# UTILIZING SHORT STORIES
## TO IMPROVE VOCABULARY OF 8ᵗʰ GRADERS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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**Abstrak**

Penelitian ini dilakukan untuk menganalisis tentang penggunaan cerita pendek berbahasa inggris untuk meningkatkan kemampuan kosa kata siswa kelas 8 SMP Negeri di Surabaya dan bagaimana persepsi mereka terhadap cerita pendek berbahasa inggris. Peneliti menggunakan metode CAR (Classroom Action Research) yang melibatkan 28 siswa (13 laki-laki, 15 perempuan) dengan kemampuan yang beragam. Dalam mengumpulkan data, penelitian ini menerapkan ujian serta wawancara terkait dengan penggunaan cerita pendek berbahasa inggris. Berdasarkan hasil analisis, penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa cerita pendek berbahasa inggris membantu siswa untuk meningkatkan kemampuan kosa kata mereka (*Mean*: 68 > 72 > 80). Selain itu, mereka juga mempunyai persepsi positif terhadap penggunaan cerita pendek berbahasa inggris.

*Kata Kunci: cerita pendek bahasa inggris, kosa kata, persepsi*

**Abstract**

*This study was conducted to analyze the use of English short stories to improve the vocabulary mastery of 8ᵗʰ grade students at a public junior high school in Surabaya and their perceptions towards the use of English short stories. The researcher used the Classroom Action Research (CAR) method, involving 28 students (13 males, 15 females) with varying abilities. Data was collected through tests and interviews related to the use of English short stories. According to the analysis, this study revealed that English short stories helped students improve their vocabulary skills (Mean: 68 > 72 > 80). Moreover, the students also had a positive perception of the use of English short stories.*

*Keywords: English short stories, vocabulary, perception*

**Introduction**

According to (Bai, 2018) vocabulary is the most essential and liveliest part of the three elements. Furthermore, vocabulary is a very crucial component when learning a language as stated from McCharthy (2003) in (Siahaan, 2012). Vocabulary is the biggest component of all languages course. Students can read, listen and write if they have adequate vocabulary. This is as stated by Zhihong (2000) in (Suliyono, 2022) that if students do not have enough vocabulary, they cannot communicate, listen, write, and read successfully that make the students' ability will be restrained. Moreover, (Sadiku, 2015) said that vocabulary will influence students' accomplishment in learning all four skills in English, listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

However, according to the observation in the preliminary study, the author found that the students had very limited vocabulary. This phenomenon occurred because teachers at schools only taught simple words by giving brief explanations of some texts in school books where the words in school books are very limited. It is also stated in the journal from (Suliyono, 2022) that books are not sufficient to build vocabulary comprehension because there is no immense number of new vocabulary, it only includes basic vocabulary, and theory.

This limited vocabulary makes the students hard to express, read and write anything in English (Siddiqua et al., 2010). This intuitively makes them less motivated, unfocused, and unable to express themselves well. Therefore, their accomplishment will be hampered. Not only will their accomplishment be hampered, the entire learning process will also be disrupted because of their limited vocabulary. Therefore, teaching vocabulary in schools is very important for students so that they can do assignments, read, and grasp meaning well.

The use of English stories was chosen because the researcher wanted to make learning fun yet meaningful. This is supported by the claim from (Slatterly & Willis, 2001) in (Bhatti et al., 2022) that short stories are effective and intriguing for igniting students' interest in learning. Besides, according to an empirical studies conducted by (Violetta-Irene, 2015), it is showed that using short stories in the EFL classroom is enjoyable for the students. Moreover, according to (Nazara, 2019) utilizing short stories improve students' desire to increase their vocabulary. Furthermore, according to (Beno, 2019), he states that learning vocabulary using short stories can improve students' vocabulary.

From those reasons, the researcher decided to do this research in order to know how does the use of short stories can improve the students' vocabulary and how is the students' perception about using short stories in the classroom activity.

