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**The Effect of Reading Short Stories on Enhancing
EFL Vocabulary Acquisition of Secondary Stage
Students and Their Interest**

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Abstract

The present research aimed at enhancing EFL vocabulary acquisition of secondary stage students and their interest. This was achieved through reading short stories. The research adopted two groups; experimental and control. The sample consisted of 32 students. The following instruments were used: A vocabulary test and an interest scale. Results revealed that there is a statistically significant difference at 0.05 level between the mean score of the experimental and control group students on the post administration of the vocabulary test in favor of the experimental group. In addition, the experimental group students outperformed their counterparts in the control group students in the target skills. Consequently, reading short stories had a positive effect not only on students' vocabulary learning, but also on students' interest.

Keywords: Short stories, EFL Vocabulary Acquisition, Students' interest.

Introduction and Overview

Vocabulary plays an important role in language learning. It is an essential skill for learning to read, speak, write and listen. Without sufficient vocabulary, people cannot communicate and express their feelings. Developing student's vocabulary acquisition is the central aim of EFL classrooms instruction because the knowledge of words determines the proficiency level of the speaker. Vocabulary is a strong indicator of reading development because reading stories acquire new words as their meanings can be determined from the written context.

Short stories play an important role in enhancing EFL learners' vocabulary. Short stories are considered as one of the literary genres that can be used in the EFL classroom to enhance language skills, motivate students, and increase their cultural awareness and interest. One of the main advantages for using short stories is that they offer authentic material which appeals to the taste and interests of learners in the reading and discussion process (Cameron, 2001).

EFL Vocabulary Acquisition

Vocabulary knowledge is viewed as an essential tool for mastering any language skill. It also contributes to the understanding of written and spoken texts. Thus, while more frequent the exposure to vocabulary is, learners are more confident to understand and interpret the meaning of some unknown words from context. Indeed, learning vocabulary does not only mean the learning of new words but also to know their functions and applicability to different contexts and situations. In other words, the comprehension and production of the language depend on the simultaneous and complex process of extracting and constructing utterances through the use of appropriate lexical combinations, in the appropriate time and appropriate place. Learners must not only learn the language as an abstract system of vocal signs or as if it were a kind of grammar text with an accompanying dictionary, but it must be learned as a tool that allows learners to know what utterances are useful to communicate effectively, and know what is not appropriate to use in a given context (Viera, 2017).

Balcı and Çakır (2012) concluded that vocabulary plays an important role in communication as well as in the other components of language. In their opinion, the lack of needed vocabulary is one of the most common causes of students' inability to express themselves in English in EFL classes. Students cannot use English outside the classroom in real life situations in spite of studying English for years.

Vocabulary is important for understanding difficult reading materials, so Hyso & Tabaku (2011) conducted a study of the importance of vocabulary teaching to advanced foreign language students in improving reading comprehension with 80 first year students studying English as their major in the University of Vlora and University of Tirana, Albania. The aim of this research is to give an overview of the beliefs the students have about vocabulary learning, its direct teaching, its importance in university studies and of the vocabulary learning strategies used by them. The conclusions reached are that direct teaching of vocabulary in university context is important and leads to better text comprehension.

Balcı & Çakır (2012) designed a study of teaching vocabulary through collocations in EFL classes. Pre-test/Post-test Control Group Design was employed in this study. Fifty-nine (59) seventh (7th) grade students from two classrooms in a lower-middle class, suburban state primary school in Konya, Turkey participated in this study. The statistical analysis revealed that teaching vocabulary through collocations results in a better learning of the words than presenting them using classical techniques

and enhances retention of new vocabulary items. Teaching vocabulary through collocations can be an effective factor in helping students remember and use the new words easily in primary school EFL classes.

Students' Interest

Fitria (2019) assured that reading interest is a feeling that accompanies or causes special attention to reading. The students will read actively if they are interest in reading. To achieve in reading, the students must want to learn. Because it can make them consider reading activity as a habitual activity for them. Furthermore, interest is very influence for reading activeness.

In a study on L1 reading comprehension assessment, Bray and Barron (2004) investigated the relationships between topic interest, verbal ability, and another relevant reader-based factor (i.e., gender). Their results revealed a consistently strong positive relationship between verbal ability and reading comprehension for all participants regardless of their level of interest in the reading materials. In addition, they reported better comprehension by girls compared to boys, and a stronger positive relationship between interest level and comprehension for girls compared to boys. In other words, topic interest affected girls' performance more than boys' performance.

