



## AN INVESTIGATION OF THE IMPACTS OF TEACHING WRITING SKILL THROUGH EXTENSIVE SHORT STORY READING

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### ABSTRACT

*The present study is an attempt to test the effect of wide short story reading on the precision and difficulty of EFL students' composition ability. The research was accomplished at Fan Bayan Language Institute in Ajabshir, Iran on advanced EFL students. The entire sample group of 30 learners exhibited a high amount of improvement in a composition ability pre-test, which had an experimental part and a control part. The experimental group of the study comprised three entire weeks of short story practicing before the final test. A composition skill post-test was administered for both the experimental and control groups of the study. The subjects' compositions were graded according to precision and difficulty of the final test and a T-Test was applied to investigate the students' improvement according to their grades. The outcomes of the research proved that long-time reading of such stories could empower students in the experimental group to apply and use many answer patterns in post-testing.*

**Keywords:** literature, short stories, extensive reading, writing, accuracy, complexity.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

It has commonly been assumed that using literature in foreign language instruction originated about two hundred years ago when the grammar translation method was the dominant method of foreign language teaching. However, when other methods became successful in EFL teaching, and language study began to be perceived as a pure science, the aspect of pleasure and interest was forgotten, and literature was completely ignored and put aside from foreign language teaching. However, since the 1980s, literary materials have come back into the second language instruction curriculum. Recently more and more teachers are interested in using literature in language teaching. They have found that literature can be used to attract students and motivate them in acquiring a second language. Therefore, it may generally be used as a complementary component in language teaching to improve student' skills. Widdowson (1985), for example, points out that "foreign language learning is a very complex process. To reduce this complexity, applied linguists and methodologists seek different

methods” (p. 3). Further, he believes that “using literary texts would bring enjoyment to language classes enabling students to be exposed to real language and the way of life of a population” (Widdowson, 1985, p. 34). Therefore, one of the most significant reasons for this interest of teachers is the authenticity of literary texts.

Most teachers now believe that literary texts have the potential to be more useful than other materials for they suggest real occasions for assessing novel language. Proving this belief, Littlewood (2000) reveals the fact that the most important problem of EFL teaching is the making of an authentic situation in the classroom, and since most of the language classrooms are outside the native speakers’ community, they are isolated from the happenings and contexts that create real language. Based on his ideas “literature has the capability to overcome this problem, because in literary texts language creates its own context and goes above the artificial situation of the classroom and presents real world experiences, relationships between people and the place where the target language is spoken to the students” (Littlewood, 2000, p. 3). Although literature has some advantages for language teaching, there are some opposing ideas against its use. Metaphorical facets of poetry, the length of long stories, and also the complication of practicing drama in populated rooms are instances of such problem areas. Regarding this, it can be inferred that, from all the literary genres, the types of story specified by Poe (cited in Abrams, 1970), material which may be read from thirty minutes to 120 minutes and restricted to an individual influence to which each fact is less significant, appear to be the most important kinds of story for second language pedagogical application. Lazar (1993) remarks that “literature exposes students to complex themes and fresh, unexpected uses of language. A good short story may be particularly fascinating in that it involves students in the suspense of unraveling the plot” (p. 37).

The application of literary materials in second language instruction has been considered as one of the old methods of instructing for years. Nevertheless, the research regarding the application of literary materials is very restricted regarding the fame of its application. Most of the EFL classrooms are isolated from the context and situations of target languages since they are outside the community of native speakers, which produce natural language. On the other hand, informational material can be boring for the learners. Literary materials are able to overcome this issue, for literary materials, particularly stories, produce real situations that are similar to the students’ living condition assets, thus instigating students to keep on reading.

Many researchers have worked on the effect of literary text on EFL learning. Mckay (1982) states that, in fact, literary materials have an influence in second language pedagogical planning as it is believed that such materials are able to provide a cause to instigate many students to read the materials in English. She argues that literature is a perfect medium for introducing cultural assumptions and for all students. However, the success in using literature significantly depends on the text selection. This is especial true in that the selected texts should not be extremely complicated in their linguistic or abstract characteristics. It has been reported that “The use of literary texts in English language teaching is a fast-growing area within English language education, EFL/ESL and stylistics, and is likely to continue to grow, along with courses where language and literature teaching are combined into a single subject” (Teranishi, Saito & Wales, 2015, p. 1). In the case of proper choice, literary materials can be regarded as not only proper for upper stages of adult instruction but also proper for non-adult students and learners with less ability. Spack (1985) believes in “the importance of story

selection and states that she chooses stories that would interest students that she most likes to read and teach, and that have been made into film to provide visual interpretation” (p. 5).

