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Effects of Short Story Reading on EFL Narrative Writing

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Abstract:

This study examined the effects of short story reading on the improvement of grammar and global quality in EFL narrative writing. In addition, it also explored learners' attitudes toward short story reading on narrative writing performance. The 7-week study was carried out at a university in Mekong Delta, Vietnam, with 50 EFL learners at the pre-intermediate level. Participants were chosen and divided into an experimental group with the intervention of short story reading and a control group with course book reading. Two types of research instruments were used to collect quantitative data, including tests and survey questionnaires. Results showed that short story reading had positive effects on the improvement of grammar and global quality in EFL narrative writing. Moreover, the findings also showed the positive attitudes of EFL learners toward short story reading on narrative writing performance.

Keywords: Short story reading, grammar, global quality, narrative writing

1. Introduction

Today, teaching and learning English language in Vietnam is considered the key to opening the world of academics, integration and economic development. In all forms of language art, writing is referred to as one of the most complex processes that require a lot of time and effort to master such skills. However, while teaching EFL in Vietnam context, several activities applied to writing classes are not sufficient and effective enough to foster the learners in this skill and limitation on grammatical knowledge is one of the factors affecting to quality of writing (Nguyen, Phan, & Ly, 2011).

In these lights, grammar teaching should not be a separate activity and not be taught as an end in itself. Instead, it should be integrated with communication activities and put into context for the goal of communication.

Literary reading seems to be one of the most effective and culturally rich resources that can be integrated with the language classroom and used to teach a variety of language items, such as sentence patterns and vocabulary. Hence, within the scope of the study, the researcher focuses on the effect of short story reading which is defined as a genre of literary reading and narrative writing performance on EFL because narrative writing is also a genre in letter writing which is popular for students and teachers as it provides the writer with an opportunity to share their imagination, creativity, skill and understanding of nearly all elements of writing.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of short story reading on the improvement of grammar and global quality in EFL narrative writing. In addition, the study also explores learners' attitudes toward the effect of short story reading on their narrative writing performance.

- Are there any effects of short story reading on the improvement of grammar in EFL narrative writing?
- Are there any effects of short story reading on global quality in EFL narrative writing?
- What are the attitudes of EFL learners toward the effect of short story reading on narrative writing performance?

2. Literature Review

There are some ways often enforced in the teaching and learning process, one among them by using short stories as a genre of literature (Pratiwi, Putri & Suhadi, 2020). Traditionally, a short story is considered an effective vehicle to alleviate boredom or to get pleasure in leisure time. On the other side, it also could be seen as a means of learning. Short story facilitates students in reading, and it may well be a lot of fun (Dari, 2020). Hismanoglu (2005) listed the advantages of using the short story: "Short story has a simple and short characteristic." Therefore, it makes the students' reading task easier because it is simple and short. As presented by the British Council, a short story is defined as a very authentic source for cross-culture communication and writing. According to Saiful (2012), in learning writing, an English short story can be an interactive way to learn grammatical structures.

At present, there are a lot of studies showing a close relationship between short story reading and writing performance. A study by Pardede (2011) emphasized that currently, integrating literature in EFL teaching is necessary because of its rich potential to provide an authentic model of language use. Among literary genres, short stories could be seen as the most suitable choice for this due to their potential to help language learners more effectively enhance writing and other skills because of the motivational benefit embedded in each story.

Currently, narrative is one of the most practical genres of letter writing. Kormos (2011), narratives are among the frequently taught written text types in general foreign language courses starting from the beginning level, and they are

also included in the curriculum of composition classes for higher-level college learners. According to Gallick-Jackson (1997), narrative writing is defined as relating a sequence of events that occurs over some period of time. The events and the order in which the events occur are both communicated to the reader. Taking the above-mentioned problems, the benefits of short story reading and the relation of short story reading and writing into consideration, the researcher perceived that using short story reading to gradually improve the narrative writing performance of EFL learners is significantly necessary. In this research, the researcher used short stories as the main reading source because the length and content of short stories are suitable in consideration of learners' interests. Short story reading seems to be a great source to help EFL learners see how grammar is used in context; therefore, it is expected to enhance their chance of using effective grammar and improving their narrative writing performance.

3. The Study

3.1. Design of the Study

A pre-test post-test control group design (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002) was implemented to examine the effects of short story reading on the improvement of grammar and global quality in EFL narrative writing (see table 1). The design allowed us to examine the effect of treatment twice with post-test 1 and post-test 2.