Yang (2009) conducted a study of the use of short stories in a small class of junior secondary school students in order to investigate if they became more interested and more confident in English with the use of short stories. The participants of this study were a class of 20 students, with 16 males and 4 females. The findings of the study showed that using short stories will not automatically make students become more interested in English unless the stories are interesting and the language used meets the level of the students. Regarding storytelling, the investigated class of students, in general, favored this approach as it helped them understand the stories easily, though their confidence in using English could not be boosted within a short period of time.

Santi, et al., (2021) examined the relationship between reading interest strength and vocabulary acquisition in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners through a systematic review and meta-analysis of eleven relevant studies conducted over the last decade, from 2010 to 2020. This study aimed to report findings of a meta-analysis assessing correlation among reading interest and vocabulary acquisition. The result obtained proved a high relation in reading interest and vocabulary acquisition.

Reading Short Stories

Short stories are literary means for classroom use, and literature can be employed as a positive stimulation to encourage students. Rather of focusing on more structural parts of the language, the students are totally involved in the short story. Students learn about the past and present of people's customs, traditions and culture through stories.

Short stories are an exciting and ever-evolving form of storytelling. They talk about the author's expression to anything about life experience concerning human imagination. As a literary work, short stories are interesting for people to read and talk. They entertain, develop mental experience and develop learners' vocabulary. They are also effective to help English learners practice all the four language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking (Pardede, 2011).

Kaya (2014) stated that there are many reasons for choosing a short story in language teaching classes.

- (1) short stories are shorter than a novel to read and are easier than a play to act out in crowded classes. Besides, they are easier than a poem to analyze linguistically and more realistic than a tale. The plot of a short story is easy to summarize and the scene is more vivid for the students.
- (2) short stories also represent ordinary life which students can easily familiarize with.
- (3) short stories are good examples of vocabulary and grammatical structures. During the reading process, students deal with the language itself while having an awareness of the language use because short stories are richer than grammar books. Students in ELT/EFL realize the various structures of sentences and different ways of connecting sentences in the dialogues within the stories. Short stories, also, provide cultural information about the target language. Short stories are the proper tools for the language learners to deepen their cultural awareness and personal vision.

Using short stories as a media to foster the students' vocabulary mastery in reading is very promising. Short stories are able to significantly foster the students' vocabulary mastery in reading. The use of short stories is able to increase students' psychological aspect and the classroom climate. The students are become more excited, enthusiastic, and active in the learning process. This then makes the classroom climate more alive, and it is finally able to foster their ability in vocabulary mastery in reading (Guritno, 2017).

Ceylan (2016) examined using short stories in reading skills class to find out the thoughts and attitudes of the first year students in Bulent Ecevit University English Language and Literature Department towards the short stories covered in reading skills course in 2015- 2016 fall term. The data gathered via a questionnaire was analyzed using frequency tests. The participants were 40 first year students in English Language and Literature department taking the course obligatorily. The results indicated that studying short stories has a number of benefits for the students such as broadening their perspectives, enabling them to think about the reasons rather than the result, showing them different life styles, providing them with a comparison between their own culture and other cultures, increasing their appreciation for literature and making them read more short stories.

Ismael (2017) investigated the effects of short stories on vocabulary development of pre-intermediate Kurdish EFL learners. 40 students participated in this study. To determine the level of the participants, Oxford Placement Test was administered and the participants were randomly placed in two equal groups (control & experimental). A vocabulary proficiency test (pretest) was also administered to the participants to see whether they were homogenous in terms of their vocabulary knowledge. To see the difference between the control and experimental groups at the end of the course, the same vocabulary proficiency test was given to the participants in both groups as a posttest. The participants also completed the vocabulary learning strategy survey. Results indicated that the experimental group who were exposed to short stories outperformed the control group in the posttest.

For many EFL learners, reading is a difficult process. One of the most important reasons for this problem is the learners' lack of vocabulary knowledge. They often give up trying to understand the meanings of the texts or skip reading if sentences or entire paragraphs contain a small number of unknown words. These encounters suggest that some learners might not have the knowledge to handle words they do not understand. Although vocabulary knowledge has been recognized as a critical determinant of one's reading ability. This study attempts to test the effect of reading short stories to enhance EFL vocabulary acquisition of secondary stage students' interest.

