrooms. Third, the studies involved EFL learners as participants. Fourth, they were published from 2011 to 2020. After reviewing the obtained potential research, three criteria were used to decline the unqualified studies: studies employing qualitative, mixed methods, and action research design; unpublished thesis or dissertation, research in ESL contexts. Using these inclusion and exclusion criteria, there finally remained 35 articles to be reviewed.

Data were analyzed employing the constant comparative method implemented in four steps: (1) evaluating the first selected study; (2) noting its content to construct a tentative theme; (3) examining the second article; and (4) comparing it to the first article's theme. If these articles' theme is similar, the third article was examined. If the first and second article's theme was found different, another theme was created. The review then proceeded by examining the next article and comparing it to the previous ones. Thus, every article was studied and compared to another.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Ways of Using Short Stories

RQ1: How were short stories administered in the treatments of the experimental studies on the use of short stories in EFL classrooms published in 2011-2020?

The analysis on the research procedure of the 35 studies shows that they administered short stories in two main ways: as the main tools/materials or as a supplementary factor of the interventions (Table 1). Short stories use as the main tools/materials was found in 86% of the research, and the other 14% administered them as a supplementary factor. Some researchers administering short stories as the main tools/materials include Pourkalthor and Kohan (2013) who assigned the experimental group to learn reading using short stories and asked the control group to use passages taken from magazines, internet, reading books, etc.; Pradana (2015) who assigned the experimental group to read short stories while learning narrative writing and asked the control group to learn writing using the coursebook; and Frimasary (2015) who administered short stories reading as the only intervening technique to develop the experimental group's reading comprehension. Some of the researchers administering short stories as a supplementary factor include Ghazanfari, Ziaee & Sharifianfar (2014) who combined short stories and their illustrations as the intervening materials and Nozen et al (2017) who used short stories reading as a supplementary activity for the experimental group.

As revealed in Table 1, short stories use as the main materials/tools in the 35 reviewed research was implemented in six types of technique, whereas short stories use as a supplementary factor was implemented in four types of technique. This finding confirms the claim that short stories can be creatively exploited in many ways to help reinforce EFL learning, as far as they are properly selected to meet the students' interest,

needs, and language level proficiency (Carter & Long, 1991; Hill, 1994); and teachers facilitate various learning styles that will stimulate students' involvement and arouse their interest (Collie & Slatter, 1991).

Table 1. Ways of Using Short Stories in the Research

No	Treatments	Number of studies
1	<i>Short Stories as the main material/tool</i>	
a	Using short stories vs. other types of text	8
b	Using online/digital short stories vs. printed short stories	6
c	Frequent short story reading vs. no short story reading	3
d	Applying specific techniques with short stories vs. without short stories	9
e	Applying different techniques using short stories	3
f	Using short stories to teach urban vs. rural students	1
2	<i>Short Stories as a Supplementary Element</i>	
a	Using a coursebook accompanied by printed short stories/digital stories vs. without printed short stories/digital stories	2
b	employing short stories with their illustrations	1
c	combining printed short stories with their digital (text, audio, or video) versions	1
d	employing sort stories reading as an additional element to certain main activities	1
	Total	35

Research Participants' Educational Levels

RQ2: What are the educational levels of participants involved in the reviewed studies?

Table 2 shows that the greatest number (46%) of the reviewed research involved undergraduate students, followed by secondary school students (40%), primary school pupils (11%), and young learners (3%). This shows that the experimental research on short story use in EFL classrooms published in 2011—2020 was predominantly conducted in higher education and secondary school levels. Less experimental studies involved primary school pupils and young learners.

Table 2. Participants' Educational Levels

No	Educational Level	Number of Research	
		f	%
1	Undergraduate	16	46
2	Secondary School	13	37
3	Primary School	5	14
4	Young Learners (Pre-Schoolers)	1	3
	Total	35	100

This finding may give the impression that short stories are most effective to use with undergraduate and secondary school students than with primary school pupils and young learners. Nevertheless, many scholars (e.g., Mourão, 2009; Hişmanoğlu, 2005; Rodríguez, 2017) claimed short stories to be effective materials and tools for primary,

intermediate, or advanced students as far as they are appropriately selected to meet the students' interest, needs, and language proficiency levels.