The great amount of research that measured the relations between novels, short stories, drama, etc. and language instruction have indicated four advantages of literary materials. They can be enumerated as (1) “Literature helps developing linguistic knowledge both on usage and use level” (Widdowson, 1984, p. 1); (2) “Literature may enhance students’ motivation” (McKay, 1982, p. 1); (3) “Literature has the potential to increase learners’ understanding of the target culture” (McKay, 1982, p. 1); and (4) “Literature may help develop skills of cognitive and critical thinking” (Lazar, 1993, p. 1). Many of these advantages are “based on the experience of teachers and researchers who had substantial background in the teaching of literature; however, none of them is supported by research that is coming from real classroom settings” (Yuksel, 2009, p. 17).

The current paper makes an effort to familiarize second language teachers with the influence of applying stories in second language teaching and analyses the impacts of wide application of story reading on the improvement of the second language composition ability regarding precision and eloquence. The research questions addressed are: 1) Is the wide application of short story reading influential on the complexity of EFL students’ composition ability?; 2) Is the application of short story reading influential on the precision and eloquence of EFL students’ composition ability? It is hypothesized that: 1) there exists a positive relationship between the wide application of short story reading and the complexity of EFL students’ composition; and 2) there exists a positive relationship between the wide application of short story reading and the precision of EFL students’ composition ability.

## **2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Benefits of the Application Literary texts**

Many scholars hold the view that literature can be regarded as fundamentally an investigation of language in use and it is not possible for it to be ignored in language education. According to Sidhu and Fook (2010), “a literature-enriched curriculum not only helps learners improve their reading and writing skills but more importantly helps them internalize grammar and vocabulary” (p. 14). Students mostly read a piece of fiction for the sake of its fun. Fine material and the willingness to keep on reading, unlike linguistic complications, encourages them to explore. Such instigation aids students in unconsciously acquiring the language. Savvidou (2004) states that the “study of literature unconsciously enhances students’ overall linguistic competency which includes their knowledge of syntax, morphology, semantics and phonetics” (p. 67). This is supported by Mahmud (1989), who found that “literature helped his students acquire native-like competence in English” (p. 25).

#### **2.1.1 Literature and Motivation**

Here is some evidence to suggest that literary materials are much more natural for encouraging students to learn another language. Lazar (1993) offers that literary materials are useful in second language learning courses for persuading learners for learning.

Literature in a foreign language classroom can make the learning experience much more enjoyable and stimulating for learners than classroom instruction that requires mere acquisition of the linguistic components of the text. For many students, literature can provide a key to motivate them to read in English (McKay, 1982). Literary texts are a rich source of

classroom activities that can be very motivating for learners. They cover every human dilemma, conflict, and desire. Their inclusion in the classroom curriculum leads learners become more personally involved in the process of language learning (Lazar, 1993).

### **2.1.2 Literature and Language Skill**

Many researchers believe that literature has the ability to improve the performance of reading, composing, talking, and listening. Some second language instructors and scholars encourage the application of literature to improve learners' abilities in the target language (Heath, 1993; Paran, 2008). According to Savvidou (2004), "using literature in the EFL classroom can reinforce learners' knowledge of lexical and grammatical structure and offers foreign language learners the opportunity to develop their linguistic and communicative skills" (p. 3). Povey (1967), points out that the purpose of applying literature in foreign language courses is that "literature will increase all language skills because literature will extend linguistic knowledge by giving evidence of extensive and subtle vocabulary usage, and complex and exact syntax" (p. 22).

### **2.1.3 Literature as Authentic Material**

Literature is mainly regarded as demonstrating the application of real substance in language teaching. Ibsen (1990) pointed out that "authentic materials such as timetables, newspapers, letters and menus which are used in the communicative classroom represent English which is needed to survive without meaningful learning and knowledge of the target language" (p. 7). On the other hand, literary texts can be seen as a valuable complement to authentic materials, which provide genuine language. Such understandable input may only be achieved from literary materials. Literary materials can be viewed as instances of natural language in use. Accordingly, "they are instances of real communication in real social contexts" (McCarthy & Carter, 1994, p. 135).

## **2.2 Integrating Literature into the Language Curriculum in EFL/ESL**

Regardless of some polemical aspects concerning whether literature is to be applied to improve the effectiveness of language comprehension plans, the point is that there is abundant logical support for why literature can be effectively used in language courses. According to Savvidou (2004), the use of literary texts in the classroom can be a potentially powerful pedagogical tool. Van (2009) believes that "studying literature in the EFL classroom is advantageous because it provides meaningful context and involves a profound range of vocabulary, dialogues and prose" (p. 2)

It is understood that the characteristics of literary material in second language learning courses have been harshly criticized. It has commonly been assumed that its cultural signification, grammatical complication, and the uncommon application of language can be precisely what are applied to boost language instruction and the experience of language comprehension. Applebee (1986) believes that specific structures, such as passives, subordinate sentences and grammatical arrangement of diction in materials of literature are usually much more countered by learners. Moreover, he points out that it is commonly assumed the improvement of diction resulted from the fact that literary materials are assignable to a higher range of diction applied in the composition of English language, as they are in the literary materials.

