

# Effects of Short Story Instruction on Students' Reading Comprehension, Vocabulary Skills Development and Reading Motivation: The Case of Second Year English Major Students

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## Abstract

*The objective of this study was to investigate the effects of short story intervention on Ambo University students' reading comprehension, vocabulary skills development and reading motivation. All second year English Language and Literature major students were purposefully selected as the subjects of this study. They participated in six months short story interventions. Quasi-experimental research design was employed. The researchers used a within-subject design where a single group of subjects is exposed to all levels of independent variables, a short story. Next, the students were given intensive training that lasted for six weeks. After the completion of the training, a post-test was administered. Then, the results were collected and recorded. The collected data was analysed by using paired sample t-test and descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation). The result of the data analysis revealed that short story intervention has a significant effect on the improvement as the paired sample t-test results indicated that a statistically significant improvement in reading comprehension,  $t(19) = 4.41$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , with the very large effect size (Cohen's  $d = 3.40$ ); vocabulary skills development showed significantly higher score than before the intervention  $t(19) = 11.43$ ,  $p = 0.001$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.99$ , 95%) and level of reading motivation levels from pre-test result to post-test result  $t(19) = 11.32$ ,  $p = 0.001$ . Based on the findings, it was recommended that appropriate short story should be used in the teaching of reading and vocabulary so that it may help students to improve their, reading comprehension, vocabulary skills and motivation to read.*

**Keywords:** Reading comprehension, vocabulary, reading motivation, short story

## Introduction

Reading is one of the four essential skills to be mastered, alongside listening, speaking, and writing. Among these English language skills, reading provides students with the greatest access to information. According to Tadros (2014), reading involves the act of deriving meaning from a text that is written. Farha and Rohani (2019) also stated that reading is a language skill that is very important to support success in obtaining knowledge or information. Further, reading is a crucial method for effective learning within an educational environment, and proficient reading involves not just decoding words but also understanding

the text (Zaccoletti *et al.*, 2020). In addition, reading plays a significant role in language instruction to enhance the skills that students have developed in listening, speaking, and writing (Van, 2009). Thus, engaging in reading plays a crucial role in forming an individual's personality and enhancing their perspective, which helps them connect with others more effectively.

Like, many English as Second Language or English as a Foreign Language reader, Ethiopian students gain wider access to electronic databases through the Internet.

Indeed, reading is a basic life skill and a cornerstone for learners' success in their careers and throughout their lives (Adcock, 2011). For this reason, the students have to be able to achieve reading competencies that can assist them in grasping necessary input using appropriate strategies of reading. Besides, language educators have given due attention is given on how students can develop their reading skill. Some scholars (Pardede, 2011; Hanadayani, 2013) argued that using short stories to teach reading skill will help students to improve their reading comprehension skill. Hence, the main objective of this study is to examine the effects of short story on the improvement of students' reading comprehension, vocabulary skills and reading motivation.

Robel and Shiue (2011) defined reading comprehension as the ability to read the words and know the meaning of a text. Khatib (2012) also stated that reading comprehension skills are the most important skills for mastery of a foreign language. Reading comprehension skill is a basic skill that any student needs to develop while learning a language. While the students are engaged in real classrooms, teachers of the English Language should use effective ways to improve students' reading comprehension so that the students can easily read and understand what they read in a better way (Nejmeh, 2011).

There are many reading strategies to improve reading comprehension and inferences, including improving one's vocabulary, critical text analysis, actual events and narration of events, and practicing deep reading (Wolf, 2016). Using short stories can help to develop reading comprehension skills and make the students exchange their ideas in the classroom discussion and make a connection between the text and the text from outside the school (Sari, 2013). Pardede (2011) stated that short stories are the most suitable literary genre which can be used in the EFL classes because they are very short, and it is more interesting than the novel, and less trouble when it is compared to the novel and easy to understand. In addition, Hanadayani (2013) pointed out that short stories are authentic materials for learning the English language.

