

# EXPLORING OMANI EFL STUDENTS' READING HABITS: THE ROLE OF SHORT STORIES IN ENHANCING LANGUAGE SKILLS AND CULTURAL AWARENESS

Mohanad Al Habsi<sup>1</sup> and Buthaina Al-Riyami<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Royal Air Force of Oman, Oman  
[Mohanadalhabsi@gmail.com](mailto:Mohanadalhabsi@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Sultan Qaboos University, Oman  
[B.alriyami@squ.edu.om](mailto:B.alriyami@squ.edu.om)

## ABSTRACT

*This study explores the role of English short stories in enhancing English language proficiency and cultural awareness among Omani EFL students. The research used purposive sample of 28 Grade 11 students in Seeb, Muscat, aged 15–17. The study is a mixed-methods study, combining qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaires. Findings show that most students regularly read short stories and perceive them as beneficial to their language learning, increasing their motivation and engagement. The findings, aligned with the previous literature, highlight the literary, motivational, and cultural value of short stories in EFL contexts.*

## KEYWORDS

*English short stories, cultural awareness, language performance, Oman, EFL.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive world, second language acquisition is critical for individuals to thrive in the rapidly changing environment. In particular, the English language is the most widely used international language. Although learning English requires time and effort for non-English speaking learners, it provides significant opportunities for academic, professional, and personal growth.

Literature, especially short stories, has been recognized as an effective medium for teaching English as a second language. According Pardede to [1, p14] “among literary genres, short stories seem to be the most suitable choice for this due to its potential to help students enhance the four skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing—more effectively because of the motivational benefit embedded in the stories”. Furthermore, in [2, p. 153], it is stated that short stories substantially enhance language skills, critical thinking, creativity, and cultural understanding”

literature supports this. For example, in [3], in a quasi-experimental study, it is found that short stories improved EFL learners' critical thinking and cultural awareness. In the Omani context, Al-Bulushi [4] found that applying Reader Response Theory to teach short stories significantly enhanced Omani secondary students' comprehension and attitudes toward reading. Also, Al-Siyabi [5] found that integrating short stories in English foundation courses enhance learning experience and improve linguistic skills. Therefore, it seems apparent that short stories in English play a key role in improving students' language learning potential and cultural awareness.

Due to the potential of short stories to enrich both language proficiency and cultural awareness, this study aims to explore short stories' role in supporting English language development among students

in Omani public schools. However, despite the highlighted benefits of short stories in global EFL contexts, there is a lack of empirical research in Oman that explore how short stories can specifically enhance language proficiency and cultural awareness among school students. The findings are expected to inform curriculum designers and English language teachers about the value of integrating short stories into EFL instruction.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Teaching literature has many advantages in an English language classroom. Among literary genres, short stories are often preferred due to their pedagogical suitability. [1] argues that “the deviated and figurative language of poetry necessitates very long time to grasp” and “the length of a novel makes it difficult to finish.” Also, with regard to drama, it is not easy to perform a play in classes that are crowded and full of students within a class time [1].

Short stories are believed to be the most enriching literary genres, as they develop literary, cultural, motivational and higher order thinking among students [6] and [1]. The use of short stories in foreign language teaching has often been debated; however, as [7] argues, earlier language teaching methods focused more on increasing the linguistic capability, but recently literature has been considered as a valuable source of authentic material.

Short stories are not beneficial for language competence but for raising cultural awareness as exploring stories from different cultures doesn't just build language skills—it opens a window into how others think and live. While this exposure may challenge students with unfamiliar ideas, it also encourages them to think more deeply and critically. As noted in [6], such experiences help learners reflect on cultural differences and develop intercultural understanding. Similarly, as shown in [8] reading short stories boosts students’ motivation and sharpens their critical thinking skills.