Research Topics

RQ3: What topics did the reviewed research focus on?

As shown in Table 3, the use of short stories in the reviewed research, be they were the main or supplementary tools/materials of the interventions, were administered to investigate six topics: (1) short stories use in language skills development, (2) short stories use in language components learning, (3) short stories use in communicative competence development, (4) short stories use for developing cultural awareness; (5) short stories use for memory enhancement, and (6) short stories use for critical thinking skills enhancement.

The first topic, effect of short stories usage on language skills development, comes up from six research focuses: effect of short stories use on reading comprehension performance (investigated by 5 studies in undergraduate level, 2 studies in secondary school level, and 2 studies in primary school level), effect of online short story on listening performance (investigated by 1 research in secondary school level), effect of online short story on listening performance (investigated by 1 research in secondary school), effect of digital storytelling on reading and writing performance (investigated by 2 research in secondary school), effect of watching digital flash stories vs. reading their printed versions on oral reproduction performance (studied by 1 research in primary school), effect of short stories use on writing skills (investigated by 1 research in undergraduate level and 1 research in secondary school), effect of short stories use to speaking and writing skills (studied by 1 research in undergraduate level), effect of short stories use on speaking (studied by 2 research in secondary school), and effect of short stories use to listening and speaking skills (studied by 1 research in undergraduate level).

The second topic, short stories use in language components learning, comes up from three research focuses, i.e. effect of short stories on pronunciation/oral production improvement (investigated by 1 research at the undergraduate level and 1 research in secondary school level), the effect of short stories use on vocabulary building (investigated by 3 research in undergraduate level, 4 in secondary school, 1 in primary school, and 1 in pre-school), and effect of short stories use in learning grammar (studied by 1 research in primary school level).

Each of the last four topics, the effect of short story use on communicative competence development, the effect of short story use on cultural awareness development, the effect of short story use on memory enhancement, and the effect of short story use on critical thinking development, was investigated by 1 research at the undergraduate level.

Table 3 also shows that the effect of short stories use on reading comprehension performance is the most frequently investigated, as 9 research focused on it. It is followed by the effect of short story use on vocabulary building (studied by 8 research). The least frequently investigated topics are the effect of short stories on communicative competence development, the effect of short stories on cultural awareness enhancement,

the effect of short stories on recalling information ability development, and the effect of short stories on critical thinking enhancement. Each of them was studied only by 1 research.

Table 3. The Research Focuses, Participants, and Results

No	Focuses	Research Number by Participants' EL				Results
		UG	SS	PS	YL	
1	Language Skills (LS)					
a.	Effect of short stories use vs. other materials/tools/strategies on reading comprehension performance	5	2	2	0	EG outperformed CG
b.	Effects of online stories on listening performance	0	1	0	0	EG outperformed CG
c.	Effects of digital storytelling vs. offline stories on reading and writing performance	0	2	0	0	EG outperformed CG
d.	Effect of watching digital flash stories vs. reading their printed versions on oral reproduction performance	0	0	1	0	EG outperformed CG
e.	Effect of short stories use vs. other materials/tools/strategies on writing skills	1	1	0	0	EG outperformed CG
f.	Effect of using SSs to develop Ss' speaking and writing skills	1	0	0	0	EG outperformed CG
g.	Effect of using SSs on speaking performance	0	2	0	0	EG outperformed CG
h.	Effect of using SSs on listening and speaking performance	1	0	0	0	EG outperformed CG
2	Language Components					
a.	Effect of using SSs on pronunciation/oral production performance	1	1	0	0	EG outperformed CG
B1.	Effect of using SSs on vocabulary building	2	4	1	1	EG outperformed CG
b2.	Effect of using SSs on vocabulary building	1	0	0	0	EG and CG had no significant difference
c.	Effects of including short stories in learning grammar	0	0	1	0	EG outperformed CG
3	Effects of using SSs on English communicative competence enhancement	1	0	0	0	EG and CG had no significant difference
4	Effect of incorporating culturally-loaded materials (short stories) on LS reinforcement	1	0	0	0	EG outperformed CG
5	Impact of SSs with illustrations to the ability for recalling information	1	0	0	0	EG outperformed CG
6	Establishing critical thinking through SSs reading	1	0	0	0	EG outperformed CG
Total		16	13	5	1	

