

The impacts of using short stories for vocabulary learning

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Abstract

This paper aspired to research the impacts of using short stories in learning English vocabulary on EFL learners' awareness. The total participants were 45 learners of English in a context of Vietnam. This study targets three main sections consisting of (1) the motivation of learning vocabulary, (2) the advantages of using short stories in learning English vocabulary, and (3) the positive methods of learning vocabulary. The study was conducted qualitatively and quantitatively using a questionnaire and interviews. The data was collected from forty-five quantitative responses and five interviews. The findings help learners understand more in their learning out of the classroom context. The students' perceptions have exhibited the motivations for acquiring vocabulary, the advantages of using short stories, and useful methods in learning for learners. It also expresses the restrictions of using short stories within the findings section. This paper will contribute to the participants' awareness of an efficient self-study to improve English vocabulary and supply many suitable strategies for EFL learners.

Keywords: Short stories, vocabulary, motivation, benefits, methods.

Introduction

The usage of the English language today has been an essential requirement for people all over the world. English is known as an international communication language for commercial, entertainment, and technical purposes. Although learning English can be challenging and time-consuming, learners can gain good opportunities in the future. Thus, the target of learning English has great meaning in the learning process.

Vocabulary is known as a key to achieving the English language so there are many methods for EFL learners to acquire new words. One of the most effective ways is using short stories, learners can learn words in their classroom activities or their self-time. Abu Zahra and Farrah (2016) suggested approaches and applications for teaching and learning short stories in the EFL classroom. Comparing the use of the short stories method and the traditional way based on the vocabulary test. The result of the short story technique was more positive and effective rather than the traditional way in the sustain vocabulary enrichment (Jabir, 2014). The short stories provided rich words, contents, and contexts. A meaningful context in stories could create the practical material and context for learners in the language usage that was indicated by Gashti (2021). In the reading stage, students become more active and creative in giving meaning to words, phrases, and stories to reflect and think about the connection between the text and knowledge (Almanza & Avila, 2015). In addition, an effective short story reading program is a strategy that helps learners pay more attention to the vocabulary and gives suitable levels of new words (Parvarehshbar & Ghoorchaei, 2016).

The approach to using short stories is flexible because the learners can read or listen to the stories. Learners also can apply the combination of modern devices with internet service in using short stories. The research of Ahmad and Yamat (2020) showed that learners are inclined to study better when they are using the digital storytelling method.

Ajideh et al. (2013) researched that the student's vocabulary retention can be more effective by summarizing short stories. Afshar and Mojavezi (2017) confirmed that using visual storytelling at a specific time can help learners improve reading skills, decoding skills, and vocabulary expansion. Other types of literature are also great materials for enhancing vocabulary. For instance, the folk tale is one of the types of short stories which also is the top selection for reading interactive that helps students provide different settings, cultures, and customs (Ismail, 2019). Another relevant research is that using newspapers and short stories was the same significant value in increasing students' vocabulary size (Wijayanti, 2020).

This research is therefore aimed to explore the use of short stories in increasing the vocabulary of EFL learners. A small number of the research reported on the use of short stories outside of the EFL classroom context, so the outcome of this study may be useful for learners in learning English achievement. Meanwhile, they get a positive reflection on their studying schedule.

Literature review

There is a multiplicity of instruments to enhance the English vocabulary level, especially the use of short stories that were known as an effective method for EFL learners in the classroom. This section presents the main contents of the effects of using short stories for EFL learners consisting of (1) the description of short stories, (2) the benefits of using short stories, and (3) the effective methods of learning vocabulary.

The description of short stories

There are several definitions of short stories in the world. A short story is imagined literature that is usually presented in prose, often in a narrative layout (Jabir, 2014). The definition of a short story is a story that describes the characters and events that are short enough to be read and follow (Wijayanti, 2020). Similarly, Storytelling was the combination of gestures, intonations, image pictures, sounds, and songs to be described, and the actions to be performed as an instrument to learn about culture, individual, location, and life (Ahmad, 2020). For instance, considered childish tales and academic stories were some of the best methods for teaching vocabulary and grammar to EFL learners (Gashti, 2021). Besides, the local folktales and fairy tales were imparted as verbal stories to explain the happening around them (Ismail, 2019).