### **2.1 The Role of Literature in English Language Teaching**

The main aim of learning a new language is to enhance communication which leads to less emphasis in grammar. Within this communicative approach, literature is considered a rich source. Although some genres of literature —especially poetry—do not adhere to standard grammatical norms, they offer creative dimension to engage with language. As stated in [9], “the creative use of language in poetry and prose often deviates from the conventions and rules which govern standard, non-literary discourse, as in the case of poetry where grammar and lexis may be manipulated to serve orthographic or phonological features of the language”

Despite such difficulties, literature contributes positively to teaching and learning language. According to [10] and [6] literature adds new dimensions to language learning, where not only are linguistic capabilities increased, but it is also a great source of motivation, cultural education, literary insight and higher order thinking. In [11], it is emphasized that literature enhances the understanding of the cultural context, which has a significant impact on the grasp of language and the enhancement of language proficiency.

In contemporary studies, [12] examines how teachers perceive the role of literature in language education in the era of globalization and Artificial Intelligence (AI). The findings emphasize the value of literature in shaping young minds, fostering critical thinking, and promoting empathy.

### **2.2 The Role of Short Stories in Teaching English Language**

Short stories are considered more appropriate for teaching English. In [1], it is recommended to use short stories for their brevity and use of simple, everyday language. In [13], a recent study found that reading short stories significantly improved students’ vocabulary acquisition and their interest. [14] also found that engaging with short stories increases students’ ability to memorize vocabulary.

## **2.3 Benefits of Short Stories in Teaching English Language**

In [2], Abuzahra and Farrah mentioned there are several advantages of using short stories in the EFL classroom, and they specified that the length of short stories makes them practical and manageable in a classroom setting and provides the full literary benefit without overburdening the student. [15, p.107] further supports this, stating that “the language used in these stories is commonly understandable for students”. Short stories also provide authentic examples of grammatical structures, making them a good tool for learning [1]. In [10], Stevens mentioned that short stories are concise, original, and an easily accessible genre. He also maintains that short stories have ingenuity and a fantasy aspect which creates a curiosity about them that makes them more acceptable among students. According to [6], the benefits of short stories in EFL classrooms can be divided into six main aspects. While Erkaya [6] originally identified these categories, other research has also supported them, as shown below:

### **1. Motivational Benefit**

In [6, p.5], it is stated that “since short stories usually have a beginning, middle, and end, they encourage students at all levels of language proficiency to continue reading them until the end to find out how the conflict is resolved”

### **2. Higher Order Thinking Skills**

Reading and analyzing short stories develops higher-order thinking in students, helping them to critically analyze complex situations and evaluate moral choices [1].

### **3. Language Areas**

Short stories help students enhance vocabulary as well as gain knowledge about authentic language [10]. They increase the chance of adaptation to a foreign environment, as they provide practical language which students might encounter there [16].

### **4. Language skills**

In [17], it is specified that short stories help in enhancing the language skills of students. In [15], a qualitative action study conducted in Tunja, Colombia, showed how group activities involving short stories can help improve the language skills of students. The study includes extracts from the students' writings to show the improvements in them.

### **5. Cultural Awareness**

In [18], it is found that most of the participants believe that diverse literary texts enhance their understanding of different cultures and deepen their knowledge of historical events.

In the present scenario, there is a consensus among many writers about the role and importance of literature in English language teaching. Short stories are also considered an effective medium to introduce literature to students due to their various benefits. However, in the Omani context, this area appears to be understudied, with limited published research available addressing it.

## **3. RESEARCH METHODS**

### **3.1 Research Design and Approach**

A triangulation mixed-method design is used in this study to get a comprehensive understanding of the role of short stories in enhancing EFL students' language performance and cultural awareness. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed.

For the investigation of the role of short stories, questionnaires will be distributed among Omani public-school students. Moreover, some interviews will be conducted with literature instructors to investigate the importance of using short stories in teaching Omani students' language competence and cultural awareness.

### **3.2 Participants**

A purposive sample of 28 Grade 11 students, 14 males and 14 females, aged between 15 and 17, participated in this study. All participants were from the Seeb area schools in the Muscat Governorate. Purposive sampling was chosen because the study targeted classrooms where teachers had integrated short stories into their teaching. This was necessary since literature, including short stories, is not formally integrated into the national EFL curriculum in Omani public schools. Although the sample size ( $n = 28$ ) is relatively small and does not represent the entire Seeb area, the limited availability of such classrooms meant that a small-scale, purposive selection was the most practical approach. The sample was therefore deemed appropriate for an exploratory classroom-based investigation designed to provide initial insights.