**Methodology**

This study used a mixed-method using action research from Kemmis and Mc. Taggart (1985). According to them, there are four stages in one cycle. They are planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This research is a two-cycled which was conducted in two weeks in SMPN 30 Surabaya. The participants of the research were one of the classes of 8th graders who had low score in pre-test which had not met the criteria of the success, according to the preliminary research. The criteria of success in this study were the minimum passing standard (KKM) at SMPN 30 Surabaya, i.e. the mean score of $\geq 75$.

The data was collected using test and non-test instruments. The test was used to collect quantitative data from the students' vocabulary accomplishment. While non-test techniques, interview and observation, were used to collect qualitative data. Tests were assessed three times; pre-test, post-test I, and post-test II. The non-test techniques were carried out using observation checklist, and interview. Paired Sample t-test by using SPSS version 25 was used to analyze the quantitative data obtained from the tests. To analyze the qualitative data, the descriptive analysis technique was used.

**Findings and Discussion**

The researcher explains the study's findings and conclusions in this section based on the data analysis done by quantitative and qualitative approaches. The answer to all the problem's statements

can be found in the result.

**Findings**
1. **Students' vocabulary improvement**

This action research was not only motivated by the fact that the students had limited vocabulary, but also the fact that teachers only taught new vocabulary from school books that only had basic vocabulary that made the students had low motivation. Their poor vocabulary was reflected by the mean scores in the table below in the pre-test that was assessed in the preliminary study.

Table 1. Student' Pre-test

PRETEST

| Mean | N | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| 68.0000 | 28 | 9.91818 |

Table 1 shows that the mean score of students have not met the criteria of success at the school. Therefore, the researcher continued the study to the first cycle.

Report of Cycle 1
1. Plan

The plan in the first cycle was used to overcome the problems that discovered during the preliminary study. The problems found were (1) students had very limited vocabulary; (2) teacher only taught basic vocabulary in the school book; and (3) students got bored easily. From these problems, the researcher planned to utilize short stories in order to had interesting and fun learning process.

2. Action

The actions of cycle I were conducted in two meetings. There were five short stories in these sessions which were on the level 1 – 2. These stories were *Emily's Picture, Hansel and Gretel, Goldilocks and the Three Bears, Alice in Wonderland, and The Princess and the Pea.* The first meeting was started by presenting short stories and the benefits of using it in the learning process. After that, the students were asked to read the story independently. While they read, they were asked to write unfamiliar words they found in the short stories. After they read short stories, the researcher and the students discussed the stories, connected them to the real-life situation. Then, in the end of the learning, the students were assigned to do online exercise. The exercise was about unfamiliar words. The researcher chose some unfamiliar words that are in the short stories and gave them online exercise. Even though some words have been discussed, the students still answered it wrong in the exercise.

The same procedure was done in the next meeting but without the exercise because the students were assigned to do the post-test I. As in the pre-test, the questions in the post-test I was about the words match and translation. Post-test I also included the questions from pre-test where the students mostly answered the answers incorrectly. The result of the post-test I can be seen in the table below.

Table 2. Students' post-test 1

**Report**

POSTTEST1

| Mean | N | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| 72.3571 | 28 | 9.76848 |

It can be seen in the table 2 that the mean score of the students' post-test I were higher than their scores in pre-test. However, the students' score in the pre-test was still 72 which had not met the criteria of success. Therefore, the researcher had to continue the study to Cycle II.

3. Observing

During the action in the first cycle, the teacher, who acted as research collaborator, was asked to observe the teaching and learning process, especially the students' activity, using observation checklist. Table shows the result of observations in every meeting in Cycle I. As shown in the table, every meeting indicated that the students were 50% showed positive attitudes towards the utilization of short stories that was used to improve their vocabulary. In the first cycle, it showed that students were much more excited and motivated during the lesson, although there were some of the students who still liked to talk one to another.