The benefits of using short stories instrument

The plural of the researchers agreed that using short stories can help learners acquire the English language effectively. Based on the techniques of using short stories in EFL classrooms, learners expanded their vocabulary through practice in a variety of contexts (Jabir, 2014). In addition to this, there is no difference in achievement between male and female students in the experimental group. Thus, students can expand their vocabulary size and increase proficiency in the language through short stories and newspapers (Wijayanti, 2020). It was notable that the telling the visual stories tool was usable in both learning and retention of vocabulary knowledge in the training program (Afshar & Mojavezi, 2017). Moreover, the effect of using short stories in improving the ability of learners to achieve vocabulary performance and create motivation for learners (Parvareshbar & Ghoorchaei, 2016). During the experimental stage, the researchers also provide students in the experimental group used reading strategies and taking note strategies. The students' perception of stories helped them be more attractive and interested in learning and positively participated in-class activities (Abu Zahra & Farrah, 2016). Students have beneficial advantages in developing their language skills, critical thinking, creativeness, cultural understanding, and personal development. Furthermore, after a pre-reading task, the good effect of the short stories tool as related to personal experience reflected on the culture brought some objectives such as prediction, confirmation, and production, and connected with classmates (Almanza & Avila, 2015). "Storytelling was also found to allow students to learn through the correct stories about other cultures, individuals, places as well as universal life" (Ahmad & Yamat, 2020, page 491). As mentioned in the research of Ahmad and Yamat (2020), telling stories is a familiar way to teach the English language in the EFL classroom because it can use gestures, intonations, pictures, or songs that help learners describe the stories. They also utilized digital techniques such as audio, video, and application to help learners guess and receive the new words. The previous study by Gashti (2021) illustrated that using short stories can allow using new words in communication and meaningful contexts because learners must focus on the events in the stories.

The positive methods of learning vocabulary

To help learners have efficient approaches for studying languages specific to achieving vocabulary, many researchers carried out experiments and concluded the results from some positive methods. Learning vocabulary strategies is not only remembering but also utilizing them in particular contexts. One of the effective strategies for learners to learn vocabulary is using visual storytelling to develop the knowledge of target words which is the power of vocabulary retention (Afshar & Mojavezi, 2017). Also, learners need to select vocabulary items that came from newspapers or stories to identify them when they realize the words in reading or hearing in the contexts (Wijayanti, 2020). For

teaching and learning the English language, incidental vocabulary acquisition is known as an effective method to enhance the quantity of vocabulary (Abu Zahra & Farrah, 2016). In addition, cooperative learning has exploited the helping and interaction between two or more members in pairs or in a group that developed critical thinking and problem-solving skill in the study of Gashti (2021). Not only that, but the procedure of summarizing stories also had a good effect that learners can acquire and retain the new words (Ajideh et al., 2013). Additionally, learners learning language through stories obtained both language knowledge and usage in meaningful ways that contributed to the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills (Ismail, 2019). Moreover, one study found that the interactive reading method permitted learners to understand the stories and participate in the interaction between readers and the text, the author, and the context of stories (Almanzan & Avila, 2015). Hence, learners connected the themes of stories with their personal experiences and cultural factors during the process of prediction, confirmation, association, and production.

Methodology

The study applied the mixed-method approach that combined both quantitative and qualitative design. The treatments were questionnaires and interview to collect the quantitative and qualitative data through three questions:

1. What are the motivations for learning vocabulary?
2. What are the benefits of short stories in English language learning?
3. What are the possible methods for learners to enlarge vocabulary?

In this research, the participants were a group of EFL learners in a context of a remote area in Vietnam. For data collection, a questionnaire began first that included 11 questions in the checkboxes and yes-no questions form of Google Form. The questionnaire included five parts that showed the importance of learning vocabulary, the factors that influence the learning vocabulary, the difficulties in learning the words, the methods for increasing vocabulary, and the benefits of using short stories. These items utilized some backgrounds from Gashti (2021) analyzed the effect of using short stories in context and collaborative learning in class. The research of Jabir (2014) presented the points of the importance of vocabulary in learning and teaching vocabulary by using short stories in increasing vocabulary. Another research by Parvareshbar and Ghoorchaei (2016) provided the role of short stories in vocabulary development and some ways to learn vocabulary. Moreover, two researchers Abu Zahra and Farrah (2016) exploited some interest in using short stories that were affected the improving language skills, personal skills, and cultural enrichment. The quantitative data in the questionnaire were analyzed and exhibited in the charts.