### **3.3 Instruments**

Two instruments were utilized to collect data:

1. **Student Questionnaire:** The questionnaire was adapted from the Adolescent Motivation for Reading Profile (AMRP), developed by Pitcher et al. (2007). The original 4-point scale was modified to a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree) to allow participants a neutral response option. The questionnaire consisted of three sections:
  - Section 1: Demographic data (gender, age, and grade).
  - Section 2: Reading behavior (e.g., number of stories read per month, time spent reading, and dictionary use).
  - Section 3: 5 Likert-scale statements on the perceived impact of short stories on language skills and cultural awareness. Some items were adapted from AMRP, while additional items were developed to address cultural awareness specifically.

The questionnaire items were reviewed by a specialist from the English Language and Translation Department at Sultan Qaboos University to establish content and face. Also, Cronbach's alpha was calculated to check the internal consistency of the adapted scale.

2. **Semi-structured Interviews:** Conducted with students – participants- English teachers to obtain qualitative insights about classroom integration of short stories and their perceived educational impact

### **3.4 Data Collection and Analysis**

Descriptive statistics, frequencies, and percentages were used to analyze and identify trends in student responses using quantitative data from the questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed and collected through the students' teachers, as they were provided with iPads to administer the survey in the classroom, allowing students to complete the items online. Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative responses from the open-ended questions and teacher interviews to expand comprehensively on the quantitative results. All ethical procedures, including informed consent and confidentiality, were observed.

## 4.RESULTS

The sample included 28 participants: 50% male (n = 14) and 50% female (n = 14). The majority of the participants were 16 years old (n = 19), followed by 15-year-olds (n = 5) and 17-year-olds (n = 4).

### 4.1 Reading Habits

85.7% of those who were surveyed have read at least one English short story in a month. 39.3% of them read more than two short stories in a month. Surprisingly, a minority of the participants (14.3%) answered that they do not read any short stories

*Table 1 Monthly Frequency of Short Story Reading Among Participants*

Number of Short Stories Read Monthly	Percentage (%)
None	14.3%
One	21.4%
Two	25%
More than two	39.3%

In terms of reading duration, 46.4% reported completing a story of 1,000 to 2,000 words in less than 30 minutes, while 17.9% required more than an hour. The remaining fell between these durations.

### 4.2 Dictionary Usage While Reading

Dictionary use varied:

- 28.6% used a dictionary every 1–2 pages,
- 17.9% every 3–5 pages,
- 28.6% rarely used it,
- 25% never used a dictionary.

### 4.3 Perceptions of Language Development

Participants' agreement levels with Likert-scale items suggested strong support for the role of short stories in language learning:

- 100% agreed that short stories help in learning new vocabulary.
- Most students agreed or strongly agreed that short stories improved grammar, reading skills, and the ability to infer meanings from context.
- The majority also reported gaining cultural awareness through reading stories.

### 4.4 Example of Responses

- "Short stories help me to improve my reading skill" – Majority strongly agreed.
- "Reading helps me infer and memorize new words" – Broad agreement.
- "I get cultural information from stories" – High agreement.

## **5.FINDINGS & DISCUSSION**

This study shows that short stories This study shows how students' frequent reading of short stories contributes to their interest, motivation, and perceived improvement in language skills. However, it further points out many other benefits of incorporating short stories in language learning classes. Apart from basic language learning, short stories are found to improve both literary and language skills. The data collected from the respondents show that students have an interest in short stories and prefer reading them to increase their overall language accuracy and fluency. It was also found during the research that the majority of students are frequent readers of short stories, and nearly fifty percent are fast readers, indicating their language competency. Findings also highlighted the agreement among the students regarding the positive effect of short stories on their language.

The data collected through the questionnaire indicate no major difference in reading habits between male and female students. One point was highlighted during the study: the majority of the respondents believed that reading short stories and including them in the curriculum increases their reading skills. Another benefit of short stories was indicated, as all the respondents answered that reading short stories helps them improve vocabulary. One unanticipated finding was that only a small number of respondents do not read short stories regularly. Around 85.7% of respondents have a habit of reading short stories and including them to improve their English. Dictionary use among the respondents was found to be very limited, with more than fifty percent not using a dictionary while reading short stories. The analysis of open-ended question answers addresses the main question of this research, as most respondents pointed out various benefits of short stories. New aspects were found as students responded that short stories help them in developing cognitive ability for language, improve their language competency, and teach life skills. Furthermore, they feel that short stories teach them new words and give them cultural insight into foreign lands.

