

Integrating Short Stories to Enhance Composition Writing in Secondary EFL Learners

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Abstract: *This study investigates the effectiveness of integrating short stories into English as a Foreign Language instruction to enhance composition writing skills among secondary school students. A quantitative descriptive analytical design was employed using a pre-test and post-test framework with a sample of 80 students, alongside a structured questionnaire administered to 30 teachers. Data were analyzed using SPSS, applying descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. The findings indicate that students initially demonstrated weak writing performance, with mean scores around 53 percent, while post intervention results for the experimental group improved significantly to approximately 69.5 percent compared to 56.7 percent in the control group. The results suggest a positive relationship between short story instruction and improved writing skills, particularly in spelling, punctuation, and organization. The study concludes that literature-based instruction enhances both linguistic competence and learner motivation, recommending curriculum integration of short stories to strengthen writing pedagogy in secondary education.*

Keywords: EFL writing instruction, short stories, composition skills, secondary education, literature based pedagogy, writing development

1. Background of Study

Writing is a fundamental skill in language education, which is necessary not only for academic performance but also for communication throughout life. Writing is not like listening and speaking in its receptive component to the brain: It requires instruction and continuous practice in organizing ideas, coherence and clarity. Literature in short stories has always been acknowledged as a valuable source of linguistic input and engagement for the second and foreign language classroom.

In connection with this long-standing role of literature in language learning, the grammar translation Method, which was prevalent during the 19th century, was based on the use of literary texts to translate an unknown language. With the rise of communicative approaches, literature was temporarily excluded. from language classes. However, contemporary pedagogical discussion has re-embraced literature as a resource to activate imagination, to locate language in context, and to promote higher forms of thought.

Following this renewed interest in literature, in short stories, there are brief and versatile texts reflecting real-life experiences, moral issues, nuances of culture and depth of feeling. Used in an integrative manner in the classroom, they can provide exposure to a wide range of discourse patterns and lexical items and help students develop writing skills. It enables learners to experiment with tone, perspective, and narrative coherence through storytelling skills which are mirrored in the needs of academic writers.

Against this pedagogical background, from the author's classroom experience, the need to address recurring weaknesses in the writing of secondary-level students was drawn to attention and gave rise to the present study. Such

challenges include lack of organization, limited control over grammatical structures, and lack of response to academic protocols that are likely to pose a barrier to future university studies. To address this gap, this study examines how short stories as part of the writing instruction of students can reinforce writing skills and change the way teaching of writing is approached at the secondary level.

To guide this investigation, the study poses the following questions:

- To what extent can teaching short stories enhance the composition writing skills of secondary school students?
- Are the current syllabi and teaching methods employed in teaching English language skills effective in developing composition writing ability?
- Is there a statistically significant correlation between teaching short stories and the enhancement of composition writing skills for secondary school students?

Accordingly, the research aims to:

- Explore the value of introducing short stories into secondary school instruction as a motivational and context-rich tool for developing writing skills.
- Improve teaching practices by examining how literary texts can support the delivery of writing instruction.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of current syllabi and methodologies in enhancing student composition performance.

By addressing these aims, the study seeks to contribute meaningfully to applied linguistics and English language pedagogy, offering practical insights for educators, curriculum developers, and researchers committed to enriching language instruction at the secondary level.

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2. Literature Review

Writing Skills

Academic writing is central to students' educational development. Li (1999) defines it as "the written work produced in schools, colleges, and universities, particularly work that involves introducing, critiquing, and building upon ideas." Oshima and Houge (2007) similarly describe it as "the type of writing utilized in high school and college courses," distinguishing it from creative and personal writing, which are informal. Academic writing, by contrast, requires formal language, accurate grammar, appropriate vocabulary, and organized ideas.

In relation to this, literary works in English—stories, prose, poetry, and essays—offer rich linguistic and cultural content. Writers from diverse backgrounds express ideas about their cultures, often aiming to teach lessons or provide guidance. Simplified literary texts, especially for young learners, help them understand aspects of earlier societies and compare them with their own experiences. English literature, particularly short stories, plays a vital role in language education by providing expressive language and essential vocabulary. Without such exposure, the development of productive skills, especially writing, is significantly limited.