On the side of the qualitative design, the interview was organized with a descriptive study following the method of the unfolding matrix (Nguyen, 2018). It also had the agreement of the participants before recording the conversation. To make the research better, it had piloting at first, and then the questions were redesigned to be more appropriate for authentic purposes. The questions after piloting were official to gather the interview data. The interview had 21 questions to gather the opinions of 5 participants. The participants had a phone call to interview about the usage of short stories in learning vocabulary terms. The concept of questions analyzed the motivation of English Studies students to achieve the vocabulary, their ways of learning new words out of the class context, and their approach to using stories in learning. The interview questions accounted for the effects of using short stories in the process of enlarging the vocabulary. After collecting the information, the qualitative data analysis was coding and categorizing ideas in the tables.

Results

This section presented the findings and the data analysis of the short stories instrument as a role of an effective method of enhancing English vocabulary. The data was clarified and described from the students' perception of the usage of stories by the questionnaire and interview instruments. These main contents are as follows (1) the motivation for learning vocabulary, (2) the benefits of using short stories in learning English vocabulary, (3) the limitation of using short stories in learning vocabulary, and (4) the positive methods of learning vocabulary.

The motivations for learning vocabulary

Based on two research tools including interviews and the questionnaire, the data showed that students had motivations in improving vocabulary to achieve proficiency in the English language. Vocabulary has played a significant role in their study, especially in their English Studies major. Most of the students' objectives can develop their abilities in four language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. The extracts below will illustrate these findings: "I want to develop my skills. If I have lots of words, it will be easier to understand what others say and be better to express my ideas." [105M02P1]

"If I don't have the plentiful vocabulary, I can't learn English with other skills" [378M05P1]

"Because learning vocabulary is the basic need for learning better other skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills." [381M05P1]

Another motivation is that these students desired to be more confident in communication with foreigners.

“Regarding the motivation to learn English, I want to be more confident to communicate with foreigners in international languages.” [12M01P4]

Notably, two in five interviewees said that they wanted to learn vocabulary because they love the English language.

“My motivation to learn English vocabulary is because I like English and I love learning about it” [380M05P5].

Furthermore, an interviewee aimed to have a rich vocabulary to apply the future occupation easier, this motivation originates not only to find out the work but also to pursue a passion for the English language.

“My motivation to learn English is to serve my future work, and I like the English language very much.” [197M03P3]

In the questionnaire, the data also reflected that forty-five participants had the same reasons as five interviewees. Chart 1 indicates the percentage of EFL learners who show their several purposes for learning vocabulary.