Table 3. Students' activity cycle I

| No | Students' Activity | Meeting | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | I | II |
| 1 | Students greet the teacher | ✓ | ✓ |
| 2 | Students are excited to follow the lesson | ✓ | ✓ |
| 3 | Students read short stories properly | x | x |
| 4 | Students ask questions | ✓ | ✓ |
| 5 | Students do worksheet properly and enthusiastically | x | x |
| 6 | Students follow the lesson without talking to their friends | x | x |
| | Total | 3 | 3 |
| | Percentage | 50% | 50% |

4. Reflecting

After Cycle I's action and observation were completed, the researcher did reflection on all of the completed activities. Short stories were proven to make the students more eager to follow the lecture. This was confirmed by the result of the test and observation. The test showed that the students' mean scores in post-test 1 were greater compared to the pre-test (from 68 to 72). The increase of the mean scores indicated that the utilization of short stories was quiet effective to improve students' vocabulary. However, even though their mean score was increasing, they have not met the criteria of success yet. Therefore, the research did some reflections in the action.

The reflection resulted in changing some of the learning process, such as (1) the researcher review the unfamiliar words in the first Cycle in the second Cycle; (2) the students were no longer read the short stories independently, but the researcher asked them to read it together, then; (3) the researcher can stress the difficult words; and (4) the researcher asked the students to make a sentence using the difficult words that have been discussed.

Report of Cycle II

1. Plan

The researcher made the decision to involve the students in the learning process in order to make it even more vibrant and exciting in light of the reflection that was done based on Cycle I. For instance, asking them to make simple sentence with one of the unfamiliar words.

2. Action

As the actions in Cycle I, the actions of Cycle II were also conducted in two meetings with five short stories but in a higher level, level 3 – 4. These stories were *Jack and the Beanstalk, The Pied Piper and Hamelin, Thumbelina, Peter and the Wolf, and The Wizard of Oz.* The first meeting was started by reviewing the unfamiliar words in the previous meeting that they still found difficult in the test. After reviewing, the students were invited to read the stories

together in the projector so that all of the students can read properly without interruption from a friend or phone's notification. By reading together, the researcher stressed and asked some unfamiliar words in the short stories then asked the students to make a sentence with the unfamiliar word. After the reading session ended, the researcher discussed about the book. Then finally, the researcher gave the students online exercise about the unfamiliar words.

In the end of the meeting in Cycle II, the students were given post-test II. The questions forms were the same as in the pre-test and post-test I. Post-test 1I also included the questions from pre-test and post-test I where the students mostly answered incorrectly. The result of the post-test II can be seen in the table below.

Table 4. Students' post-test 2

**Report**

POSTTEST2

| Mean | N | Std. Deviation |
|------|-----|----------------|
| 80.8571 | 28 | 9.63679 |

It can be seen in the table that after implementing Cycle II, it shows that there was significant improvement from the Cycle I. The table shows the students mean score in post-test II that was conducted in cycle II was 80 and it indicated that the students passed the successful minimum criteria (KKM) of the school. In short, the results indicate that the mean scores of the post-test II (cycle II) was greater than those obtained from pre-test (preliminary study) and post-test I (cycle I). This demonstrates that after using the strategy, the students made very good progress in mastering English vocabulary.

3. Observing

As in Cycle I, the research collaborator assisted the researcher in using an observation checklist to observe the students' activity.. As shown in the table, every meeting indicated that the students were 83.3% showed positive attitudes towards the utilization of short stories to improve vocabulary. The table shows improvement in the students' participation to read the short stories. With the exception of not chatting to friends, they participated actively in practically the whole learning process. In conclusion, this table shows a significant improvement from the students about their perception of using short stories in the classroom.

Table 5. Students' activity cycle II

| No | Students' Activity | Meeting | |
|----|--------------------|:-------:|:-------:|
| | | I | II |
| 1 | Students greet the teacher | ✓ | ✓ |
| 2 | Students are excited to follow the lesson | ✓ | ✓ |
| 3 | Students read short stories properly | ✓ | ✓ |
| 4 | Students ask questions | ✓ | ✓ |
| 5 | Students do worksheet properly and enthusiastically | ✓ | ✓ |
| 6 | Students follow the lesson without talking to their friends | x | x |
| | Total | 5 | 5 |
| | Percentage | 83.3% | 83.3% |

4. Reflection

Based on the data obtained from tests and observations in every meeting in every Cycle, the researcher found that the class had obtained the target of the mean scores in the criteria of success, i.e. ≥75. Therefore, the researcher did not continue to the next Cycle.