Despite this potential, many students feel comfortable writing only in their native language, and this confidence decreases sharply when writing in a second language. As a result, teachers often encounter poorly organized, underdeveloped, grammatically weak, and vocabulary-deficient writing. A major factor contributing to this issue is limited engagement with English literary works, especially short stories, which can broaden linguistic awareness and improve language use.

In today's globalized context, reading and writing have become increasingly important. Writing preserves information, beliefs, emotions, arguments, and theories, enabling communication across generations. Yet students at all levels often overlook its advantages. English short stories, which form a substantial part of written language, engage readers through the originality of authors' expression and provide valuable material for creative writing. They also offer an effective context for examining syntactic choices and diction.

Alongside these challenges, the approach to teaching writing has evolved. Historically, instruction focused mainly on correcting errors rather than teaching the writing process (Calkins, 1989; Willis, 2001). By the late 1970s, the process writing movement emerged (Willis, 2001). Developed by Graves (1983), this approach emphasized brainstorming, feedback, revision, editing, and proofreading before producing a final draft (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983; Willis, 2001). It provided students with repeated opportunities to practice and internalize writing skills, similar to the processes used by professional authors (Wong-Kam and Vasquez, 2003).

Extending this discussion to broader language learning, the primary function of language is to convey thoughts, feelings, needs, and ideas (Banu, 2009). However, studies show that many primary school graduates struggle to acquire effective

language skills (Ahmed and Nath, 2005). To address writing difficulties, students must find value in classroom activities and be taught appropriate strategies. Although the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) now promote the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method, many government schoolteachers continue to rely on the Grammar-Translation Method. This research will examine both approaches and their impact on writing development.

Advantages of Early-Stage Writing Instruction

Writing has long been acknowledged as a core literacy skill to begin fostering from a young age. It builds students' comprehension and expressive skills and supports cognitive and inner reflection. Graham and Harris (2005) point out that writing is influenced by students' experience, emotion, and sense perception, and it promotes clearer thinking. Writing is also an effective way to learn, maintain ideas, and generate new ones by transforming thoughts from an abstract space into a structured form.

Building on this early foundation, Tolga and Ozge (2012) underline the significance of sparking interest in writing during formal education. At this stage, students are more open to forming writing habits that will carry over to later academic levels. However, in some educational contexts, early writing practice remains scarce. In Bangladesh, for example, students often resist writing, and uninspiring instruction leaves little room for meaningful language use. Such early negative experiences can lead to long-term writing difficulties.

This decline in motivation becomes more evident as students progress through school. Young children often enjoy reading and writing as preschoolers, but enthusiasm usually declines around Grade 4 (Paquette, 2008). According to Merisuo-Storm (2006), writing development can suffer when teachers assign tasks that fail to engage students. When writing is reduced to rote exercises—as reported in Bangladesh—students tend to view writing as dull and irrelevant to self-expression.

Writing Difficulties in EFL Contexts

Writing skills are widely perceived as the most difficult for many students, including those who are otherwise fluent in English. Yavuz and Genc (1998, in Al-Asmeri 2013) argue that in ESP contexts, students often view writing as a compulsory task—especially in examination-driven environments—rather than a meaningful communicative activity. Byrne (1991) identifies three main causes of writing difficulties: psychological, linguistic, and cognitive.

Psychological factors stem from the writer's isolation. Unlike spoken language, which is supported by interaction and immediate feedback, writing requires individual effort and relies heavily on conceptual thinking. Without social cues or validation, writing can feel lonely and mentally draining.

Linguistic factors arise from the fundamental differences between spoken and written language. Spoken interaction is spontaneous, negotiable, and supported by prosodic and paralinguistic features. Writing, however, demands careful syntactic organization, grammatical accuracy, and coherence, while compensating for the absence of tone, gesture, and stress (Hedge 2010).