The application of literary texts in a foreign language course brings about different benefits. Lazar (1993) proposes that "literature stimulates language acquisition" (p. 17). The

use of literature can enlarge learners' vocabulary and as McConochie (1985) asserts "motivate them to take risks in experimenting with the target language" (p. 4). There is some evidence to suggest that literature cannot only be used to enrich their vision, promoting critical thinking (Oster, 1989), and "stimulating their creativity" but also to "promote their greater cultural tolerance" (Mckay, 1982, p. 12). Spack (1985) asserts that "literature may be the appropriate vehicle to achieve students' understanding in the reading and writing process" (p. 4).

### **2.3 The Short Story: Characteristics and Definition**

Short story is part of the narrative prose genre which is related to the genre of the novel; however, its shortness is one of its characteristics compared to the novel. It is believed that "Transformations in different spheres throughout the nineteenth century (mass-production of printed matter, technological innovation, removal of taxation and extension of copyright, the end of circulating libraries, growth of readership to reach mass proportions, etc.) did away with the nearmonopoly of the serialised novel in periodical fiction, turning magazines into profitable outlets for short story writers" (Sacido, 2012, p. 3).

#### **2.3.1 Selecting short stories**

According to Mckay (1982), "the key to success in using literature in the ESL class seems to rest in the literary works that are selected" (p. 15). A text which is extremely difficult on either a linguistic or cultural level will have few benefits. Three suggestions have been presented "to avoid the problem of linguistic and cultural complexity" (Mckay, 1982, p. 15). They are "1. Using simplified texts. 2. Using easy texts 3. Using young adult's texts. One common method of solving the potential problem of linguistic difficulty is the simplification of the text" (McKay, 1982, p. 531).

There are, however, some disadvantages to simplification. As Honeyfield (1977) argues, the simplification tends to produce a homogenized product, and it involves expansion in which the information becomes reduced, or less densely packed. Moreover, cohesion and readability may be reduced by simplification of syntax (Honeyfield, 1977). Povey (1967) believes that "we have exaggerated the significance of elements of linguistic difficulty in ESL reading" (p. 34). Scholars are realizing that linguistic complication cannot be a minus point to understanding that language instructors had essentially considered it to be. For example, students do not necessarily understand better materials with a lower readability score. In her study, she compared the comprehensibility of reading materials in which the vocabulary and content were held constant while sentence complexity varied from simple sentences to complex sentences with the usual amount of clues and redundancy. Students scored highest in comprehension after reading materials written in complex sentences containing normal meaning clues.

The stories should be short enough to read in a short time, between five and ten pages according the proficiency level of the student. This skill level also determines the style and complexity of the story given to the students. The more basic the learner, the more basic the story should be, without considering the student's age. The language should be challenging but not overwhelming. In choosing a literary text for use with students, Lazar (1993) believes that instructors should think about three main areas. These are the type of course you are teaching, the type of students who are doing the course and certain factors connected with the text itself. He continues that the criteria for selecting texts include the age of students, their emotional and intellectual maturity, and their interests and hobbies.

As the lengths of short stories are different, teachers should choose a story short enough to handle within course hours. The shortness of the text is important for the students because they will see that they can read, understand, and finish something in English, and this will give the students a feeling of achievement and self-confidence. The vocabulary and sentence structure of the short story to be studied must be suitable to the level of the students. The short stories with old-fashioned, slang, and foreign words and allusions, having sentences imitating the speech of a particular locality or impolite people or foreigners should be avoided if the text is intended for students below intermediate level.

### **2.3.2 Advantages of Short Stories**

Short stories represent appropriate grammar and sentence structure and give students suggestions for their own writing. Literary texts, especially short stories, are as important as essays, articles, and other material for ESL learning. In reading a story, subject matter is more engaging and it brings an element of fun into the class, as opposed to expository essays.

Short stories are a very important and a necessary mean of knowledge in classes where students need to improve their skills in the language they are learning. Erkaya (2005) points out that “short stories allow the students to learn the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) more effectively because of the motivational benefits embedded in stories and also they help instructors to teach these skills to all levels of language proficiency” (p. 12). Moreover, Oster (1989) states that “literature helps students to write more creatively and EFL teachers can help students in developing their writing skill by creating different kinds of writing activities” (p. 37).