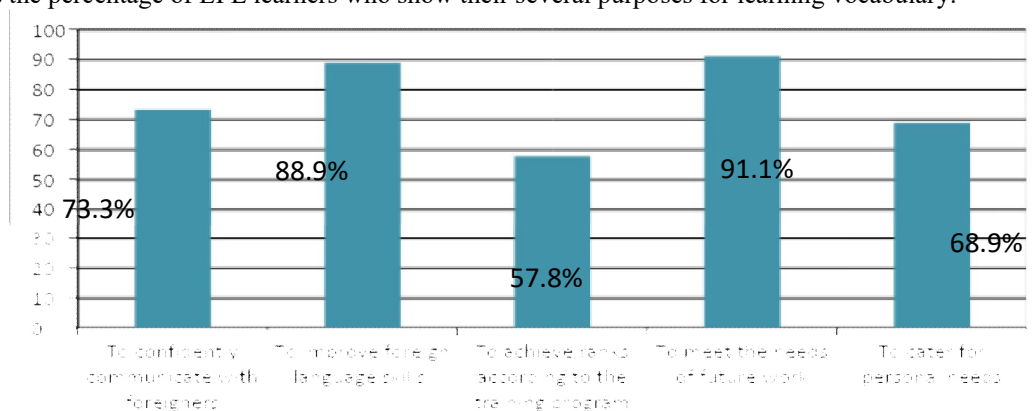


Chart 1: The EFL learners' motivation concerning learning English vocabulary

Chart 1 presents the proportions of EFL learners in their motivation for learning vocabulary aspects. Obviously, the top three motivations are for a future career (91.1%, n=45), language skills (88.9%), and communication (73.3%). This finding shows that students also have the specific motivation in enlarging their vocabulary that relies on their essential needs. Generally speaking, they have to require a determined and serious study. Besides that, the large aggregates of students in the questionnaire tend to prefer acquiring new words in a contingent way more than acquiring new ones following a specific schedule.

From the questionnaire, students showed a preference for learning vocabulary in two different ways. It compares the two ways that EFL students use to learn vocabulary. About 66.7% of students asserted that they like to learn new words accidentally. While other 33.3% of students preferred to have a plan or goals for acquiring the vocabulary.

The benefits of using short stories in learning English vocabulary

There are various positive impacts of using short stories methods for learners to increase vocabulary through their perceptions. They already were used to applying the short stories to improving their lexis, the significant advantage is enhancing vocabulary effectively:

“I think I can easily figure out the words in the context of those stories. These words are very diverse and common which are easy to remember” [37M01B1]

“Learning English through stories helps me expand my vocabulary, also knows more new words. Besides, I can understand the other meanings of familiar words in different contexts” [328M04B1]

“The advantage of learning vocabulary through stories is that I can acquire lots of words on different topics” [464M05B1]

Another side of short stories is that can improve understanding and knowledge in many aspects of life. Learners received the different types of traditions, cultures, and people in the world. They had a part of view about the foreign literature reflecting truly the lifestyle in a country. The usage of short stories is an attractive and interesting way for EFL learners in their study. They felt more interesting and enjoyable in the process of learning vocabulary.

“The English stories about the English-American literature reflect the lifestyle, culture as well as the human behavior in there, so I find it is quite interesting and I know more interesting things about their culture” [158M02B3]

“I can understand better the author's style of writing stories. Moreover, I understand the culture and the people of English-speaking countries through the message that each story brings, and from there, I gain more knowledge in different aspects.” [445M05B3]

“I find it very interesting to learn vocabulary through English stories because when I follow the story, I will encounter new words then I look up in the dictionary and I will know the new meanings of words” [308M04B2]

Also, they can conclude many lessons and messages from these stories. Learners can develop their abilities as follows reading, summary, prediction, deduction, and analysis throughout the stories.

“It helps me improve my reading comprehension” [129M02B4]

“I summarized the story with the basic structure of the opening, climax, and ending. Then I will tell more about the compelling main idea, the explanation, and the solving problem” [227M03B4]

“We don't always know all the words because it depends on the context, so we have to apply the knowledge we have learned in class and our understanding to try to guess the meaning of the words. Only then can I understand the meaning of the story” [436M05B4]

“After reading and following the stories development, I can draw lessons and messages based on the story” [337M04B4]

Especially, one learner said that she can realize the parts of speech and improve her pronunciation. The nouns, verbs, adjectives, and others were potential elements to contribute to the complete sentences.

“When I see new words in the story, I often look up the dictionary to know some more information such as the meaning of the word, whether it has another meaning or not, is it a verb or a noun or an adjective, and what is the exact way to pronounce that word. Then I repeat the word over and over and make notes on my phone or paper and make a sentence with that word or that phrase often” [422M05E5]

The application of short stories in EFL learners described the number of benefits in chart 2. These advantages are not only positive in the classroom context but also in the out-of-class context.