Cognitive factors highlight that speaking is acquired naturally, whereas writing is learned formally at school. Writing requires understanding conventions not typically used in oral communication, such as academic language, rhetorical structure, and audience awareness. Students must generate text that communicates meaning to absent readers, a process requiring planning, generalization, and self-monitoring.

Hedge (2010) notes that competent writing depends on high levels of organization and accuracy, along with effective use of grammatical, discourse, and stylistic choices appropriate to the topic and audience. Byrne similarly emphasizes that writers lack the “to-and-fro” of oral communication— body language, vocal inflection, and conversational negotiation—that help speakers arrive at meaning. Anderson (2017) adds that many students continue to struggle with writing even after high school, indicating a gap between writing instruction and the transfer of writing skills.

Together, these perspectives reinforce the view of writing as both a cognitive and communicative task, underscoring the need for pedagogical support—such as integrating short stories- that makes writing more accessible, contextualized, and engaging for learners.

Overcoming Writing Difficulties of Secondary EFL Learners

Writing skills are considered one of the highest standards for success for secondary school EFL learners. As Fadhlly (2023) includes in his meta-synthesis of writing difficulties, EFL students frequently experience problems with linguistic precision, organizational clarity, and lack of motivation, all three difficulties coming together in the act of composing. The inclusion of short stories as part of the pedagogical tools attempts to provide a global solution that includes language input, patterned examples, and meanings in context for expression.

Vocabulary Deficiency

Limited vocabulary resources are a common obstacle in EFL writing. Irzawati, Hasibuan, and Giovanni (2021) state that learners usually use repeated and simple language because they have limited vocabulary. Short stories add to the area by providing the words with fine, evocative settings. Teachers can build on this by promoting vocabulary recycling in follow-up writing activities; parents can help this along by urging students to use new words in verbal responses.

Weak Argumentation and Logical Structure

Both argument and orderliness in the arrangement of ideas are the fundamentals of good writing. Nurdianingsih, Fitriati, and Astuti (2021) underline that several EFL students are unable to organize a coherent sequence of ideas when writing, so that what they write turns out to be a scattered composition. Cases from literature- stories, poems, and novels, especially those that portray dilemmas or moral conflict—are rich jumping-off points for arguing. Learners can develop responses to aspects of the story and make a convincing claim to this effect.

Poor Grammatical and Syntactic Control

EFL compositions are permeated by grammatical and syntactical mistakes, as noted by Anh (2019). Short stories allow students to read real sentence lengths and different syntax. Awareness and control are also developed through structured reading-to-writing activities, such as sentence reformulation or stylistic imitation. When learners are reinforced at home through careful grammar-conscious conversation, they carry their accuracy over into their written work.

Understanding Plagiarism and Promoting Originality

Fadhlly (2023) reveals that plagiarism is symptomatic of low writing self-efficacy of his students. Short stories enable students to respond personally to what they have read and invite an independently reflective approach to writing. When they are given an opportunity to explore themes (justice, identity, etc.), they have the room to make literature relevant to their lives, which helps increase confidence in their expression.

Citation, Formatting, and Organizational Skills

While composition is not limited to restrictive formats among the types of writing, Chan and Leung (2020) emphasize that source organization and citation clarity are significant in EFL writing. Comparative literary essays, thematic analyses, or other types of essays can be used early on as a means of fostering proficiency, in conjunction with parents and teachers, to evaluate format and citation style with the aid of a rubric or annotated examples.

Tackling Unfamiliar Topics

Literature is a vehicle for complex, higher-order, abstract thinking. According to Sylvester and Aziz (2022), literary texts improve understanding of both cultural and philosophical themes. Individuals can also more easily deal with new ideas when represented in stories that touch on change, conflict, or personal transformation. Focused conversation and research activities—both in school and at home- prepare students to write reflectively and with purpose.

In conclusion, writing problems happen, but they can be conquered. This study argues, following Pardede (2020), that short stories are never raw texts awaiting reading- they are opportunities for expression, scaffolds for the cultivation of skills, and inspirations for production. Teachers and parents who involve literature as a collaborator in writing for secondary EFL learners assist them to negotiate shallow writing and delve into writing as exploration and voice.

