



Methodology to Teach Short-Stories for Secondary Level Learners: An Overview

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Abstract The aim of this article is an attempt to explore the activities used by teachers in teaching short stories at the secondary level. For this, I wish to concentrate on methodologies used by the teacher's while teaching short stories in Secondary level. Edgar Allan Poe, in his essay "The Philosophy of Composition," said that a short story should be read in one sitting, anywhere from a half hour to two hours. Teachers often hesitate to use literature within the classroom. That's a pity since short stories are perfect for teaching language and significant thinking skills. Good stories engage both teachers and students, better of all; they'll be used to enrich all language skills in imaginative and unexpected ways. The study explores the characteristics of short stories, main characteristics and its importance in contemporary classrooms to learn an English language. In today's world, most of the teachers always motivate their students before starting to teach a short story. This article finds that most of the teachers use pre-reading, while reading and post reading activities in teaching short stories when they teach ELT classroom. It explains briefly how a short story helps to develop a learner's abilities in enhancing their language skills and how the learning environment grabs the attention of students. Its focus is on elements of short stories, methodologies in teaching short stories for secondary levels and the way far students are able to understand.

The notion that the most purpose of EFL teaching is to assist students to speak fluently within the target language cause many teachers still believe that an EFL class should specialize in mastering linguistic elements only. However, recent trends in EFL teaching indicates the

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need of integrating literature due to its rich potential to provide an authentic model of language use.

Keywords Short stories, Teaching-Learning methodologies, Learners activities, ELT classroom, Motivation, Learning environment

Introduction

Today at large many students fail to speak English with fluency even after they have completed their schooling in English medium schools. As all along they have been subjected to the routine dull teaching of English without any life expression or excitement. Students are subjected to rote learning and drills, hence there is a lot of stress on students which does not allow them neither speak nor write good English. Methodology is completely exam oriented; but spoken form of English is neglected. Teachers never teach a story for its own sake. Most of the time children are busy coping down answers from the black-board or responding during monthly assignments and class tests. Many English teachers depend only on text books since their teaching revolves around the text books. They do not bring any authentic material such as pictures, articles, charts etc. into the classroom. These experiences had never stimulated their imagination, curiosity, creativity enough to tap their inherent language capacities.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To explore the activities used by teachers in teaching short stories at the secondary level,
- To find out most frequent activities used by the teachers, and
- To suggest some pedagogical implications.

The relevance of teaching short stories: A justification

Language and literature are inseparable. Teaching a language in isolation from literature will not move students towards mastery of four skills. Among all the other genres of literature, short stories have the potential to be used as a context or a base for different



classroom activities. The classroom can be expanded indefinitely and the outside world can be brought into the classroom, in terms of different characters, situations, emotions, feelings, reactions and responses to the stories. These can be used as background for providing a framework for natural, authentic and legitimate communication opportunities and for the development of language learning resources.

Young learners are instinctively drawn towards stories; they are eager to listen to them and love to read them. Learners' involvement with the story text helps in furthering the addition of more chunks of language in the learners' mind which in turn helps in improving learners' language repertoire. Stories have some basic intrinsic qualities which make them suitable material to be used in the classroom of young learners for language acquisition. There is a difference in the manner in which a child reads a lesson in a school text, and a story. As children are interested in listening to and reading stories again and again, the interaction between the language of the story and the children becomes quite intimate, frequent and intense, which helps the learners absorb the language and retain it.

Procedure

1. Selecting situations and creating Dialogues:

Situations to be role played should be selected. For every role play situation dialogues should be provided by the teacher or created by the students themselves.

2. Teaching the Dialogues for role plays:

The teacher wishes to teach vocabulary, sentences and dialogues needed for the role play situations. The teacher needs to make sure that the students know how to use the vocabulary, sentences and dialogues prior to doing the role play activities.

3. Students practice the role plays:

When students are confident enough to demonstrate or perform in front of the class, the teacher can ask them to perform.

Role play is really a worthwhile learning experience for both the students and the teacher. Role play lightens up the atmosphere and brings liveliness in the class. Students learn to use the language in a more realistic and more practical way.



Methodology for teaching short stories

Selection of appropriate stories

Stories with appropriate language and conceptual complexity can be selected according to the age of the learners and can be comprehensible as the teacher helps the learners to interact with the story text and make meaning from it. The stories for young learners need to have an element of 'challenge' in them because it motivates them to guess and helps them move successfully with a sense of achievement, a much needed motivational tool in language acquisition. A little success at every stage of the narrative process makes them more confident, attentive and interested in the material they are reading or listening to. Further the selection of the type of the stories should be dependent on the learner's linguistic and conceptual level.