(SSs= Short Stories, Ss= Students/Learners, LS= Lang. Skills; EL= Education Level; UG= Undergraduate, SS= Secondary School; PS= Primary School, YL=Young Learners, EG= Experimental Group, CG= Control Group.

The participants' involvement in each of the topics varies. Undergraduate students were involved in all of the six topics. Secondary school students were involved only in two topics, i.e. effect of short stories use in language skills development and language components learning. Primary school students were involved only in two topics (effect of

short stories use in reading comprehension development in grammar learning), whereas preschoolers were involved only in the topic of the effect of short stories use in vocabulary building.

As argued earlier, the predominant involvement of undergraduate students as participants in the reviewed studies may give the impression that short stories are not quite effective to use with students in lower educational levels. Yet, various authors (e.g., Mourão, 2009; Hişmanoğlu, 2005; Rodríguez, 2017) claimed short stories to be effective materials and tools for all students regardless of their educational levels, as far as they are appropriately selected to meet their interest, needs, and language proficiency levels.

Research Results

RQ4: What are the results of the research?

As shown in Table 3, overall, the reviewed research revealed that short stories are effective materials or tools for language skills development, language components learning, communicative competence advancement, cultural awareness increase, memory enhancement, and critical thinking skills development. Indeed, only 94% of the research revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group. The other 6% (Kim, 2018; Wijayanti, 2020) showed the experimental group and the control group had no significant difference. Yet, the independent variables of both experimental and control groups in these two research caused a significant increase each dependent variable. This finding reveals that short stories are more effective than the other materials administered to the control groups (textbooks, magazine and internet articles, other expository texts, and novels) to help students' reinforce language skills, learn language components, advance communicative competence, increase cultural awareness, enhance memory, and hone critical thinking skills.

In terms of the effect of short story use on reading comprehension performance, all the nine studies focusing on this topic revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group. Since they involved students of different educational levels, this finding confirm the view that short stories are effective tools for developing reading comprehension.

It is interesting to note that two of the research focusing on the effect of short stories on reading comprehension performance administered online (digital) short stories. Khalili and Rezvani (2015), assigned the experimental group to read 20 selected short stories online, while the control group was asked to read the same texts in print. Permadi (2019) taught reading to the experimental group using some online short stories, whereas the control group was taught using the printed version of the same short stories. The results of these two studies revealed that their experimental group outperformed the control group. This finding indicates that online short story usage gave better results than the use of printed short stories in terms of reading comprehension.

In terms of the effect of short story use on the development of other language skills, Khosravani et al (2014) and Tamzid and Hassanzadeh (2014) showed that the use of short stories gave significantly better listening performance than other materials or tools administered to the control groups. Five research (Gorjian, et al (2011); Abdollahpour, &

Maleki (2012b); Khosravani, Khosravani & Khoosf (2014); Omid & Zafarghandi (2016); Iman (2017) reported that short stories facilitated significantly better-listening performance than the use of other materials or tools administered to the control groups. Finally, five other research (Abdollahpour & Maleki (2012a); Pradana (2015), Bartan (2017); Nozen et al (2017); Rahimi & Yadollahi (2017); revealed that short stories use facilitated significantly better writing performance.