3. Methodology

A descriptive analytic approach was used in this research, as the current study was an empirical quantitative study. Data were obtained using two tools: a composition writing test and a structured questionnaire. The composition test was constructed by the researchers to assess the writing abilities of secondary-level learners at Umbada Secondary School before and after their exposure to short story instruction. The questionnaire was administered to thirty secondary school English language teachers to gather their evaluations regarding literature-based pedagogy. The test was taken by 80 participants, and the questionnaire was filled out by 30 teachers. The design centered on investigating the influence

of short stories on students' writing and understanding teachers' perceptions regarding the use of literature as a pedagogical tool.

The composition test was conducted in two parts (pre-test and post-test) on two different days. It assessed four aspects of writing: spelling, punctuation, neatness, and presentation. The test was developed with a high level of content validity (representativeness of writing aspects), face validity (clarity, format, and readability), and general validity (convergence with the hypotheses in the study). The questionnaire included 12 items related to attitudes toward instruction, perceived difficulties in teaching writing, and suggestions for how to improve the teaching of writing. Questions were answered using a closed-ended checklist format. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS by employing descriptive and inferential statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and correlation analysis. Ethical issues were addressed in accordance with data collection, and anonymity and voluntary participation were guaranteed to the participants.

4. Data Analysis

One instrument was used to collect data in this study: a composition writing test. The test was evaluated based on four

aspects- spelling, punctuation, tidiness and layout; up to five marks were awarded for each. A group of 20 secondary EFL students took part in the study, and their responses were scored as a percentage of the maximum possible performance in writing.

The data have been analyzed through the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS), and descriptive statistics have been utilized to understand trends in writing mechanics of students. They are asked to write a composition about 'Water'.

5. Analysis of the Test

The researcher gathered quantitative data from the participants of the two groups by means of a pre/posttest design. These students' tests became a rich source of background data after the pre-test had been conducted with 40 Sudanese secondary school students before the treatment program. Then, the researcher divided them into two groups: 20 students represented the control group and 20 represented the experimental group after the researcher raised their awareness of the skill of composition writing during the treatment program.

Table (4.6) explains experimental group degrees before the treatment

Student No	Spelling (5marks)	Punctuation (5marks)	Tidy (5marks)	Presentation (5marks)	Percentage
Student 1	0\5	3\5	3\5	3\5	45%
Student 2	3\5	2\5	3\5	2\5	50%
Student 3	1\5	3\5	1\5	4\5	45%
Student 4	2\5	1\5	4\5	4\5	55%
Student 5	1\5	3\5	2\5	2\5	40%
Student 6	4\5	2\5	3\5	2\5	55%
Student 7	0\5	2\5	2\5	3\5	35%
Student 8	3\5	2\5	2\5	2\5	45%
Student 9	2\5	4\5	3\5	1\5	50%
Student10	4\5	3\5	4\5	4\5	75%
Student11	1\5	4\5	5\5	4\5	70%
Student12	3\5	2\5	3\5	2\5	50%
Student13	3\5	4\5	2\5	3\5	65%
Student14	5\5	3\5	1\5	3\5	60%
Student15	5\5	3\5	2\5	3\5	55%
Student16	2\5	1\5	4\5	2\5	45%
Student17	4\5	3\5	0\5	4\5	55%
Student18	0\4	4\5	1\5	4\5	45%
Student19	3\5	2\5	4\5	3\5	60%
Student20	0\5	1\5	4\5	3\5	65%

This table shows the entire percentage of the experimental group.

The Question Branches	Spelling	Punctuation	Tidy	Presentation	Entire Percentage
Percentage	46%	55%	53%	58%	53%

Table (4.6) explores the experimental group degrees before treatment programme and the student's results in each branch of the test come out as follows (spelling by 46%, punctuation by 55%, tidy by 53% and presentation by 58%) The percentage of the entire test by 53% and each student has given his own percentage as it mentioned in table (4.2) above.