Pre-reading tasks: use of pictures and other authentic material

A stage or background has to be set before the story text is introduced. This provides an opportunity to each student to compare and contrast with what they already know, and to accommodate the new information in their pre-existing schemata.

The pre reading task begins with the teacher introducing the key word, concept or picture to stimulate a discussion. It helps the students to link his background knowledge with concepts in the text and engage in the learning process. Use of pictures gives the students plenty of opportunities who use non linguistic visual support, with help of the pictures the students may predict what the text is about. Pictures stimulate the necessary interest in the students to read the text to be introduced.

Other authentic material such as the news paper materials, magazines, and real life incidents can be used to generate interest in the learners and to connect the text with the real world. Learners gain confidence and creative thinking skills through these authentic materials. Authentic materials should be relevant and it should have a good connection with the text. Otherwise the learners are misleading.

**Presentation of the story, use of audio tape**

Use of audio tape for the presentation of the story text intensifies concentration, accelerates the rate of reading and listening and makes the activity more focused. Repeated readings aloud of a text by the teacher in the class may be too much of a physical strain for the teacher. Moreover it becomes too routine, too monotonous for learners to listen to the same teacher's repeated readings. On the other hand audio taped story in a pleasant voice holds greater attraction and is welcomed by the learners. The learner gets a chance to listen to a correct and standard form of English.

As the teacher is free during the time the tape is on, the teacher's time can be utilized in moving around the class to manage class activities and to offer help to those learners who are lagging behind, not keeping pace with the narration in their text. The teacher has plenty of time to sit with individual children for some time to help them to develop this ability. In this way the class can be managed better than by the teacher narrating a story, because when the teacher does narration, and she will not be able to pay complete attention to the class. But, attention can be paid to each child's reading in the class with the help of an audio tape. Audio tapes can be stopped at a point where the story takes an important turn and the students can be asked to predict what happens next. It develops their interpretation abilities.

Benefits of repeated readings of the story

Dowhower (1987) found that repeated reading improves accuracy, fluency, comprehension and prosodic reading when practiced in the classroom. Herman (1985) states that it is particularly beneficial for poor readers whose rate and accuracy of word recognition improves with multiple readings. Margaret Meek (1988:36) observes that "Children read stories what they like over and over, then they pay attention to the words, after they have discovered what happens" in the first reading children pay attention to the story and later pay attention to language.

The process of repeated reading and teacher modeling leads to learning of new words, new concepts and language growth, because the words and sentences children read repeatedly become part of their language repertoires.

**Role play and enactment of the story**

As Larsen-Freeman pointed out in her book “Techniques and Principles of Language Teaching” “Role-plays are very significant for language acquisition, because they give students an opportunity to practice communicating in different social contexts and in different social roles.” According to Brown (2001). “Role-play austere involves (a) giving a role to one or more members of a group and (b) assigning an objective or rationale that participants must accomplish.” Brown suggests role-play can be conducted with a single person in pairs or in groups, with each person assigned a role to accomplish an objective.

There are many benefits of using role-play. Furness (1976) stated that a child can enjoy and profit a role play experience “in terms of improved communication skills, creativity, enlarged social awareness, independent thinking, and verbalization of opinions. He provides seventeen advantages of role play. Short story is a very good resource for role plays.

Elements of Short Stories

According to Regmi (2003) short stories are classified in the following elements.

a) Plot

A short story gets formed when many latest events are logically and systematically linked. The plot in a short story is a planned, logical chain of events or actions with proper beginning, middle and end. Due to the-artistic craftsmanship of a writer, it creates artistic and emotional effect in the readers. Such feeling arises through suspense (secret or problem) and resolution (solving of those suspense) evident in a plot. The popular three parts of a plot are beginning, middle and an end. In the beginning of a story, we encounter a problem that gets developed in the middle and resolved at the end. Plot can be of different types with different natures. Few examples are: seemingly plot-less story, complicated plots by flashbacks and forwards, frame plots (plot within plot), plot with subplots, double plots (two main plots), plot with foreshadowing, reversals of fortune, digressions, abrupt transition etc.