Group	Pre-test O1	Intervention Session 1	Post-test 1 O2	Intervention Session 2	Post-test 2 O3
EG (n=33)		Short story reading from Anglophone cultures		Short story reading from Vietnamese culture written in English	
CG (n=17)	O1	Coursebook reading and deductive grammar teaching method	O2	Coursebook reading and deductive grammar teaching method	O3

Table 1: Experimental Design

Note: EG= Experimental Group, CG = Control Group, O = Measurement (1 To 3)

This design allowed the researcher to compare participant groups in grammatical achievement and overall writing quality in EFL narrative writing and measure the degree of change occurring as a result of interventions. The experimental group was given the treatment and the results were gathered at the end. The control group received no treatment over the same period of time but underwent exactly the same tests.

3.2. Participants

Participants of this study were 50 undergraduate learners from different majors taking a General English course. During the research time, the researcher was assigned to teach two classes:

- One group included 17 learners, with 4 males and 13 females
- Another group included 33 learners with 17 males and 18 females

Both groups were ranked by the university at a pre-intermediate level in EFL competence. They were taught by the same teacher for the study.

3.3. Measurement

Two research instruments, including tests and questionnaires, were used in this study. The written response task (around 100 words) allowed the researcher to see the improvement of participants in two aspects, including key grammar point usage and overall writing quality in narrative writing. For the first aspect, the rater checked and calculated the number of sentences in their writing in which learners successfully used the appropriate and correct forms of simple past and relative clauses. The maximum score for rating grammar use was 3. In addition, the improvement of overall writing quality in narrative writing was also explored due to these written response tasks. The researcher designed a writing assessment scale which was developed with reference to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and was divided into five sub-scales:

- Content,
- Communicative achievement,
- Organization,
- Vocabulary and
- Grammar

The maximum score for rating overall writing quality was 10, in which learners successfully produced written texts with the satisfaction of these five subscales.

Moreover, to obtain quantitative data on learners' attitudes towards literary reading on the improvement of grammar and overall writing quality in letter writing, questionnaires were administered to the participants before and after the intervention. In this study, learners were provided with a scale of possible responses to the question ranging from the attitude measure 'strongly disagree' to the exact opposite measure of 'strongly agree' according to a predefined

scale (1-5). The response to the questionnaire was measured and analyzed by SPSS 20 to see the improvement of the learner's attitude towards the intervention.

Time/Activities	Experimental Group	Control Group
1 st week Test duration: 30'	After consolidating about letter writing, the pre-test was used.	
2 nd , 3 rd week	Reading and grammar sections in the course book were replaced by short story reading from Anglophone cultures containing key grammar points.	Learning activities were followed by the guidance in the course book. Key grammar points were taught deductively.
4 th week Test duration: 30'	Post-test 1 was used.	
5 th , 6 th week	Reading and grammar sections in the course book were replaced by short story reading from Vietnamese culture written in English containing key grammar points.	Learning activities were followed the guidance in course book. Key grammar points were taught deductively.
7 th week Test duration: 30'	Post-test 2 was taken by both two groups.	

Table 2: Procedure of the Study

Experimental condition: Teaching grammar through short story reading	Control condition: Course book-based and deductive grammar teaching method
<i>Giving setting and stimulating:</i> The teacher introduced the setting of the story and stimulated learners' curiosity by asking some questions related to the story.	<i>Key grammar points presenting:</i> The teacher introduced grammar structures and explained how these rules work in a sentence.
<i>Short story reading and Grammar exploration:</i> After reading, learners were asked to highlight the key grammar points. Then, they were encouraged to pay attention to the usage of these grammar points.	<i>Grammar exploring:</i> Learners were encouraged to repeat the usage of these grammar structures and give some other examples related to these key grammar points.
<i>Drilling through exercises based on the content of the story:</i> The teacher gave learners some questions/exercises containing these key grammar points to respond to/practice. Then, learners were encouraged to visualize how these rules work in a sentence respectively.	<i>Drilling through exercises presented in the course book and media reading containing key grammar points:</i> After practicing some exercises in the course book, learners got a text of news (source: from Tuoitre.online) containing key grammar points to read without any instruction.
Writing task with grammar points learned: Learners were asked to write a summary of the story around 50 words and key grammar points must be used in their writing.	Writing task with grammar points learned: Learners were asked to write a summary of news of around 50 words and key grammar points must be used in their writing

Table 3: Teaching Scenario and Two Conditions

4. Finding

4.1. The Effect of Short Story Reading on Improvement of Grammar in EFL Narrative Writing

After the two times of applications of the intervention, both two groups gained a higher level of grammatical achievement in narrative writing.

