

INTEGRATING SHORT STORIES INTO LANGUAGE TEACHING TO ENHANCE VOCABULARY ACQUISITION

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Annotation. Vocabulary acquisition plays a crucial role in second language learning, yet traditional vocabulary teaching methods often fail to provide sufficient contextual exposure. This study explores the integration of short stories into English language teaching as an effective strategy for enhancing learners' vocabulary acquisition. The findings suggest that incorporating short stories into language instruction positively impacts learners' vocabulary development and overall language proficiency.

Key words: *short story, vocabulary, linguistic input, acquisition, short-story-based instruction, sociocultural perspective, lexical items.*

The knowledge of vocabulary is one of the core elements of the communicative competence in EFL learners and plays a crucial role in an individual's ability to understand and produce the language. Vocabulary teaching in numerous EFL classes is mainly based on memorization and it results in superficial learning. Focusing on meaningful exposure and contextualized input, the researchers highlight that the learning process is better than drill and kill, and therefore that vocabulary should be acquired [2, p. 34]. Short stories as short literary texts act to offer meaningful linguistic input and authentic contexts that aid in the acquisition of vocabulary. It seeks to investigate the pedagogical impact of using short stories in language teaching and to assess the enhancement in vocabulary acquisition in EFL learners.

Vocabulary acquisition in EFL contexts. Vocabulary acquisition is about knowing word meaning, form, and use in context. Nation finds that, from a learner perspective, learners acquire vocabulary more effectively by encountering words repeatedly in meaningful contexts rather than through decontextualized learning [3, p. 67]. Contextual learning allows learners to deduce meanings, be able to spot collocations, and pragmatically use the words. Studies indicate that extensive exposure to written texts significantly contributes to vocabulary growth, especially when learners actively engage with the content [2, p. 41].

Short stories as instructional materials. Short stories are particularly suitable for classroom use because of their manageable length, clear structure, and engaging narratives. Lazar notes that short stories motivate learners and offer repeated exposure to vocabulary in varied contexts, which strengthens retention [4, p. 19]. Empirical research confirms that learners exposed to short stories demonstrate higher vocabulary achievement compared to those taught through traditional methods. For instance, Sariana et al. reported a significant improvement in students' vocabulary scores after implementing short-story-based instruction [5, p. 88].

Theoretical Framework

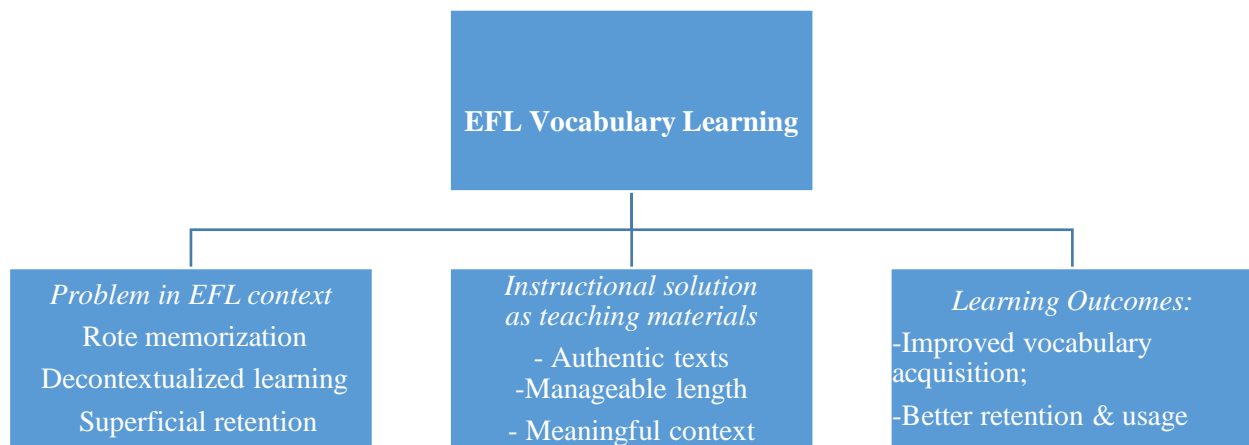
Input Hypothesis. Based on Krashen's Input Hypothesis, the acquisition of a language involves providing comprehensible input slightly above the learners' current level of proficiency ($i + 1$) [6, p. 21]. Short stories serve as an opportunity for such input by embedding new vocabulary within meaningful narratives, allowing learners to understand unfamiliar words through context.

Sociocultural Theory. From a sociocultural perspective, learning is a socially mediated process. Vygotsky draws attention to the role of interaction and scaffolding in language learning [7, p. 86]. Classroom discussions, group work, and collaborative tasks based on short stories make it possible for learners to negotiate meaning and internalize new vocabulary more effectively. Several theories of language acquisition focus on the value of meaningful input and social interaction in the development of vocabulary. Based on Krashen's Input Hypothesis, students receive language from input that slightly exceeds their current level of proficiency. It has already been shown through short stories that new words are given in a specific meaningful context. From the sociocultural viewpoint, language learning is viewed as a social process in which interaction plays an indispensable role. In this context, classroom activities (group work and discussion based on short story projects) allow learners to more effectively negotiate meaning, to integrate new vocabulary and thus acquire new vocabulary.

Empirical Evidence. A growing body of empirical research confirms the effectiveness of short stories in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among language learners. For instance, a classroom action research study revealed a significant improvement in students' vocabulary knowledge, with mean scores rising from 48 to 76 after instruction based on short stories [8, p. 55]. This improvement indicates that narrative-based input supports better retention and understanding of new lexical items. Similarly, findings from a quasi-experimental study demonstrated that learners who were taught vocabulary through short stories significantly outperformed those in the control group who followed traditional instruction methods [9, p. 102]. In addition to

measurable vocabulary gains, learners reported increased motivation and more positive attitudes toward vocabulary learning. The use of narratives made lessons more engaging, meaningful, and less monotonous, thereby fostering a supportive learning environment.

Text Selection. The effectiveness of short-story-based instruction largely depends on the careful selection of texts. Teachers should choose short stories that correspond to learners' language proficiency levels to avoid cognitive overload and frustration. Furthermore, cultural relevance should be taken into consideration so that learners can easily relate to the themes and contexts of the stories. Selected texts should include sufficient contextual clues—such as descriptions, examples, and repetition—that enable learners to infer the meanings of unfamiliar words without excessive dependence on dictionaries [4, p. 23]. Such an approach encourages the development of learners' inferencing skills and autonomous vocabulary learning strategies.



Classroom Activities. To maximize vocabulary learning, teachers should implement a variety of well-structured classroom activities before, during, and after reading. Pre-reading activities may include predicting vocabulary meanings based on titles, pictures, or key sentences, which activates learners' prior knowledge. While-reading tasks can focus on inferencing meaning from context and identifying key lexical items within the text. Post-reading activities, such as summarizing the story, role-plays, discussions, and vocabulary recycling exercises, help consolidate newly learned words and promote deeper cognitive processing. These activities not only reinforce vocabulary retention but also support the integration of vocabulary into active language use [6, p. 29].

In conclusion, the integration of short stories into language teaching represents a pedagogically sound and effective approach to enhancing vocabulary acquisition. Both theoretical frameworks and empirical studies consistently indicate that short stories offer rich, contextualized input that facilitates meaningful vocabulary learning. Moreover, narrative texts increase learners' motivation and engagement by presenting language in authentic and relatable contexts, which in turn supports deeper processing and long-term retention of lexical items. Consequently, EFL teachers are strongly encouraged to incorporate short stories into their curricula as a valuable instructional resource for fostering effective and sustainable vocabulary development.

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