Table (4:7): Explains control group results before the treatment programme

Student No	Spelling (5marks)	Punctuation (5marks)	Tidy (5marks)	Presentation (5marks)	Percentage
Student 1	3\5	5\5	0\5	3\5	55%
Student 2	0\5	2\5	4\5	1\5	40%
Student 3	2\5	3\5	1\5	3\5	45%
Student 4	1\5	4\5	3\5	4\5	60%
Student 5	4\5	3\5	2\5	1\5	50%
Student 6	3\5	2\5	3\5	4\5	60%
Student 7	0\5	3\5	4\5	0\5	35%
Student 8	2\5	3\5	0\5	3\5	40%
Student 9	4\5	2\5	3\5	4\5	65%
Student10	2\5	4\5	3\5	3\5	60%
Student11	4\5	5\5	4\5	2\5	75%
Student12	4\5	5\5	2\5	5\5	80%
Student13	2\5	3\5	2\5	3\5	50%
Student14	0\5	2\5	4\5	3\5	45%
Student15	2\5	0\5	5\5	5\5	60%
Student16	4\5	3\5	2\5	2\5	55%
Student17	4\2	1\5	2\5	0\5	40%
Student18	3\5	2\5	2\5	4\5	55%
Student19	3\5	4\5	1\5	4\5	60%
Student20	4\5	4\5	1\5	2\5	55%

This table shows the pre-test entire percentage of the control group.

The Question Branches	Spelling	Punctuation	Tidy	Presentation	Entire Percentage
Percentage	53%	58%	48%	56%	54%

Table (4.7) shows the control group degrees before treatment programme and the students' results in each branch of the test come out as follows (spelling by 53%, punctuation by 58%, tidy 48 by% and presentation by54%). The percentage of the entire test by 54.7%.

Table (4.9): Shows students degrees after treatment programme-post-test

Student No	Spelling (5marks)	Punctuation (5marks)	Tidy (5marks)	Presentation (5marks)	Percentage
Student 1	4\5	5\5	2\5	4\5	75%
Student 2	3\5	3\5	5\5	5\5	80%
Student 3	2\5	3\5	5\5	4\5	70%
Student 4	5\2	2\5	4\5	2\5	65%
Student 5	4\5	4\5	4\5	4\5	80%
Student 6	5\5	4\5	5\5	3\5	85%
Student 7	4\5	2\5	3\5	5\5	70%
Student 8	3\5	1\5	5\5	4\5	65%
Student 9	4\5	5\5	1\5	3\5	65%
Student10	4\5	5\5	5\5	4\5	90%
Student11	5\5	3\5	5\5	4\5	85%
Student12	2\5	3\5	4\5	3\5	60%
Student13	3\5	4\5	2\5	4\5	65%
Student14	4\5	4\5	2\5	5\5	75%
Student15	5\5	4\5	3\5	3\5	75%
Student16	4\5	1\5	2\5	2\5	45%
Student17	3\5	4\5	3\5	4\5	70%
Student18	4\5	3\5	1\5	3\5	55%
Student19	4\5	0\5	4\5	3\5	50%
Student20	3\5	5\5	0\5	5\5	65%

The table shows the post-test total percentage of the experimental group after the treatment programme.

The Question Branches	Spelling	Punctuation	Tidy	Presentation	Entire Percentage
Percentage	75%	65%	65%	73%	69%

As shown in table (4.9) which explains the students results after the treatment programme and in each branch of the test has given its marks as the following :(spelling by 75%, punctuation by 65%, tidy by 65% and neat presentation by 73%),the entire percentage of the test was 69.5%.

Table (4:10) shows the control group results of post-test with no treatment programme.