**b) Characters**

Persons in staged or narrative work play any kind of art is called characters. They exhibit it through dialogue of (that they speak) and action (that they do) in the story. There are many types of characters.

Protagonist in a short story is the main character who is central to all events. His role has a unique importance in the story. Antagonist is a character who opposes the protagonist. His role is somehow negative in the story. He interrupts the protagonist in many ways. Round character, flat character, complex characters, etc. are other kinds of characters. Author provides information about the characters either through the narrator or through the characters themselves in their dialogues which is known as characterization.

c) Setting

The place and time (location or time) is more important for a story is called setting. Setting helps to comprehend or interpret a theme (a meaning of the story). Description of setting can be done either by the author himself or the characters of the story. Social condition refers to social detail of the characters, their speech, dress, mannerism, customs etc of a place. The detail about the feeling or mood of the story e.g. cheerful, frightening, rebellious etc is the mood or atmosphere of the story. Setting thus is a detail about the location and time that includes description of geography, weather, and time, social and atmospheric condition of a story.

d) Style

Style is a way in which a story is written or it is a writer's way of telling a story. Sometimes it can have a different sense, than the meaning or theme of a s It includes the diction (word choice), syntax (grammatical structure of a sentence), use of figurative, language (use of simile, metaphor, symbol etc), rhetorical devices sense and size of a paragraph-and conceivable aspect of language.

(e) Theme

Theme is a controlling idea or central insight of a story. It is an author's underlying or internal meaning or main idea that he wants to convey through his story. It is an



author's contemplation about a topic or a view of human nature. Theme is presented through title, characters, setting or the style (allusion, symbols etc). Such themes can be of various types.

Types of Short Stories

According to Regmi (2003) The short stories are categorized in the following types.

a. Myth

Myth is an unknown narrative originated in the ancient legends of a race or a notion that explains the origin of life, religious beliefs and the forces of nature as some kind of supernatural occurrences that counts deeds of traditional superheroes. In general, a myth is a story which is not true and involves paranormal beings or at any rate supra human beings, it is always concerned with creation. It focuses and explains how something comes to exist. Myth is transferred to another generation through oral sayings.

b. Fable

It is usually a short and simple story that exemplifies an abstract moral thesis or principle of human behavior. The main characters in fables are often animals and they exhibit human frailties. In other words, animals talk and act like the human types they represent. The fables in western cultures derive mainly from the stories attributed to Aesop, a Greek slave of the six century B.C.

c. Legend

A popular story handed down from earlier times whose truth has not been ascertained. It is a story a part of fact and part of fiction, about the life and deeds of a saint, a folk hero or a historical figure. Legends are also transmitted orally from one generation to the next. For example the story of Beowulf.

d. Fairy Tale

It is a type of story that is related to fairies or other mythical or magical beings. It tends to be a narrative in prose about the fortunes and misfortunes of a hero or heroine who has experienced various adventures of a more or less supernatural kind.



e. Parable

According to Abrams (1985) A parable is a very short description about human beings presented so as to stress the implicit analogy, or equivalent, with a general lesson that the narrator is trying to bring home to his audience. The parable was one of Jesus' favorite devices as a teacher (pp. 5-8)

Characteristics of the Short Stories

Short stories are a symbol of the part of human life. The short stories are an absolute and spontaneous form of literature. They differ from the novel in their length and the representation of human life. Brevity, singleness of unity and simplicity are the major characteristics features of short stories. Some of the distinctiveness of short stories are given below:

- Short story has brevity in the number of characters, their dialogues, selection of words and the detail about them. It can be read at one setting from half an hour to two hours.
- It represents only one aspect of human life plot, character and settings are less elaborated in the short story.
- It has the use of simple, communicative and effective language.

Activities of Teaching Short Stories

Teaching activities engross different activities which are used in teaching. Simply activities are a generalized plan for a lesson which includes structure, desired learner behavior in terms of the goals of instruction and an outline of tactics necessary to implement the activity. Generally teaching activities and teaching methods are used synonymously but they are different. Activity is a micro approach. On the other hand, the term teaching 'method' has been used in education for long as traditional and inflexible concepts. Teaching method is a sequenced formal structure and it includes teaching activity and instrumental tactics. It includes teaching methods. It shows that there is debate among the scholars whether teaching activity or teaching method is a general term. Different scholars have listed different language teaching activities. Brumfit and Carter (1996, p.110) state five activities of teaching language.