2. **Students' attitudes towards the contribution of reading short stories in improving their vocabulary.**

The students' attitudes towards the use of short stories in the classroom were investigated in order to know in depth their opinion on this technique. They were asked eight questions related to the use of short stories in terms of students' interest of short stories, students' learning process, and their thought of the most effective method in learning vocabulary. The result can be seen in the description below.

A. **Interest**

Several questions were asked about the students' interest in short stories, in terms of short story itself and the content of short story

1. **Do you like short stories?**

Not all of the students said that they like short stories. Most of them considered short stories as their favourite but others do not. However, even if they aren't in to short stories, one of them said that she can still learn with it. In short, short stories are one of the favourite methods of the students in learning vocabulary.

*S2: "I like it, because I also like to read books, like novels."*

*S8: "I like it, miss, but not really like it though because the story uses a lot of English so it's confusing for me if there are words that I can't understand, but it can't be made to learn so I think it's acceptable."*

*S3: "Yes, I like it, because short stories are easier to read, the stories are short but have a lot of meaning."*

2. **Do you prefer short stories with pictures or not?**

All of them agreed on the same thing, they prefer short stories with pictures. Pictures are very crucial in the learning process because it can help the students to imagine the story by looking at it so that it makes them easier to understand the story.

*S1: "With pictures, because they are more interesting, if it does not have picture I think it is too much and it makes me dizzy."*

*S4: "With pictures because it is less boring."*

*S5: "With pictures because it is more interesting."*

*S6: "With pictures so that I can imagine the contents of the story."*

B. **Learning Process**

In this section, the researcher gave some questions to know the students' thought of short stories in effecting the learning process.

3. **Do you love learning vocabulary using short stories?**

Most of the students answered that they like it because of several reasons. Such as, they can gain vocabulary through unfamiliar words because they like learning new vocabulary, the stories are interesting, it can be learned together with friends, it is less boring and less saturated that make the learning fun. In conclusion, all of them love learning vocabulary with short stories.

*S5: "Yes, I quite love it because of the story is interesting, but there are times that I'm lazy to read."*

*S6: "I love it, because at first I'm not really good in English, then I can do it better now and there are interesting stories in it too."*

*S7: "I really love it! The vocabulary isn't too complicated, it's easy to understand, there are also pictures that make it fun."*

4. **Do you feel motivated when learning vocabulary through short stories?**

When they were asked about this question, all of them said that they felt motivated during the lesson because they think that learning vocabulary through short stories is

less boring and interesting, they can gain a lot of new vocabulary and get new insights from the stories, and also it is a new method so they gain more motivation.

*S1: "Yes, because I'm interested in learning new vocabulary."*

*S3: "Totally yes, because I'm happen to like English."*

*S8: "A little bit, because I didn't really enjoy learning English but when this method is being implemented, my curious level in vocabulary was increasing."*

5. **Do you understand the story when facing unfamiliar words?**

Students answered to this question are all the same. All of them answered that they tried to guess the unfamiliar words but they couldn't get them all correct. Most of them guessed the unfamiliar words through the pictures and the rest guessed the unfamiliar words through words they already knew. According to their responses, pictures are crucial to the teaching and learning process since they make learning easier for students.

*S2: "There are words I can but there are words I'm confused too, but I tried to guess it from the pictures and from words I know."*

*S3: "If the stories have pictures, it is easier for me to understand because I can know the meaning from the picture because if it does not have pictures I have to read it again from the beginning."*

*S4: "Not really because there are words that are correct and there are words that are incorrect. I try to understand the unfamiliar words through the words I know.*

6. **Do you have any difficulties while learning English through short stories?**

The only difficulty that the students faced was unfamiliar words. However, they could manage the difficulties by themselves by opening Google translate or simply ask the teacher. In short, learning using short stories is a good method to be used in learning because there is no difficulty related to the content of it.