Student No	Spelling (5marks)	Punctuation (5marks)	Tidy (5marks)	Presentation (5marks)	Percentage
Student 1	4\5	5\5	0\5	3\5	65%
Student 2	2\5	2\5	4\5	2\5	50%
Student 3	2\5	3\5	1\5	3\5	45%
Student 4	3\5	2\5	3\5	4\5	60%
Student 5	4\5	3\5	3\5	2\5	60%
Student 6	3\5	2\5	5\5	4\5	70%
Student 7	2\5	3\5	4\5	1\5	50%
Student 8	2\5	3\5	1\5	3\5	45%
Student 9	4\5	2\5	3\5	4\5	65%
Student10	2\5	4\5	3\5	3\5	60%
Student11	4\5	5\5	4\5	2\5	75%
Student12	4\5	5\5	2\5	5\5	80%
Student13	2\5	3\5	2\5	3\5	50%
Student14	0\5	2\5	4\5	4\5	50%
Student15	2\5	0\5	5\5	5\5	60%
Student16	4\5	3\5	2\5	2\5	55%
Student17	4\5	2\5	2\5	0\5	45%
Student18	3\5	2\5	2\5	4\5	55%
Student19	4\5	4\5	1\5	4\5	65%
Student20	4\5	4\5	2\5	2\5	60%

This table shows the result of post-test total percentage of the control group.

The Question Branches	Spelling	Punctuation	Tidy	Presentation	Entire Percentage
Percentage	59%	55%	53%	60%	56.7%

Table (4.10) shows the control group degrees in the post-test. At this stage the students have continued with their normal textbooks at a secondary school level. And their results have come out as follows (spelling by 59%, punctuation by 55%, tidy by 53% neat presentation by 60%) finally the entire percentage of test by 56.7%.

6. Discussion of the Test Results

As shown in tables 4.5 and 4.6, the pre-test scores for secondary school students before the treatment program—whether in the experimental or control group—indicate that there is no significant difference in the results; the overall percentage for the experimental group was only 53%, while the control group was 54.7%. In the researcher's opinion, the results of the two groups are similar due to the ordinary textbooks that their teachers use at the secondary school level. It is also noticeable that such results reflect very weak writing skills for students who will soon join universities; unless they address this problem, their writing performance will be negatively affected, potentially causing them to lose opportunities in obtaining certificates, as the university system is more challenging than that at the secondary school level.

Tables 4.5 and 4.6 explain the students' scores after the experimental group received the treatment program while the control group continued with the normal secondary school textbooks. In the end, the researcher corrected the test questions, and their results yielded overall percentages for both the experimental and control groups as follows: the experimental group achieved 69.5%, and the control group achieved 56.7%.

It is clear from the results above that the experimental group's score is higher than that of the control group due to the treatment program implemented by the researcher. The instructor implemented short story-based instruction instead of their ordinary textbooks. It is known that short stories are full of expressions and vocabulary that can help stimulate the students to understand the content of the stories. Consequently, they can use these expressions and vocabulary in their own written texts. This is why the experimental group performed better than the control group in composition writing.

7. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that integrating short stories into EFL instruction significantly improves secondary students' composition writing skills, particularly in writing mechanics and overall performance. The experimental group showed notable improvement compared to the control group, confirming the effectiveness of literature based pedagogy. The findings highlight the need to revise existing curricula to incorporate engaging literary materials and interactive teaching approaches. These results suggest that contextualized language exposure through short stories enhances both linguistic competence and learner motivation, offering a practical framework for improving writing instruction in secondary education.

8. Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations are suggested for improving the teaching of writing at the secondary level:

- 1) **Curriculum Integration:** Short stories should be widely integrated into syllabus design in writing courses to motivate students and scaffold composition skills.
- 2) **Pedagogical Implications:** Teachers of English as a foreign language are urged to incorporate literature-based activities, such as the use of short stories, to enhance learners' input and output in writing activities.
- 3) **Resource Development:** New texts should be developed, featuring focused and topic-oriented writing exercises derived from literary materials.
- 4) **Instructional Reform:** Methods of teaching composition need to be reconsidered with an emphasis on interactive, creative, and student-centered learning.
- 5) **Reading Focus:** Students should be guided to read short stories regularly to address various writing problems and to raise language awareness.

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