The benefits of using short stories in achieving vocabulary

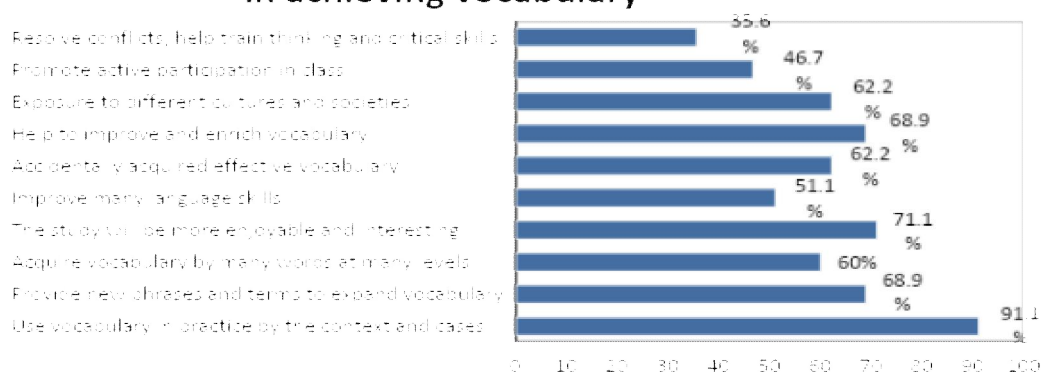


Chart 2: The benefits of using short stories in achieving vocabulary

The data from checkboxes in the questionnaire is provided multiple answers about the advantages of short stories in chart 2. It points out that the top one of the charts is the function of enlarging vocabulary (91.1%, n=45). In the second position, students considered short stories as an interesting method for learning (71.1%). The same percentage of the vocabulary enrichment and the expansion in phrases and terms of vocabulary are 68.9%, respectively.

The limitation of using short stories in learning vocabulary

Besides, the student's perception of the use of short stories also has a limit. Students expressed that sometimes they felt confused about the content of stories. The stories may require so many new terms of cultures and messages that cannot be understood clearly.

“When I read foreign jokes, sometimes the content can make me confused and difficult to understand. I am not sure that I understand the content correctly” [81M01L1]

“The downside of it is that if a story that has a theme or a story from a country with a different culture than ours, the content will be difficult to understand. Then we can easily get bored as well and can misunderstand the meaning of that word” [362M04L1]

Another factor is the students' attitude toward the use of short stories. They thought that sometimes they felt unready to read because of boring content and they do not have time for reading. The habit of reading was also an important factor to memorize the vocabulary. An interviewee depicted that she could learn the new words effectively if the stories is appropriate to her interest.

“About the limitation, I think it may be because sometimes there is no interest or there is not much time to read a story” [180M02L2]

“As for the restriction... is that someone who doesn't have the habit of reading as often as I do will feel a bit lazy and if you don't read as often, it will be easy to forget words” [467M05L2]

“But if the content of the story is too new, I look up the words' meaning to understand the story. It makes me excited to read, so I think that is the only way to find the suitable stories for me, then it will be effective” [266M03L3]

The positive methods of learning vocabulary

The interviewees figured out the significant methods for acquiring the vocabulary. The traditional for learning new words is that remember words by writing them in notebooks or handbooks. The method is highlighting or taking notes of words throughout the papers and sticky notes.

“When I see new and interesting words in the story, I will write them down in my notebook to memorize” [232M03W1]

“I like to use notebooks and notes to write down the words I want to learn” [21M01W2]

Additionally, the similarity between interview and questionnaire pointed out that the strategy for learning the vocabulary based on different topics was popular. The list of words provided common and plentiful words for learners. The learners used word lists to build their vocabulary.

“I usually learn new vocabulary by organizing it by topic” [20M01W3]

The students applied the technology in studying, they used some modern devices such as computers, laptops, and smartphones to use applications software, social networks, or websites for learning vocabulary. Furthermore, the usage of short stories was one of the great methods for improving the size of the vocabulary.

“I think I will combine many other methods such as learning on YouTube or Tiktok” [25M01W4]

“I like reading stories and I found that if I read stories in English, I can both entertain and learn new vocabulary. I was recommended by friends to read stories through Wattpad and Facebook” [253M03W5]

“I usually write new words in my notebook and note down the words that I want to learn the most and then I take a picture and then I make it my phone wallpaper so that every time I turn on my phone I can see it. I learn in that way” [293M04W8]

The interactive method means a learner studies with a partner or a group of members together to supplement words. In this way, learners could practice and discuss with others which helped learners easy to remember words. It also motivated them to feel more enjoyable.