Background of the problem

This study is an attempt to develop students' vocabulary learning and their interest towards reading short stories. A pilot study was conducted to investigate the first year secondary stage students' EFL vocabulary. The sample was 30 first year secondary stage students in Barq El Ezz school,

Mansoura Directorate, Dakahlia, Egypt. The students were asked to answer a vocabulary test to check their performance in vocabulary. The test contains 20 items with a total score of 20 marks. The following table shows the mean score, the standard deviation and the percentage of the EFL vocabulary test.

Table (1): Results of the pilot study

Vocabulary test	Ss. N.	Total Score	Mean score	SD	Percentage
Vocabulary	30	20	9	2.1	45%

Table (1) shows that the mean score of the students on the EFL vocabulary test was 9 which indicated that the students need to improve their EFL vocabulary acquisition.

Statement of the problem

Based on the literature review and pilot study results, it can be concluded that students have difficulties in their EFL vocabulary. Therefore, the current study suggested using short stories to enhance the participants' vocabulary learning.

Questions of the study:

The present study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What is the effect of reading short stories on enhancing Secondary School students' EFL vocabulary acquisition?
2. What is the effect of reading short stories on enhancing EFL Secondary School students' interest?

The purpose:

This study aimed at:

1. Investigating the effect of reading short stories on enhancing the EFL vocabulary acquisition of the first- grade secondary stage students.
2. Providing some short stories for enhancing EFL vocabulary learning for the first- grade secondary stage students.

Significance of the study:

This study is significant as:

1. It provides the teachers of English with samples of short stories for enhancing EFL secondary stage students' vocabulary acquisition.
2. It raises the awareness of planners about the importance of including short stories when planning the EFL curriculum.
3. It encourages the use of short stories in English language classes for addressing the vocabulary difficulties that EFL learners face.

Delimitations of the study:

This study was delimited to:

1. First year secondary stage students at Barq El Ezz school, Mansoura Directorate, Dakahlia, Egypt.
2. Some short stories adopted from internet websites.
3. EFL vocabulary stated by Ministry of Education for EFL 1st grade secondary stage, student's book: Units (1, 2, 3, 5 and 8).

Hypotheses of the study:

The study attempted to verify the following hypotheses:

1. There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level between the mean score of the experimental group students and the control group students on the post vocabulary test in favor of the experimental group.
2. There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level between the mean score of the experimental group's pre-post vocabulary test in favor of the post test.
3. There is a statistically significant difference at the level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the post administration of the interest scale in favor of the experimental group.
4. There is a statistically significant difference at the level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the mean score of the experimental group in the pre and post measurements of the interest scale

Methodology**Participants**

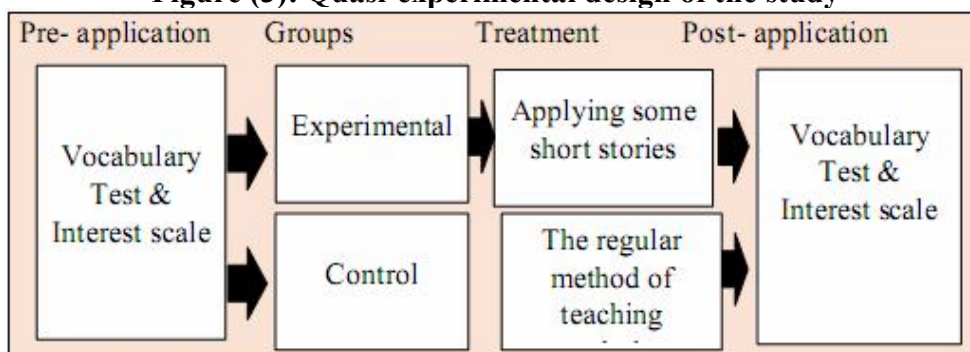
Participants of the study were 1st year secondary stage students at Barq El Ezz school enrolled in the first term of the 2022/2023 school year. Participants of the study comprised of (32) students divided into a control group (N: 16) and an experimental group (N: 16).

Design

This current study adopted the quasi-experimental design for assessing the effect of reading short stories on developing vocabulary learning and students' interest. The study used two groups: a control group and an experimental group. The control group was taught the vocabulary of English text book of the 1st year secondary stage (*New Hello!*), units from the 1st and the 2nd semesters through regular method. The experimental group was taught the same vocabulary through implementing short stories according to the topics of the units and some vocabulary strategies.