*S2: "Unfamiliar words. If there's a teacher, I try to ask him about the meaning of them, but if there's no teacher, I try to look it on Google Translate."*

*S5: "I don't really understand the story because of the unfamiliar words so sometimes I take a break first and then open Google Translate to find the unfamiliar words."*

*S6: "A little bit in unfamiliar words but I can still deal it by opening Google Translate."*

7. **Does short story help you to learn vocabulary?**

All of the students agreed that short stories help them learn vocabulary because of the same reason that is they can gain vocabulary. In short, short stories are helpful in improving their vocabulary mastery.

*S3: "Yes, it helps a lot because I can make sure that I can a lot of vocabulary."*

*S4: "Of course it helps me because the unfamiliar words became familiar now and I'm sure I gain a lot of vocabulary."*

*S7: "Very much because I gain a lot of vocabulary for sure."*

*S8: "It helps me because I know the meaning of a lot of unfamiliar words now."*

C. **The most effective method**

8. **Do you think that learning vocabulary using short stories is the most effective method?**

Finally, they were questioned on whether or not short stories are the most effective. Some of them agreed that short stories are the most effective method in learning vocabulary because short stories contain a lot of vocabulary so they can find unfamiliar vocabulary faster, easy to understand, have so many different stories, and it has pictures. However, most of them didn't agree on that. They think that there are other methods to learn vocabulary, such as YouTube, games, films, and songs. They think that those media are more interesting and make them happier. It can be repeated too because it has rhyme in songs. While one of them said it depends on the individual's

interest. In short, even though they think that short stories are not the most effective method, it can be denied that short stories help them gain a lot of vocabulary.

*S1: "I think no. In my opinion, it depends on the individual's interest. If he likes game so I think he needs to focus on learning from game, if he likes books then learn from book and others. For me personally, I like films and songs."*

*S2: "I think yes it is the most effective because there are so many vocabulary in it."*

*S3: "For me personally, I think it's not. I learn vocabulary through films and songs. I think those are "earworm" because it's easier and I can repeat it as many as I like. Moreover if I like the songs and the lyrics are good so I can search it on Google Translate and repeat it I can understand unfamiliar words."*

*S7: "I think yes, because there is a teacher that I can immediately ask if I don't know the unfamiliar words. Even if there's no teacher I think it is easier to understand because there are a lot of different stories with a lot of different vocabulary as well."*

**Discussion**

In this research, the students' vocabulary mastery through learning with short stories is examined. The test reveals that their vocabulary mastery is improved significantly according to the results. This result proves the technique from (Beno, 2019) that using short stories can improve students' vocabulary. Moreover, when using short stories to learn vocabulary, students feel positively about the process, according to their perspective in an interview. Students take pleasure in learning because it is interesting, motivating and less boring. It also proves fruitful because they can learn new vocabulary in a fun way. This result supports the finding in the former research from (Nazara, 2019) that short stories enhance students' desire for widening their vocabulary.

However, even though their vocabulary is increasing through utilizing short stories, they have different perception about learning with the technique. Some of the students do not think that using short stories is the best method because of their own interests. YouTube, games, songs, and films become their way in improving their vocabulary. Nonetheless, the fact that short stories can improve their vocabulary mastery cannot be denied.

**Conclusion**

It is clear from the data presentation and interpretation that short stories have a positive influence on students' vocabulary development. The data shows that the students' scores are rising after each cycle. As a result, using short stories in the classroom is very beneficial.

Using short stories not only good at increasing students' vocabulary skills, which can have a good impact on their grades, but students also find that using short stories in class is fun. Most of them found short stories are interesting, fun, simple, easy to read, and meaningful. As a result of the abundance of contexts and hints that short stories offer, students are able to understand better the meaning of new words, which aids in their vocabulary development. Since they found that short stories are fun, they became more motivated in following the learning process by using short stories. This is supported by (Nazara, 2019) finding that the students have positive perception about the use of short stories in vocabulary development.

However, most of them didn't think that short stories were the most effective way to improve vocabulary. There are a lot of ways that they think are more interesting than short stories, even so, it cannot be denied that short stories can help them improve vocabulary

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