The whole process of grammar improvement in narrative writing of two groups was illustrated in figure 1:

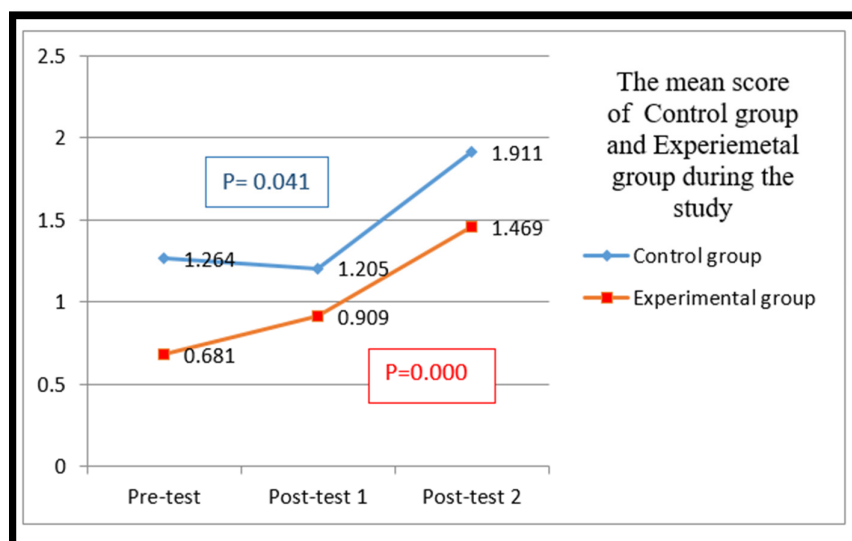


Figure 1: The Differences between the Mean Scores in Grammar Improvement in Narrative Writing of Two Groups in the Study

4.2. The Effects of Short Story Reading on Global Quality in EFL Narrative Writing

Generally, before the treatment, the overall level of the two groups in letter writing quality was not a significant difference. In post-test 2, both two groups obtained a higher level of narrative writing performance compared to pre-test and the differences after twice of intervention were statistically significant.

The whole process of global quality improvement in narrative writing of two groups is illustrated in figure 2.

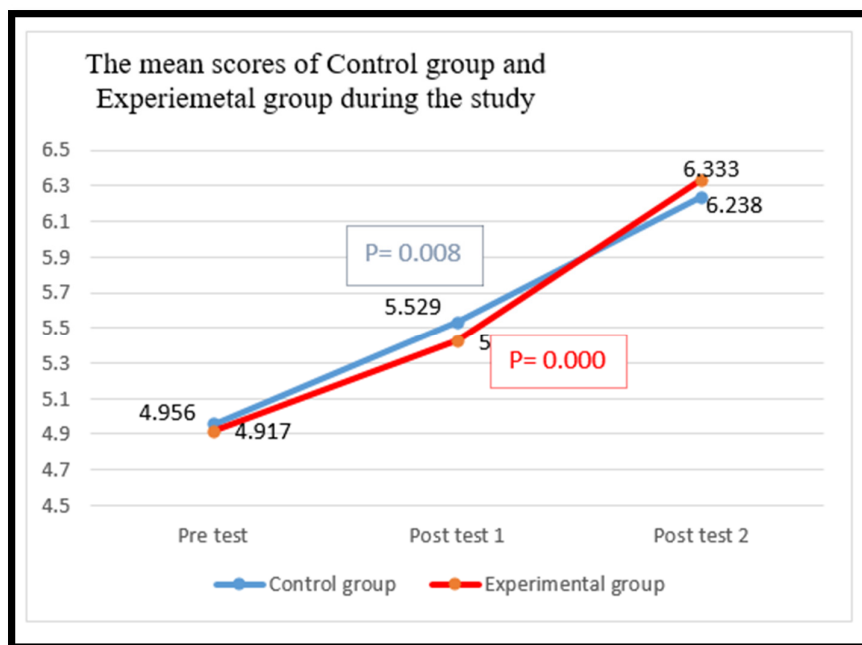


Figure 2: The Differences between the Mean Scores in Global Quality in Narrative Writing Two Groups in the Study

4.3. The Attitudes of EFL Learners towards the Effect of Short Story Reading on Narrative Writing

It could be briefly described that before the intervention, students of both groups had the same level of positive attitudes towards the effect of short story reading on narrative writing performance. The moment the post-test was measured, the control group gained the same level of attitude towards this learning strategy, while the experimental group gained a higher level of attitude towards the effect of short story reading on narrative writing performance under the application of short story reading. In addition, the difference in the positive attitude of learners in the two groups was statistically significant in the post-test. The experimental group had a higher level of attitude towards the effect of short story reading on narrative writing performance.