The design of the study is illustrated in the following figure:

Figure (3): Quasi-experimental design of the study



Instruments

To achieve the purpose of the current study, these instruments were designed and used:

- 1) A pre-post vocabulary learning test to measure the vocabulary acquisition of the control and experimental group before and after the treatment.
- 2) An interest scale to measure the students' interest towards short stories of both the control and experimental group before and after the treatment.

The procedures of the study

The following steps were carried out:

1. Reviewing literature and previous studies related to reading short stories and vocabulary acquisition.
2. Designing a test to measure the students' knowledge of vocabulary.
3. Designing an interest scale to identify if the students have interests towards short stories or not.
4. Preparing the activities and the sessions that should be used.
5. Presenting the instruments to a group of jurors for validation.
6. Measuring the reliability of the instruments.
7. A random selection of the subjects of the study from two classes at Brq El Ezz secondary school was chosen. Sixteen students were assigned to the experimental group who would receive the treatment. Other sixteen students were assigned to the control group who would receive the traditional method in teaching.
8. Administration of the pre-test to the control and experimental groups to identify the students' pre-level in vocabulary.
9. Conducting the proposed treatment, using short stories, for the experimental group.

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10. Administration of the post-test to the experimental group to reveal the difference and measuring the effectiveness of short stories.
 11. Analyzing and interpreting the results statistically.
 12. Presenting the suggestions and the recommendations in the light of the study findings.

Definition of terms

Short stories

Short stories operationally defined in the present study as they are literary works unlike novels which may take days to finish, a short story is a brief fictional narrative that is shorter than a novel and it has a few characters, a few words, one single plot and a theme.

Vocabulary

Operationally, vocabulary is all the words that a person reads, writes, listens and speaks. Vocabulary is important to be taught in learning a foreign language because if a person knows a great number of vocabulary, he/she can read well, write efficiently and speak fluently.

Interests

Interests are operationally defined in the present study as having a desire to learn or engage in activities you enjoy. Personal interests vary from person to person. For instance, students often become drawn in by short stories which motivate them to read and learn more. As a result, they develop an interest in short stories

Statistical Analysis and Results

The results of the research are discussed in light of the statistical analysis of each instrument. A discussion of the results is provided after each statistical analysis as well as a discussion of the overall results.

The Pre-Administration of the Vocabulary Test

The "Mann Whitney" test for independent groups was used to determine the significant differences between the mean ranks of the experimental and control groups in the vocabulary test before the treatment in order to ensure the equivalence of the two groups. Table (2) shows that:

Table (2): results of Mann-Whitney of the experimental and control groups in the pre-administration of the vocabulary test

Groups	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	U	Z	Sign.
Experimental	16	14.66	234.5	98.5	1.126	Non
Control	16	18.34	293.5			

Results in table (2) showed that there is a statistical significant difference between the mean ranks of the experimental group and the

control group in the pre-administration of the vocabulary test, as z value is not significant at (0.05) level.

The Pre-Administration of the Interest Scale

The "Mann Whitney" test for independent groups was used to determine the significant differences between the mean ranks of the experimental and control groups in the interest scale before the treatment order to ensure the equivalence of the two groups. Table (3) shows that:

Table (3): Establishing the homogeneity between the experimental and control groups in the pre-administration of the interest scale

Groups	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	U	Z	Sign.
Experimental	16	16.03	256.5	120.5	0.283	Non
Control	16	16.97	271.5			

It is clear from the previous table that there is no significant difference at the level of 0.05 between the mean ranks of the experimental and control groups in the interest scale, which means that the two groups are equivalent in their interest towards short stories before the treatment.

Results of the Statistical Treatment

To investigate the effect of reading short stories on students' vocabulary learning and their interest, the hypotheses of the study were tested. The following section tests each hypothesis individually.

Testing the first hypothesis

The first hypothesis stated that, *“There is a statistically significant difference between the mean score of the experimental group students and the control group students on the post vocabulary test in favor of the experimental group”*.

To investigate this hypothesis, Mann-Whitney U test was used to identify the significant difference between the mean ranks of the two independent groups, the experimental and control group students in the post-administration. The effectiveness of the independent variable in developing EFL vocabulary was calculated using Field's equation for independent groups in nonparametric statistics to determine the effect size and level. The following table (4) illustrates the results concerning this hypothesis.