Acquiring and mastering vocabulary is a crucial aspect that educators must instruct in English (Oscarini and Bhakti, 2018; Wulandari, 2019). Learners acquire new vocabulary by reading and understanding various English terms (Bi, 2020). Through reading, individuals can discover the significance of vocabulary (Tager-Flusberg, 2015). This assertion is reinforced by the research carried out by Rahayuningsih (2020), which revealed that in order to grasp the context of a text, students must not only read and articulate some words but also comprehend the meaning of each individual word. In summary, engaging in reading can enhance the vocabulary of students (Yildirim, 2008). A study conducted by Fitria (2019) stated that when students comprehend what they are reading, the more they read, the better they understand each word's meaning in English (Fitria, 2019). Once readers have an extensive vocabulary, they will understand the texts better, as vocabulary plays a crucial role in learning a foreign language (Reynolds et al., 2018). Overall, the enhancement of vocabulary plays a crucial role in advancing students' language abilities (Pezoa *et al.*, 2019; Yousefi and Biria, 2018). So, our students have to learn this basic skill using appropriate strategies to cope with books teaching foreign languages since it has multipurpose benefits. Short stories are very useful in the trials to improve students' vocabulary and reading. Nasreen (2010) stated that "short stories" will create a marked difference in language teaching and improving vocabulary.

Experts have performed numerous previous studies on reading skills. Furthermore, the review of pertinent local empirical studies divulged that some studies were conducted on the issues of students' reading skill and the difficulties associated with it. For example, according to Oromia Education Bureau (2011), the students' overall performance in learning other subjects is affected by their inability to read in English. Different local studies have been conducted in the area of literature in English language classroom teaching learning practices. For instance, Yitagesu (2017) carried out a research study examining the impact of literary texts on enhancing reading comprehension among ninth-grade students in

Addis Ababa. The researchers utilized a correlation design along with both quantitative and qualitative methods for data analysis. Ultimately, the study's results revealed that a majority of the participants viewed the incorporation of literary texts in reading instruction favourably.

Antehun (2020) conducted a second study on the advantages and difficulties of teaching English literature in Ethiopian secondary schools. The researchers employed a descriptive survey research design and purposive and convenient sampling techniques. According to the study's findings, incorporating literary texts into EFL/ESL classes is essential for teaching secondary school students the English language.

Despite the fact that the aforementioned scholars studied the function of literary texts in language instruction, no research has been done to look at how short stories affect students' vocabulary and reading comprehension. Furthermore, the current study's context is different. In this context, the primary goal of the current study was to investigate how short stories can enhance the reading comprehension, vocabulary and reading motivation of second-year English major students at Ambo University.

## Methodology

### Research Design

The study's goal was accomplished through the use of a quasi-experimental research design. The rationale is that experimental research uses direct manipulation of an independent variable and control of unrelated variables to examine cause-and-effect correlations (Creswell, 2012). Furthermore, by controlling any threats to internal validity, quasi-experimental design procedures can be constructed to draw some conclusions without including all the elements of an actual experiment. According to Patino and Ferreira (2018), internal validity is the degree of assurance that there are no outside factors influencing a cause-and-effect link found in a study. This is the other reason that

the researchers used the quasi-experimental design for the current study.

Additionally, this enables the researchers to choose volunteers according to their suitability for the study and convenience (Gray, 2023). Additionally, posttest-only designs with control groups, one group pre-test-post-test designs, and pre-test-post-test designs with control groups are examples of quasi-experimental research designs (Gray, 2023, Harris *et al*, 2006). Because there aren't many responders, the researchers have selected the second one—a one-group pre-test post-test design. Therefore, the current study, which aims to investigate the impact of short tales on second-year students' reading motivation, reading comprehension, and vocabulary skills, is suitable for a quasi-experimental research design.