“I like having friends to study with it is more motivated and more enjoyable” [213M03W7]

“I prefer to have friends to learn vocabulary, we can exchange with each other so that it can be easier to remember” [398M05W7]

There are several methods found in this study throughout the questionnaire form. Thirty-five students suggested that they usually applied these ways to acquire their vocabulary size in chart 3.

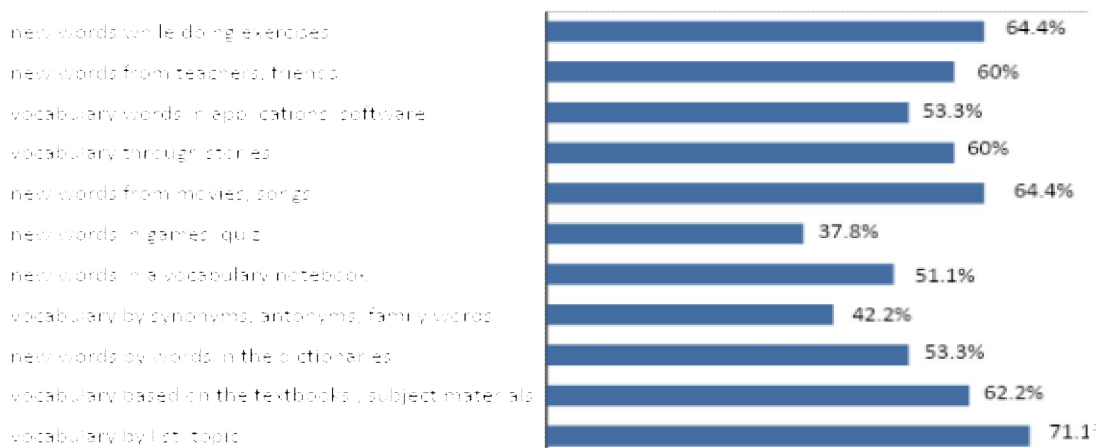


Chart 3: The methods for learning vocabulary

In the questionnaire, chart 3 revealed that some crucial methods for expanding the vocabulary are learning vocabulary from the lists of topics, from movies, songs, and exercises. These methods have used the advantages of intelligent devices. The exercise, movies, and songs held the same percentage at 64.4 %. While the games and quizzes are at the smallest proportion at 37.8%. The reason may be that they have less information or interest in the games or quizzes app.

Discussion

From the data analysis of two research instruments, the findings presented as (1) the motivation of learning vocabulary, (2) the benefits of using short stories in learning English vocabulary, (3) the limitation of using short stories in learning vocabulary, and (4) the positive methods of learning vocabulary. For these findings, several noticeable ones are discussed by following different aspects of relevant studies from Jabir (2014), Ismail (2019), and Gashti (2021).

As suggested by Jabir (2014) about the student's motivation, short stories can be a factor that motivates students in reading skills. Similarly, in two articles by Almanza and Avila (2015), Parvareshbar and Ghoorchaie (2016), carried on the interest in reading short stories of the students related to their motivations. In this finding, learners must have appropriate and fascinating material to read, at that time they can enlarge their vocabulary. The participants in this study have various motivations mainly for future work, communication, and language acquisition. In addition to this, Gashti (2021) presented a different perspective about the students' habits in reading. The difference is that the reading habits of a student are limited because of the topics in books. In this finding, the investigation is that most students in interviews do not have the habit of reading because they felt lazy and uninterested when reading.

The specific outcomes in this paper are in line with previous articles about the positive effects of the usage of short stories. As the dependable purpose in enhancing vocabulary by context, learners can acquire their vocabulary retention Afshar and Mojavezi (2017). Students can remember words after a long time. It was supported by Ahmad and Yamat (2020) that students create ideas to remind the new words in memory. The findings are in agreement with the results of Abu Zahra and Farrah (2016) and Ismail (2019) which illustrate the efficiency of short stories on language skills, especially in reading comprehension. After reading the stories, students summarize the stories following their understanding (Ajideh et al., 2013). They usually predict the new words during the treatment of using short stories in the research of Almanza and Avila (2015). Furthermore, Ajideh et al. (2013), Afshar and Mojavezi (2017), Ismail (2019), and Gashti (2021) all of which confirm the positive effects of short stories. They assessed that short stories also can help learners to understand and achieve knowledge in many aspects of life such as culture, people, and lifestyle in different countries. Notably, the way of using short stories in learning vocabulary as an effective tool will help learners more interested and enjoyable, Afshar and Mojavezi (2017) and Ismail (2019). Moreover, this outcome figured out that learners can get meaningful messages and lessons throughout the stories, they are confident in their achievements after reading the stories.