Table (4): comparison between the experimental and control groups on the post-vocabulary test

Groups	n	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	U	Z	Sign.	D	Level of effect
Experimental	16	23.19	371	21	4.066	0.01	0.719	High
Control	16	9.81	157					

Results in table (4) showed that the ‘U’ value which is significant at (0.01) level. The differences were in favor of the experimental group.

Table (4) also showed that the ‘d’ value expresses a large effect size; where the size of the effect of the independent variable in vocabulary acquisition was (0.719) which expresses a large effect size. Thus, the first hypothesis is proved and accepted.

The second hypothesis

“There is a statistically significant difference between the mean score of the experimental groups pre-post vocabulary test in favor of the post-test”.

In order to verify the validity of this hypothesis, Wilcoxon test was used to determine the significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre and post administration of the vocabulary test, the effectiveness of the independent variable in vocabulary acquisition was also assessed to determine the effect size and level. Table (5) shows the “z” value and their statistical significance difference between the mean rank of the experimental group in the pre-post administration of the vocabulary test.

**Table (5)
Comparison between the experimental group’s pre and post administrations of the vocabulary test**

Ranks	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Z	Sign.	D	Level of effect
(-) Ranks	0	0	0	3.527	0.01	0.882	Great
(+) Ranks	16	8.5	136				

It is clear from the previous table that the value of ‘z’ was statistically significant at the level (0.01), where the differences were in favor of the post-administration, which indicates the improvement of the students’ vocabulary of the experimental group after providing the experimental treatment.

Table (5) also showed that the value of "d" which expresses a large effect size; where the size of the effect of the independent variable in vocabulary development was (0.882), which expresses a very large effect size according to the adopted gradient of the values of "d". Thus, the second hypothesis is accepted and verified.

The third hypothesis stated that, “There is a statistically significant difference at the level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the post administration of the interest scale”.

In order to verify the validity of this hypothesis, the Mann Whitney test was used for independent groups to determine the significance of the differences between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups

in the interest scale dimensionally, and the effectiveness of the independent variable in developing interest was determined using Field's equation "d" for independent groups in non-parametric statistics to determine the size and level of the effect. Table (6) shows that:

Table (6): Comparison between the experimental group and the control group in the post administrations of the interest scale

Groups	n	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	U	Z	Sign.	d	Level of effect
Experimental	16	21.19	339	53	2.836	0.01	0.501	High
Control	16	11.81	189					

It is clear from the previous table that the "U" value was statistically significant at the level (0.01), where the differences came in favor of the experimental group, which indicates the development of interest among the students of the experimental group compared to their peers in the post-control group.

As it is clear from the previous table, the value of "d" expresses a large effect size; Where the size of the effect of the independent variable in the development of interest was (0.501), which is a value that expresses a large effect size according to the adopted gradient of the "d" values.

The fourth hypothesis stated that, "There are a statistically significant difference at the level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre and post measurements of the interest scale".

In order to verify the validity of this hypothesis, Wilcoxon test for related groups was used to determine the significant differences between the mean ranks of the experimental group's scores in the pre and post measurements of the interest scale, and the effectiveness of the independent variable in developing interest was also determined using Field's "d" equation (Field, 2009, 550) to determine the effect size and its level. Table (7) shows the "z" value and their statistical significance difference between the mean rank of the experimental group in the pre-post administration of the interest scale.

Table (7): Comparison between the experimental group's pre and post administrations of the interest scale

Ranks	n	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Z	Sign.	d	Level of effect
(-) Ranks	3	2.33	7.00	2.861	0.01	0.715	Great
(+) Ranks	11	8.91	98.00				
Ties	2	-	-				

It is clear from the previous table that the value of 'z' was statistically significant at the level (0.01), where the differences were in

favor of the post-administration of the interest scale, which indicates the growth of interest among the students of the experimental group after providing the experimental treatment.

Table (7) also showed that the value of "d" expresses a large effect size; Where the size of the effect of the independent variable in the development of interest was (0.715), which is a value that expresses a large effect size according to the adopted gradient of the values of "d".