In particular, a time series design involves using several pre-test and post-test measures created by the researchers to examine a single group over time. The repeated measures design was the most popular time series design, in which each group served as the control and all participants in that group had all experimental treatments (Cresswell, 2012). The researchers compared a group's achievement under one experimental treatment with its performance. This single-subject design involves the study of single individuals, their observation over a baseline period, and the administration of an intervention (Creswell, 2012). In a similar vein, Creswell (2014) also noted that a single-subject design entails tracking the behavior of one person (or a limited number of people) throughout time. Because comparing the effects of treatments entails examining how each participant's performance changed before and after the treatments, the design is known as within subjects.

### Research Setting

Ambo University, situated in Ambo town, the capital of the West Shewa Zone of Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia, is where the study was carried out. Ambo is located 114 kilometers to the west of the nation's capital. The University incorporates four campuses,

namely: the main campus at Ambo, Hachalu Hundessa Campus, Mamo Mezemir Campus at Gudar and Woliso Campus. Among the mentioned four, the researchers conducted the study at the main campus since the target groups were found there. The other reason for selecting this particular setting was that while delivering reading courses at different times the researchers' observed students' problems of reading comprehension. Hence, the availability or existence of the problem in this particular setting and its appropriateness to the study were among the other reasons for the selection of this particular research setting.

### **Participants and Sample of the Study**

The study's 19 participants were all second-year English majors at Ambo University. Second year students were believed to be appropriate for this study since they have taken common courses at this level and are also familiar with the environment. The subjects were specifically chosen because they assisted the researchers in conducting experiments on the subject and confirming or refuting the study's concept. Since purposive sampling is a better method for gathering data from students, the researchers employed it. If the objective is description rather than generalization, purposeful sampling are employed (Dawson, 2002).

### **Research Hypothesis**

H1: Students who completed the reading short story training showed a statistically significant difference in their reading comprehension scores before and after the training.

H2: Students who completed part in the reading short story training exhibited a statistically significant difference in the vocabulary skill development scores before and after the training.

H3: The reading motivation levels among the students who completed part in the short story reading training varied significantly in statistical terms before and after the training.

The researchers used description in the case of analysing the collected data for variables in the study through means, standard deviations, and ranges of scores to describe the effect of the treatment. Furthermore, a quasi-experiment was used for the present study by exposing the students' reading skills via different short stories. The effect of the independent variable (short tales) on the dependent variables (the target groups' reading motivation, vocabulary, and comprehension) was attempted to be examined.

### **Research Questions**

1. Is there a statistically significant difference in reading comprehension scores before and after the short story training for the students who participated in it?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference in vocabulary skills scores before and after the short story training for the students who participated in it?
3. Is there a statistically significant difference in reading motivation scores before and after the short story training for the students who participated in it?

### **Research tools**

#### **Pre-test**

Pre-tests which are also known as before test was given for all second year English major student respondents to assess their initial level of, reading comprehension, and vocabulary skills and reading motivation before they receive the treatment. It was delivered using different tasks. The question types correspond to the specific objectives of the study. The student respondents were given nearly two and half hours each to complete the given activities. The tests were prepared by the researchers from the selected short stories. Finally, the student respondents' responses were collected and corrected. The method of data analysis used was inferential statistics since it allows the researchers to compare the mean, and P value of the student respondents' result (Lim 2024).

## Post-test

Post-tests which are known as after test were prepared and delivered for all student respondents to know the effects of short stories on their reading comprehension vocabulary skills and reading motivation. The objective was to assess each treatment's effects.

Specifically, it was carried out to assess the effect of dependent variable or the variable being manipulated on the dependent variable or the variable in which the effect of the manipulation of the independent variable is observed. The post-test's objective in this instance was to investigate how the short tale affected the understanding, vocabulary, and reading motivation of the students' responses. The student respondents were given nearly two and half hours each to complete the given activities. The tests were prepared by the researchers and also checked by expert from education institution to ensure the validity. Finally, the respondents' responses were collected and corrected using inferential statistics since it allows the researchers to compare the mean and p value to accept or reject the hypotheses.