Online (digital) short stories were also administered in three of the research focusing on the effect of short story use on listening, speaking, and writing performance. Rahimi and Yadollahi (2017) reported that the experimental group learning with online digital storytelling outperformed the control group assigned to deal with offline short stories. Abdollahpour and Maleki (2012b) showed that the experimental group assigned to deal with flash (digital) stories through computer outperformed the control group that was assigned to read the printed texts of the same stories and then answered the provided reading comprehension questions. Tamzid and Hassanzadeh (2014) reported that the experimental group, taught using a course book and sixteen digital short stories, outperformed the control group that was taught using the same course book only.

The great majority (92%) of research focusing on short stories use in language components learning revealed that short stories are effective to build vocabulary, improve pronunciation, and develop grammar. The majority (90%) of research focusing on the effectiveness of short stories use to build vocabulary revealed that short stories facilitated significantly better results in vocabulary development than the use of other materials or tools administered to the control groups. Wijayanti (2020) is the only research reporting that short story use had no significant difference with the use of the materials provided to the control group. She found that both short stories and newspaper readings significantly increased students' vocabulary size, but there was no significant difference between the short stories and newspaper groups.

Each of the topics of the effect of short story use to increase cultural awareness, recall of information, and critical thinking was studied by one research. Nasirahmadi, Madarsara and Aghdam, (2014) investigated the effect of short stories on cultural awareness growth. The experimental group, after learning in the usual way for one and a half hours, was assigned to work with short stories, whereas the control group was assigned to study in the usual way. The results show that the experimental group outperformed the control group in terms of willingness to volunteer in speaking and eagerness to participate in classroom discussion, short stories use created a very friendly and authentic atmosphere which lowered students' affective filter and allowed them to feel free to engage in the learning activities. To test the effectiveness of short story use on memory enhancement. Ghazanfari, Ziaee and Sharifianfar (2014) reported that the experimental group assigned to read some short stories accompanied by well-made illustrations outperformed the control group that was assigned to read the same short stories (without illustration) in terms of the ability to recall the major features of the assigned texts. To investigate the effectiveness of short stories use on critical thinking improvement, Khatib and Mehrgan (2012) asked the experimental group to read short stories, do some critical thinking activities, and write a paper to analyze, evaluate, or

criticize each short story, whereas the control group was assigned only to read the same short stories and answer some comprehension questions provided for each short story. The results revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in terms of critical thinking skills.

To sum up, 94% of the reviewed research revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group. Although the other 2 (6%) of the research revealed different results, they essentially showed the effectiveness of short story use, too. This finding confirms claim that short stories usage can enhance language skills and language components because short stories provide authentic language features such as "the formation and function of sentences, the variety of possible structures, and the different ways of connecting ideas" at various levels of difficulty (Collie and Slater, 1994, p. 5), encourage learners to think about the language use norms (Widdowson, 1975, cited in Lazar, 1993, p. 18), which in turn will familiarize themselves with numerous language uses and conventions or forms. This finding also approves previous studies' findings showing that short stories are effective to improve vocabulary and reading (Lao & Krashen, 2000) and engage students in listening, reading, speaking, and writing simultaneous practices which will promote language acquisition and stimulate real-life communication (Rodríguez, 2017).

The results showing short story's efficacy to develop cultural awareness, recall of information, and critical thinking confirm the claims that literary works, including short stories, offer motivational, literary, cultural, and higher-order thinking benefits (Erkaya, 2005), grow foreign language students' understanding of the target language country and people, which fosters their ability to interpret discourse in various social and cultural contexts of the target language (Savvidou, 2004) and facilitate cognitive and learning strategies development because they encourage students to predict, guess and research to get a deeper meaning while reading or listening to them (Gonzales, 2010). Yet, since the research investigating these topics is very limited in number, more research is needed to conduct to confirm and increase their confidence and significance levels.