Based on the previous findings, it is concluded that the treatment was effective on EFL vocabulary acquisition of the secondary stage students. It can be stated that short stories helped develop the students' interest and participation as well as their vocabulary. Short stories also enabled them to understand the meaning of words easily. The score of the students got higher after they taught by reading short stories. Short stories create an interesting environment to learn in the classroom. Therefore, applying short stories in teaching EFL vocabulary could improve not only students' vocabulary acquisition, but also their interest towards reading.

In addition to the statistical/quantitative results, the following qualitative results could be revealed:

1. Using short stories has helped the first secondary stage students to develop their EFL vocabulary.
 - The experimental group students outperformed the control group students in the post vocabulary test.
 - The experimental group students' mean score in the post - administration of the vocabulary test was much better than their mean score in the pre- administration of the test.
2. Reading short stories was effective in developing students' interests.
 - The experimental group students' mean score of the post interest scale was better than their mean score of the pre one. So, there seems to be much difference between their interests towards short stories before and after the treatment.

Based on the results of the study, the following points were concluded:

Based on the results of the study, the following points were concluded:

Using short stories to make the students identify the meaning of the vocabulary through the context made a great development in students' vocabulary acquisition and increase their interest towards reading short stories. Acquiring vocabulary through reading helps the students enrich their knowledge of the words they already know as these words may have different meanings through the context. Students can learn a lot of new vocabulary in a short amount of time through reading.

Students are motivated enough to learn vocabulary after reading short stories. The use of short stories creates a joyful learning atmosphere.

Reading with having an interest and elaborative strategies for acquiring vocabulary gives a message about the reading material. Moreover, reading with clear attention to identify the meanings of unfamiliar words gives the students more vocabulary. This is why learners and teachers should keep in mind that short stories can make reading more effective in acquiring words.

To sum up, acquiring more vocabulary is very important in the learning process as vocabulary knowledge helps learners improve their four language skills listening, speaking, reading and writing. If learners have an adequate number of vocabulary, they can speak and communicate effectively. Also, if they read constantly, they acquire new vocabulary and comprehend its meanings through the context. Short stories can help them have interests towards reading because they take short time to read them. Acquiring new vocabulary and knowing their meanings are challenges that face the students nowadays. The present study is focused on reading and using short stories as an effective way to promote the first secondary stage students' EFL vocabulary acquisition and add to their interests reading short stories. This study also attempted to answer the following questions: 1) What is the effect of reading short stories on improving Secondary School students' EFL vocabulary acquisition? 2) What is the effect of reading short stories on improving EFL Secondary School students' interest?

This study adopted the quasi-experimental design. The sample consisted of 32 1st secondary stage students at Barq El Ezz secondary school, Dakahlia Governorate. The participants were divided into two groups, control group (taught by using the traditional method) and experimental group (taught by using short stories for vocabulary acquisition). The two groups received pre and post-administrations of the study instruments.

To fulfill the purpose of the research, two instruments were designed and used by the researcher: a pre-post vocabulary learning test and a pre-post interest scale.

Recommendations of the research

With reference to the experimental evidence provided throughout the present research and its conclusions, the following recommendations are suggested:

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1. Short stories are recommended to be used as a framework not only for enhancing reading and writing skills, but also for vocabulary acquisition with secondary school students.
 2. EFL teachers and trainers should make use of short stories as a method that could help students acquire more vocabulary.
 3. EFL teachers also should find new and effective ways of teaching stories and apply them in their classrooms.
 4. Teaching vocabulary of through short stories, the teachers are suggested to use pictures, give definitions, synonyms, antonyms, matching vocabulary to their meanings, etc.
 5. Students should be trained on how to organize their vocabulary meanings through the context.
 6. It is necessary for the students to determine their interests, objectives, and efforts in learning the English language.
 7. Language learners may benefit from different materials including literary and nonliterary texts to acquire more vocabulary.
 8. Course designers should put into consideration the use of many exercises of guessing new words meaning from context to encourage students to have confidence in their abilities to discover meanings on their own.

Suggestions for further research

In the light of the previous recommendation, the following ideas can be considered for further research:

1. Investigating the effects of using different genres of short stories and literature and their contribution to vocabulary learning of participants at different proficiency levels.
2. Short stories impact on different aspects of language learning such speaking and writing or even the affective factors such as students' motivation.
3. Using short stories to develop EFL vocabulary acquisition of primary and preparatory stage pupils' vocabulary learning.
4. The role of short stories on improving EFL students' grammar learning.

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