## Procedures of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how short stories affect, reading comprehension, vocabulary skill and reading motivation. To do so, the selected short stories which were to the level of the learners were adapted from different sources by the researchers and delivered to the student respondents after they were checked by education expert. The level here deals with the age of the students and the theme of the short story. The short stories were mixed in nature since they began from the culture of the students and preceded to the world level. Then after, the provision of a pre-test to identify students' initial level of reading skill was carried out. Next to that, the implementation of the treatment was carried out. The treatment was delivered for six weeks. During this time, the student respondents' were practicing different activities that were prepared from the reading short stories. In particular, the

researchers' guidance on applying the three stages of reading—pre-, during-, and post-reading—was given to the students while they read the texts. They were completing the given exercises most of the time in group. The researchers got permission from one of English language and Literature instructors who was assigned to teach reading course. Additional classes were also arranged by the representative of the class.

The prepared short stories for the training were accompanied by various activates and all of them were adapted from different sources of literature by the researchers. The time allotted for reading and performing the followed activities regarding each short story was two and half hours After that, the provision of a post-test to measure the effects of using short stories on students' reading comprehension, vocabulary skills and reading motivation was carried out. The post-test short story's level of difficulty, content and type is the same as that of the pre-test one. The only difference was the topics of the short stories. Hence, the procedure for completing the post-test is the same to that of the pre-test. At last, correcting the post-test was done followed by data analysis using inferential statistics.

## Methods of Data Analysis

Following test administration, data was gathered and statistical analysis was performed. The same respondents were given estimation mean of the pre-test and post-test. In particular, the paired sample t-test was used in inferential statistics to analyze the data gathered from student responses at various times. As per the selected approaches in the literature, the statistical tools that were employed were D (mean difference), T (t-value), Df (degree of freedom), and Sig. 2-tailed (p value) (Field, 2024).

## Results

The purpose of the pre- and post-tests was to determine whether there was a significant mean difference between the target student respondents' performance on the pre- and post-tests, as well as the impact of short tales on and

reading comprehension, vocabulary skill and reading motivation. The paired sample t-test was used to analyze and interpret the reading comprehension vocabulary skills and reading

motivation performance findings from the pre-test and post-test. Here are the analysis's findings.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics on the students' Reading Comprehension

Test	Mean	Standard deviation
Reading comprehension pretest	9.800	7.56
Reading comprehension posttest	12.950	6.11

In the table 1, the result indicated that student's reading comprehension mean score was improved from 9.80 (pre-test) to 12.95 (post-test) (i.e. within difference 3.15). This indicates substantial improvement in reading

comprehension after the intervention. Therefore, it can be concluded that the six weeks short story intervention was effective in enhancing the students' reading comprehension.

Table 2. Hypothesis whether statistically significant difference in reading comprehension scores before and after the reading short story training testing

Pre-test and post-test	T	Df	p	Cohen's Effect size
Reading comprehension post-test minus reading comprehension pre-test	4.41	19	0.001	3.40

Hypothesis No. 1 'There is a statistically significant difference in reading comprehension scores before and after the reading short story training for the students who participated in it' was accepted. The paired sample t-test results indicated that a statistically significant improvement in reading comprehension,  $t(19)$ , 4.41,  $p < 0.001$ , with the very large effect size

(Cohen's  $d=3.40$ ) (Table 2). The effect size of 3.40 is considered as large (Fritz *et al.* (2012). Cohen (1988) also identified small size effect ( $d=0.2$ , medium effect size ( $d=0.5$ ) and large effect size ( $d=0.8$  or greater). This shows that the six weeks short story intervention had positive effect on the students' reading comprehension.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics on the students' vocabulary skill development