The use of online/digital short stories in some of the research in this review is worth noting. The fact that only 6 (17%) of them (Abdollahpour, & Maleki, 2012a; Abdollahpour, & Maleki, 2012b; Tamzid & Hassanzadeh, 2014; Khalili & Rezvani, 2015; Rahimi & Yadollahi, 2017; Permadi, 2019) administered online/digital short stories is quite surprising because ICT exponential advancement has been mounting the range of potential solutions for language teaching and learning inputs, processes, and outcomes. Various studies have shown that ICT use in EFL classroom is beneficial because it helps students to master language skills (Shuchi, & Islam, 2016), enables teachers to easily adapt teaching materials to meet the class circumstances, learner's needs and response, provides easy access to authentic materials through the internet, helps teachers to integrate or alternately use language skills and media (text and images, text and audio, text and video clip) to increase students' interest and engagement, and enables teachers and/or students to concentrate on one specific aspect of the lesson (Houcine (2011). Moreover, today's students are digital natives who respond well to activities employing ICT due to their familiarity with the new technology (Prensky, 2001). Realizing ICT accelerating

penetration to EFL learning,, more and more studies investigating online/digital short stories use in EFL classrooms are needed to verify these findings' accuracy.

Research Gaps

RQ5: What gaps are there in the recent literature that should be addressed by future research?

As described earlier, the six topics in the reviewed research were not studied by equal number of research. The vast majority of the research focused on language skills and language elements. Studies investigating short story efficacy for developing communicative competence, cultural awareness, memory, and critical thinking skills are very meager. Thus, more future studies are needed to focus on the effectiveness of short stories use on short stories use to develop communicative competence, cultural awareness, memory, and critical thinking skills.

The second gap in the reviewed research concerns with the involvement of participants from primary school students and young learners. As described earlier, 46% of the research involved undergraduate students, 37 % involved secondary school students, and only a few involved primary school students and young learners. Therefore, future studies need to involve participants of the lower levels of education.

The third gap concerns with the meager number of research administering online or digital short stories. Despite the current accelerating penetration of ICT into the EFL field, only 6 (17%) of the reviewed studies dealt with ICT-based or digital short stories. Thus, researching this issue is urgent.

CONCLUSION

Based on the review results and discussion above, five conclusions are drawn. First, the experimental research on short story use in EFL classrooms published between 2011 and 2020 showed that short stories can be effectively used as the main or as supplementary tools/materials to optimize EFL students' learning and performance. Second, the majority of reviewed research involved participants from undergraduate and secondary school, requiring us to take more studies involving primary school pupils and preschoolers to validate short stories use efficacy for young learners. Third, short stories can be used to help students develop six areas of EFL learning and teaching: language skills, language components, communicative competence, cultural awareness, memory, and critical thinking skills. The results showed that short stories are more effective for language skills development and language components learning than other materials or tools that do not use short stories. The results also showed short story efficacy for developing communicative competence, cultural awareness, memory, and critical thinking skills. However, it should be noted that each of these four topics was investigated only by one research. Fourth, online/digital short stories are found to be more effective than printed short stories in developing students' language skills. Yet, since this result was obtained from 6 (17%) of the research, more research is needed to confirm it.

SUGGESTIONS

Referring to the identified research gaps, three points are recommended for future studies on short story use in EFL classrooms. First, since the studies focusing on short story's efficacy for developing communicative competence, cultural awareness, memory, and critical thinking skills are very meager, there should more further research focusing on these four topics. Second, the number of the reviewed research involving primary school students and preschoolers is limited. Thus, this issue would be very relevant to investigate by future studies. Third, due to the accelerating penetration of ICT into the EFL field, it would be relevant for future studies to investigate ICT-based or digital short stories usage in EFL classrooms.

This review has at least two limitations. First, it merely includes experimental research published in the form of research articles indexed by Google Scholar. Future reviews are recommended to include unpublished theses, dissertations and other research investigating the the same topic but not yet indexed by Google Scholar. Second, this review excludes empirical research employing descriptive, mixed-methods, and action research design. Reviewing research reports using these designs is also recommended.

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