The findings of the questionnaire align with the literature reviewed, as respondents highlighted similar benefits found in the review. For example, in [17] and [16], it is stated that short stories improve reading and help in understanding the literal meaning of the texts. Similarly, the majority of respondents said that reading short stories has helped them to improve their reading, vocabulary, and overall understanding of the language. Furthermore, it is mentioned in [10], [17], [16], and [1] that short stories lead to cultural insight on the value system of the culture and impart awareness about political, social, and historical happenings. The results of the questionnaire also gave similar responses. Many students believed that short stories lead to knowledge about the people, behavior, and culture. In the literature review, [19] mentions that short stories are the best medium for teaching literature as they are easy to grasp, concise, and have a fantasy factor. Besides, the questionnaire shows that many students read short stories regularly due to their small size, accessibility, and ease of understanding. In the open-ended question, some students emphasized that short stories add a fun factor to their learning process. The research also shows that the majority of the students believe that short stories help them in learning new words, thus improving their vocabulary and grammar, which is exactly what was found in the literature review. This research shows that short stories are an effective medium to teach foreign language in classrooms.

## **6.CONCLUSION**

This paper has given an account of the usage of short stories as the best form of literature to include in teaching a foreign language. The research was designed to study the benefits of short stories and their impact on students' learning. A short comparison of all the forms of literature in relation to short stories was done to highlight the fact that short stories are an effective medium to teach a new language. The motivational, literary, higher-order thinking, and cultural benefits of short stories for the students were discussed. The criteria for choosing short stories for the language class and their role in improving language competence, literary benefit, and cultural benefits clearly showed how important it is to include them in teaching the language. The most obvious finding of this research is that the majority of students prefer reading short stories and generally dedicate time to reading them to enhance their

English learning. The second major finding is that most students whose responses were taken in this study believe that their vocabulary, grammar, and most importantly, cultural awareness increase through short stories. The study also shows that students' use of dictionaries is quite limited, indicating that they read short stories and strive to acquire new words and understand their meaning from context.

The present study confirms previous findings and contributes additional evidence that suggests that short stories are a preferred form of literature and play a major role in learning English and imparting cultural knowledge. As many students in this study expressed their interest in short stories, reported reading them frequently, and felt that such reading enhances both their language development and cultural awareness, it seems reasonable to encourage their wider use in the classroom. The Ministry of Education should make it mandatory to include short stories in the curriculum and train teachers in best teaching techniques so that students learn English easily and in a fun way. The students are also required to take more interest in learning the language by improving their reading habits and increasing their dictionary usage to increase their vocabulary. Finally, several important limitations need to be considered. Firstly, the sample size and the age of the respondents were quite small and not varied enough to get a better understanding. This research has raised many questions that need further investigation, as there is a need to assess the problems faced by teachers while teaching short stories in classrooms. Furthermore, extensive research is required, including a wider age group and number of students, to get a clear picture of the benefits of including short stories in EFL classes. A further study investigating all these factors would be very interesting and helpful for both teachers and students of EFL classes.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank everyone contributed to this research.

## REFERENCES

- [1] P. Pardede, "Using short stories to teach language skills," *Journal of English Teaching*, vol. 1, pp. 14–27, 2011. [Online]. Available: <http://www.academia.edu/6867758>
- [2] Z. Heidarian and R. Heydon, "The impact of short stories in EFL classrooms: Enhancing language skills, attitudes, and perceptions in two Iranian schools," in *Belonging in Culturally Diverse Societies – Official Structures and Personal Customs*, pp. 135–154, IntechOpen, 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.1007591>
- [3] A. R. Alhelal, "Enhancing critical thinking and cultural awareness in Iraqi EFL university students through short stories: A quasi-experimental study," *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 1300–1311, 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://ijsshr.in/v8i2/Doc/61.pdf>
- [4] S. Al-Bulushi, "Teaching short stories in the Omani context: The use of the reader response theory," *Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal (LICEJ)*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 335–342, 2011. [Online]. Available: <https://infonomics-society.org/wp-content/uploads/licej/published-papers/volume-2-2011/Teaching-Short-Stories-in-the-Omani-Context-The-Use-of-the-Reader-Response-Theory.pdf>
- [5] R. Al-Siyabi, "Integrating true short stories into English classes: The case of foundation students in Oman," *International Journal of English Language Teaching*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 45–55, 2017. [Online]. Available: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1132015.pdf>