Pre-test and post-test	Mean	SD.
Vocabulary skill development pre-test	11.12	3.39
Vocabulary skill development post-test	17.45	2.07

Table 3 revealed that before the short story intervention, the students' vocabulary skills mean scores  $M=11.12$  ( $SD. =3.39$ ). However, after the treatment, the mean score increased to  $M=17.45$  ( $SD = 3.07$ ). The mean difference was 6.33 ( $17.45-11.12$ ). The increase in the mean scores from pre-test to post-test indicates a substantial enhancement in vocabulary skills (Field, 2018). This suggests that the six weeks short story intervention was effective in

improving students' vocabulary skills. Additionally, the reduction in standard deviation from the pre-test ( $SD=3.39$ ) to the post tests ( $SD=2.07$ ) indicates that students' vocabulary skills became more consistent following the intervention. This suggests that not only did the average skills level increase, but the variability in scores decreased, which in turn indicates a more uniform improvement among the students.

Table 4. Hypothesis whether statistically significant difference in vocabulary skills development scores before and after the reading short story training testing

Pre-test and post-test	T	df	p	Cohen's Effect size
Vocabulary skills development post-test minus vocabulary skills development pre-test	11.43	19	0.001	0.99

As it can be seen in the Table 3 and 4, participants' vocabulary skills development showed significantly higher score ( $M=17.45$ ,  $SD=2.07$ ) than before the intervention ( $M=11.12$ ,  $SD=3.39$ ),  $t(19)=11.43$ ,  $p=0.001$ , Cohen's  $d=0.99$ , 95%). This indicates that the

hypothesis 'H2: There is a statistically significant difference in vocabulary skill development scores before and after the reading short story training for the students who participated in it' was accepted.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics on the students' on Reading Motivation

Pre-test and post-test results	Mean	SD.
Reading motivation pre-test	3.20	1.34
Reading motivation Post-test	3.84	1.14

The descriptive statistics in the Table 5 shows the increase in the students' reading motivation mean score from post-test ( $M=3.84$ ,  $SD=1.14$ ) to pre-test ( $M=3.20$ ,  $SD=1.34$ ). The decrease in

the standard deviation from 1.34 (pre-test) to 1.14 (post-test) indicates that students' responses became more consistent after the intervention.

Table 6. Hypothesis testing about if there is a statistically significant difference in reading motivation levels before and after the reading short story training

Pre-test and post-test	T	df	Sig.	Effect size
Reading motivation Post-test - Reading motivation pre-test	11.32	19	0.001	1.87

As it can be seen from the table 5 and 6, the paired samples t- test result suggested the increment of the participants' level of motivation from pre-test result ( $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ) to post-test result ( $M = 3.84$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ),  $t(19)=11.32$ ,  $p= 0.001$ ). This shows that the hypothesis No 3 'there is a statistically significant difference in reading motivation levels before and after the reading short story training' was accepted. The effect size of 1.87 is classified as large effect according to the Cohen's (1988) benchmark, which indicates a substantial impact of short story instruction on students' reading motivation. This suggests that the training not only significantly improved students' reading motivation but did so to a considerable extent.

## Discussions

The goal of this study was to find out how teaching short stories affected the

understanding, vocabulary growth, and reading motivation, of English majors. This study achieved three objectives. Determining the impact of short story usage on reading comprehension was the first specified goal. The second was to look at how pupils' vocabulary skills were affected by short stories. Examining how employing short stories affected the learners' motivation to read was the third goal. The design of this investigation was quasi-experimental. Additionally, the obtained data was analysed using the paired sample t-test.

Data were presented and analysed based on their themes under different headings. Further, the explanation of the reasons why the study has found was provided. Similarly, the results of pre-tests and post-tests were analysed and their means were compared to identify to what extent the intervention affected the participants' motivation to learn reading skills and the effects of using short stories on increasing the

students' achievement. The pre-tests aimed to identify students reading comprehension, vocabulary skills and reading motivation before the treatment. Similarly, the purpose of conducting post-test was to check the effect of the treatment i.e., a short story on the dependent variables i.e., reading comprehension vocabulary skills and reading motivation.