The whole process of learners' attitudes towards the effect of short story reading on the narrative writing performance of two groups was illustrated in figure 3.

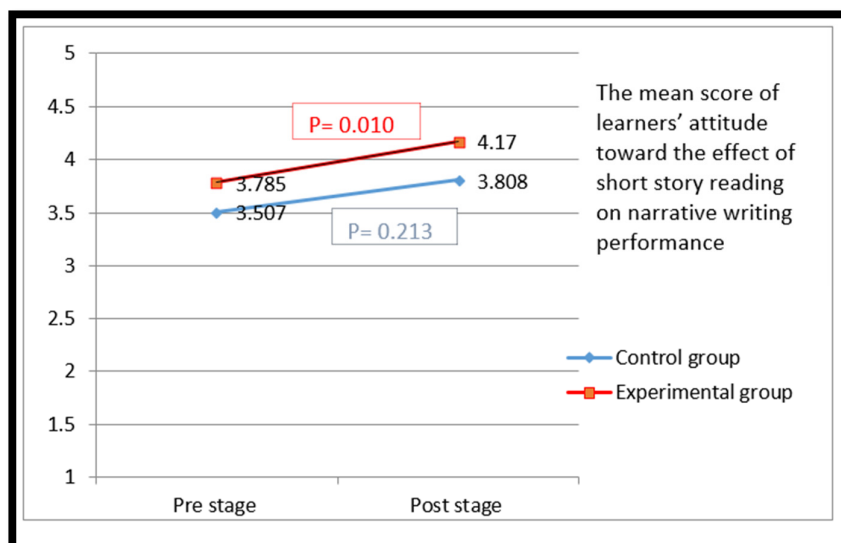


Figure 3: The Differences between the Mean Scores in Learners' Attitude towards the Effect of Short Story Reading on Narrative Writing Performance

5. Discussion

The findings of this study are consistent with the exploration of Cileli and Ozen (2003), who found out that learners exposed to short story reading got higher levels of writing performance. In addition, these findings also support the study of Can and Sapar (2010), who discovered that learners were strongly motivated and developed their writing skills through applications of short story reading. Moreover, the results of this study are in line with Kirkogoz (2012), Schleppegrell and Achugar (2003), Soleimani and Khandan (2013), and Marouch (2020), who revealed that the use of literary reading in EFL/ESL classes resulted in positive grammar achievement in writing. It confirmed the hypothesis that short story reading has a positive effect on the improvement of grammar and global quality in EFL narrative writing.

Narrative writing is a complicated skill. We can teach our students basic narrative writing skills; however, it is impossible to teach the art of fine narrative writing. It is possible to learn, but this learning is only fully achieved through reading the appropriate literary genres as short story reading. Learners participating in this study are expected to use short story reading more frequently in the classroom. Hence, it should be noted that the application of short story reading material to teach grammar in narrative writing is necessary; it will serve as a tool for fostering and enhancing learners' ability in grammatical achievement and overall writing quality.

It is recommended that a short story is a meaningful material source to be implemented in English writing classes. Therefore, to encourage learners to improve their writing, teachers should create spaces for them to read literary genres regarding their own benefits as short stories. While the learners are the center of reading and writing activities, teachers play the role of facilitators. If the teachers positively facilitate the learning to write by using short story reading, the learners' writing performance could be improved.

In addition, the researcher also found out the coefficient correlation between the improvement in grammar achievement and global quality in narrative writing under the positive impact of short story reading. Hence, to be a good writer, students must spend a lot of time for short story reading to acquire the grammatical structures and effectively control the other critical components in their writing.

6. Conclusion

The present study was conducted to examine the effects of short story reading on the improvement of grammar as well as global quality in EFL narrative writing. In addition, it also explores learners' attitudes toward the effect of short story reading on EFL narrative writing. It found that short story reading had positive effects on the improvement of grammar and overall writing quality in the narrative writing of EFL learners. Additionally, learners who participated in this study had positive attitudes towards the effect of short story reading on EFL narrative writing.

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