- [6] O. Erkaya, "Benefits of using short stories in the EFL context," *Asian EFL Journal*, pp. 1–13, 2003. [Online]. Available: [http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/pta\\_nov\\_ore.pdf](http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/pta_nov_ore.pdf)
- [7] M. Khatib, S. Rezaei, and A. Derakhshan, "Literature in EFL/ESL classroom," *English Language Teaching*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 201–208, 2011. [Online]. Available: <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v4n1p201>
- [8] O. A. Abdel Haliem, "Using short stories to enhance ESL teaching and learning: A case study of Egyptian students," presented at the American English Institute, Univ. of Oregon, 2018. [Online]. Available: <https://hdl.handle.net/1794/23528>
- [9] C. Savvidou, "An integrated approach to the teaching of literature in the EFL classroom," *The Internet TESL Journal*, vol. 10, no. 12, 2004. [Online]. Available: <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Savvidou-Literature.html>
- [10] A. E. P. Stevens, "Short stories as a source of cultural insight when teaching language," M.S. thesis, 2014. [Online]. Available: <https://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/284177/Stevens.pdf?sequence=1>
- [11] M. Karlik, "Exploring the impact of culture on language learning: How understanding cultural context and values can deepen language acquisition," *International Journal of Language, Linguistics, Literature and Culture*, vol. 2, no. 5, pp. 5–11, 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://doi.org/10.59009/ijllc.2023.0035>
- [12] E. R. Eslit, "Thriving beyond the crisis: Teachers' reflections on literature and language education in the era of artificial intelligence (AI) and globalization," *International Journal of Education and Teaching*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 46–57, 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://doi.org/10.51483/IJEDT.3.1.2023.46-57>
- [13] G. M. M. Khalid, "The effect of reading short stories on enhancing EFL vocabulary acquisition of secondary stage students and their interest," Master's thesis, Mansoura Univ., Faculty of Education, 2023. *Journal of the Faculty of Education – Mansoura University*, no. 124, pp. 177–192. [Online]. Available: [https://maed.journals.ekb.eg/article\\_359307\\_8a94e315124057e7d7714d32cdddc8cf.pdf](https://maed.journals.ekb.eg/article_359307_8a94e315124057e7d7714d32cdddc8cf.pdf)
- [14] A. Mansoor, M. Jabbar, and A. Abid, "English language teaching through a short story: A technique for improving students' vocabulary retrieving," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 1–6, 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/366593738>
- [15] G. L. A. Rodríguez, "Students' language skills development through short stories," *Íkala, Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura*, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 103–118, 2017. [Online]. Available: <https://doi.org/10.17533/udea.ikala.v22n01a07>
- [16] H. Sepahvand, "The effect of oral reproduction of short stories on speaking skill in Iranian high school students," *International Journal of Science and Research*, vol. 3, no. 7, 2014. [Online]. Available: <https://www.ijsr.net/archive/v3i7/MDIwMTQxMzAxMQ==.pdf>

[17] M. Hişmanoğlu, “Teaching English through literature,” *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 53–66, 2005. [Online]. Available: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281379160 Teaching English through literature](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281379160_Teaching_English_through_literature)

[18] T. T. Simel, “Assessing the role of literary texts in students’ cultural awareness, historical understanding, and challenges faced by EFL students,” *English Education Journal*, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 208–228, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://doi.org/10.24815/eej.v15i4.40782>

[19] N. A. Abuzahra and M. A. Farrah, “Using short stories in the EFL classroom,” *IUG Journal of Humanities Research*, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 11–24, 2016. [Online]. Available: <https://doi.org/10.12816/0023933>