The mean of the learners' scores increased when comparing the pre-test and post-test findings. This suggested that using short stories enhances learners' vocabulary, understanding and reading motivation. According to the results of the paired sample t-test, there was a statistically significant improvement in reading comprehension ( $t(19) = 4.41, p < 0.001$ , with a very large effect size (Cohen's  $d = 3.40$ ); vocabulary skills development showed a significantly higher score ( $M = 17.45, SD = 2.07$ ) than before the intervention ( $M = 11.12, SD = 3.39$ ) ( $t(19) = 11.43, p = 0.001$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.99, 95\%$ ), and reading motivation levels increased from the pre-test result ( $M = 3.20, SD = 1.34$ ) to the post-test result ( $M = 3.84, SD = 1.14$ ),  $t(19) = 10.58, p = 0.001$ ). In this investigation, all three hypotheses were accepted.

The short stories created for the training included a range of activities and were all adapted from various literary sources by the researchers. These short stories began with elements from the students' own culture and expanded to a global perspective, allowing the participants to explore different cultures around the world. This exposure through literature also helps them reflect on and appreciate the diversity of others' cultures. These can be one of the reasons why these results obtained.

This study's findings align with previous research that demonstrated a positive connection between English literature reading and reading skills. For example, Kazerooni (2013) examined how exposure to literary texts affected students' reading comprehension and vocabulary retention at Khorasgan Azad University in Iran. The study compared literature majors to translation students and discovered that the use of literature increased

students' vocabulary. Similarly, Palenfo's (2018) study also found out that the students improved their reading skills as a result of the short story intervention. Hamane and Guetatlia (2022) also stated that using literature in language classes enhances EFL learners' language skills.

Implications drawn from the findings suggested that, for English language teachers, this research could assist them in improving their current teaching techniques. Based on this research work, teaching reading skills through short stories would work best in any language classroom including Ethiopian context if the classroom teacher is given further training on the issue. This study also suggests that teachers need to devote significant class time to teaching reading skills through short stories and encourage students to be engaged in it so that some students' gaps will be addressed. Lastly, the study's findings demonstrated that the student respondents had a favourable opinion of using short stories to improve reading skills. This study also suggests that teachers need to devote additional significant class time to teaching reading skills through short stories and encourage students to be engaged in it so that students can benefit from it especially in their, reading comprehension, vocabulary skills and reading motivation gaps and generally their reading skills can be improved.

## Conclusion

As it can be concluded from the above findings, the result indicated that there was a significant effect of the use of short stories in teaching reading skills to improve students', reading comprehension, vocabulary skills and reading motivation. The study also suggested that teachers need to devote significant class time to teaching reading skills through short stories and encourage students to be engaged in it so that some students' gaps can be addressed. Further, the study suggests that teaching reading skills through short stories has a positive effect on student respondents' reading skills in general and their reading comprehension, vocabulary skills and reading motivation in particular. Moreover, the results of the study can have



practical contributions to designing policy frameworks and curriculum designers.

## Recommendations

Based on the drawn conclusions the following recommendations are forwarded: Short stories should be integrated extensively into teaching reading skills so that it can help students' to be better in reading comprehension and vocabulary skills. To maximize the effectiveness of short stories in the English classrooms, teachers need to devote significant class time to teaching reading skills through short stories and encourage students to be engaged in it. Additionally, short stories should get attention since they have positive impact on students' reading skill along with reading comprehension, vocabulary skills and reading motivation. Finally, concerned bodies like designers of policy frameworks and curriculum designers should give due attention on the impact of short stories for students' to teach and reinforce vocabulary acquisition and comprehension skills, vocabulary skills development and reading motivation.

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## Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors of this study declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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