This finding is compatible with a point about cooperative learning by Abu Zahra and Farrah (2016) that students can help each other when they study together. Based on collaboration with others, each member developed critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Additionally in this finding, students tend to work in pairs or in a small group to interact and discuss which purpose to remember new words when they are out of class context. They expressed that they can learn from others and it is more fun to have a partner to study with. The interactive reading model of Almanza and Avila (2015) indicated that it creates opportunities for readers in attaining their vocabulary. Moreover, the summarized method is a good effect that can help learners to improve and recall the new words, Ajideh et al. (2013). The absolute evidence of previous researchers indicated that the participants in this paper showed that they summarized the stories by using their own words, and then they retold the stories to listeners. The traditional method is to write the unfamiliar words, the learners rewrite the new words until they can remember them. This paper performed another strategy in which the words can be emphasized by highlighting to help learners pay more attention to vocabulary items. Besides, learners use websites and social networks to develop their vocabulary via modern techniques with internet services. These days, learners get advantages in learning vocabulary from different instruments such as digital storytelling, games, songs, quizzes, and movies through the application of technology. Bilingual dictionaries or other dictionaries are helpful tools that help learners look up the words. Many students assumed that they can actually obtain vocabulary when doing their exercises. Specifically, the EFL learners can utilize short stories as a potential technique that not only expands the vocabulary size but also improves the target language.

Conclusion

This research presents the conclusions that come from the result of the data analysis, as well as the effects of short stories in vocabulary learning when students are out of the class context. The findings answered three main queries by students' perceptions: (1) the motivations of learning vocabulary, (2) the benefits of short stories to English language learning, and (3) the positive methods to enlarge vocabulary. In this section, the information from these questions will be exhibited shortly.

First, the motivations in the students' learning vocabulary originated from their goals in the second language process and acquisition. Essentially, the participants in this study focus on the requirements of level language to obtain a good occupation, be effective in communication, and be fluent in the language skills. As mentioned before in the article of Jabir (2014), the purposes of students started with their reading comprehension by using short stories.

Second, most of the participants concurred about some values in using short stories in learning English vocabulary. They explained their point of view about the benefits of short stories to the English language, especially in the vocabulary achievements. Generally speaking, vocabulary retention based on the context of learners can improve significantly (Afshar & Mojavezi, 2017). It means that learners have creative ways to remember the words effectively. At the same time, the vocabulary size of learners can affect their language proficiency.

Third, some positive methods are given for learners to apply. Students provided some practical ways that they used to follow. Focusing on the usage of short stories is regarded as a great technique for learners in developing vocabulary. They utilize several devices such as computers, laptops, and smartphones to use applications software, social networks, or websites for learning words. Learners also use other materials like songs, videos, quizzes, and stories for their study process. They can read or listen to the stories in the activities of language class or in self-study time. In other words, they can approach storytelling or digital stories in both traditional and modern ways.

To conclude, this study contributes to an agreement with previous studies that the use of short stories has many good impacts on EFL learners' improving English vocabulary size. Thanks to the questionnaire and interview design, the data demonstrated confidence in learning vocabulary through the short stories tool in the present and future.

Implication

Besides, EFL learners apply the short story instrument, which also has the limitation that sometimes learners do not have an interest and misunderstand the stories' content. It is necessary for the learners must determine their motivations, objectives, and efforts in learning the English language. Regarding the students' mission, learners should pay more attention to combining different methods to acquire English language proficiency. Another note is that teachers may employ short stories in teaching and designing the EFL classroom.

Limitation

In this study, a population is a small group on a campus which is forty-five participants is the final year students that are just enough to have a general valid in the specific scale and time. The questionnaire in Google Form collected less information than reality. On the other hand, the time and the contact for the interviews were limited. These students participated in the conversations through phone calls because of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. If the interviews are conducted directly, the study will be more favorable in gathering data.

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