**a. Prediction**

It is for the teacher to stop the reading at key points and to elicit predictions of how the narrative will develop. It requires careful preparation before the story is read in the class. The story can be presented in the following ways using this activity;

- a. The title can be omitted and after the story has been read, students can be invited to predict what it should be.
- b. At the end of the first paragraph, students might be asked to predict what the story is going to be about.
- c. In the course of teaching the story, students might be asked to predict the role of the characters as well.
- d. After the reading is over, the teacher might ask different questions to predict the probable answers.

b. Cloze Procedure

This is also a form of prediction, but the focus is given on individual words or text. Teachers need to give careful consideration to the number of words.

Stages of Teaching Short Stories

The stages for teaching of short stories can be divided into three stages; they are pre-reading, while-reading, post-reading stages.

Lazar (1993, p.22) says that stories be inclined to present fully developed plots with sequence of action with perceptible beginnings, middles and ends. The best way he suggests for teaching story is to present in three stages viz; pre-reading, while reading and post-reading. He has given the following activities:

- Helping students with cultural background
- Stimulating students interest in the story
- Pre teaching of vocabulary
- Helping the students to understand the plots
- Helping students to understand the characters
- Helping students with difficult vocabulary



- Helping the students to make the interpretation to the text
- Understanding narrative point of view
- Follow up activities and follow up fluency practice.

a. Pre-reading stage

In this stage, an initiation of teaching story in the class. The teacher makes the students prepare for the lesson and the task to be performed. In this stage, the teacher can ask some questions related to the stories. The following are the activities to be performed at this stage.

- Helping students with general background.
- Stimulating student's interest in the story.
- Predictions about the genre and theme of the story.
- Reading or listening or watching videos about the author's life.
- Setting the task or asking questions related to the story.
- Pre teaching vocabulary
- Discuss the language of the story.
- Brainstorming with the lexical sets.

b. While –reading Stage

At this stage, the teacher presents the task to be performed. The teacher is required to watch students and evaluate their activities being silent but attentive. At this stage the following activities are done.

- Making students involved in reading
- Helping students to understand the plot by asking questions
- Asking to summarize or asking to give title for each paragraph.
- Helping students with difficult vocabulary
- Helping students with language and style through contextualization
- Dealing with different activates like answering question,
- Rearranging the sequence, true-false items and gap filling exercises.



- They choose the best adjectives from the list, and use some adjectives, words to describe the attributes of the characters.
- Writing the textual analysis of the story.
- Guessing the meaning in the context.

c) Post-reading stage

The pupils' scripts are checked by the teacher directly or indirectly. The teacher clarifies the ambiguities if the students are confused at some points. The following activities are included in this stage:

- Providing students with different critical interpretations and then allowing them to discuss on theme and produce similar ones.
- Interpretation of the main theme of the story
- They speculate about the possible symbolic association of lexical sets.
- Writing a review of the story
- Describing the characters.
- Critical discussion
- They may role play or act out the scene of the story.
- Summarizing

There is no exact formula to teach stories as such but generally stories can be presented through the three stages. These stages will help the teachers to teach a short story when they enter the language classroom. Pre-reading activities show the way to the teachers how to motivate and brainstorm to the students in ELT classroom. Secondly, while reading activities involved both students and teachers interaction in ELT classroom. Lastly, post reading activities help the teachers summarize the story in the ELT classroom. Unfortunately, due to several reasons, especially in rural areas, students are deprived of the technology. Because of the large number of the students in the classroom, ill-managed administration and lack of trained teachers, translation and lecture methods are being used in language teaching in secondary level.

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The story project encourages the spirit of enquiry, critical thinking and problem solving. The strength of the whole language approach lies in its flexibility in that it allows for innovation and improvisation while keeping the basic principle and ideology which advocates child centered activity based, and stimulating experience oriented learning. The study also brings to light the kind of classroom culture that should be developed; the kind of teacher pupil relationship that was nurtured and maintained in the classroom. The evidence of language and literary games suggested that the story project can be considered a successful attempt in the direction of classroom practices for second language acquisition.

Student's involvement was visible willing participation; they appeared to form a bond with the characters of the stories. The children participated not only in reading and listening but also in narrating the stories and in practicing stories script for presentation. Moreover they were interested in writing their own stories. At the end students were asked to express their opinions about the story session. They liked the process of the teaching and the methodology I have followed. They said that their English lessons should be taught in the same way.

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