Scholars who support the application of short stories to instruct second language courses list many advantages of such stories. They involve motivational, literary, social, and greater reasoning advantages. However, “before instructors look at these benefits in a more detailed way, they need to be reminded of one benefit that all instructors should take advantage of, reinforcement of skills” (Erkaya, 2005, p.15). Oster (1989) affirms that “literature helps students to develop their writing skills” (p. 23). However, a universal formula of how to deal with literature does not exist. Eventually “the teacher has to find the method which he favours as well and which he considers having the greatest learning effect” (Oster, 1989, p. 23).

### **2.3.3 The Reasons for Using Short Stories**

There are some objections against the use of different forms of literature. According to Pardede (2007), “although using literature in EFL classrooms is beneficial, there have been some controversies and objections against its use in public schools because of overcrowded classes and limited time” (p. 13). Criticism has been made that the hypothetical and fictional language of poetry needs to be investigated with more effort which subsequently takes more time. Another objection states that novels cannot be finished in classes due to their length. Ultimately, dramatic substance can be applied in courses, but acting out a play within limited course hours and in crowded classes will be difficult, too. Regarding these controversies and criticism, it is clear that in literary genres, short stories appear to be the best of forms of literary works to use.

### **2.3.4 The Aspect of Interest**

Spack (1985) points out that the aspect of interest should be regarded and states that the teacher should choose stories that would interest students that they most like to read. Pardede (2010) suggest that if the subject of the text is relevant to the learner’s real life experience

and interest, they would love to read and enjoy the text. Reading for pleasure “can provide an avenue for efficient second language acquisition and reading proficiency” (Mckay, 1982, p. 112).

## **2.4 Reading**

Reading can be construed as a fundamental and complementary ability in language instruction. Reading requires that the reader concentrate attention on the reading substance and unify formerly achieved comprehension and abilities to understand what a writer has composed. Chastain (1988) maintains that “sometimes erroneously called a passive skill because the reader does not produce messages in the same sense as a speaker or writer. Reading is a receptive skill in that the reader is receiving a message from a writer” (p. 4). In addition, signified as an unlocking ability, the terminology implicitly signifies the theory of language as a cipher, one that should be deciphered to get at the signification of the message. Widdowson (1979) regarded reading “not as a reaction to a text but as interaction between writer and reader mediated through the text” (p. 74). This interaction occurs on two levels: linguistic and conceptual. In other words, “reading necessitates the ability to interact with a text by decoding the language and comprehending the concepts presented” (Widdowson, 1979, p. 74).

### **2.4.1 Literature and the Process of Reading**

The observation that reading is communication implies that a reader is going to communicate with a specific text. “It is here that the motivational factors involved in reading become critical” (McKay, 1982). As Gaies (1979) points out,

since the reading process [...] is the interaction of a reader and a text, we stand in equal need of more research on the affective, attitudinal and experiential factors which will motivate them to read. As such, literary texts can aid in the development of reading proficiency and in this way contribute to a student’s academic and occupational objectives (p. 48).

There are intensive and extensive literature reading programs; the extensive program which draws on novels and short stories has two versions: 1. Interventionist, in which the teacher assigns the students with a predetermined list of books which they will read and be tested on; 2. Non-interventionist, in which the students themselves choose the books and then write a standard reading questionnaire on them. According to Lazar (1993), “the reading of literature is an important way of supplementing the inevitably restricted input of the classroom” (p. 45).

There is acceptance of the prevailing creed that pleasure reading gives the type of language input which permits learners to learn a great range of language without direct investigation in structure, diction, or language. Green and Oxford (1995) found that “reading for pleasure and reading without looking up all the unknown words were both highly correlated with overall language proficiency” (p. 4).

### **2.4.2. Intensive/Extensive Reading**

Considering the past history, methods of instructing reading are mainly divided into methods of instructing intensive reading (doing activities with small materials in the school to make different ideas regarding the essence of these materials and the reading stage) and methods for instructing extensive reading (giving the entirety of materials to be used outside of school

or in a reading context such as a library). According to Brown (2001), pleasure reading is often extensive. Eskey (2002) states that

In order to motivate learners we should locate appropriate texts, that is, texts that the reader wants or needs to read. Since people learn to read better by reading, a major part of the reading teachers' job is to introduce students to appropriate texts; that is, the ones that at the right level linguistically and texts that are both interesting to them and relevant to their particular needs and to induce them to read such texts in quantity (p. 11).

### **2.4.3. Extensive Reading in Language Learning**

Extensive reading programs have recently emerged as a major pedagogical response to the problem of finding appropriate texts for particular groups of readers or for individuals and for inducing them for reading such texts in quantity. According to Eskey (2002), extensive reading programs, which are often called Sustained Salient Reading (SSR) today, come in various forms, all of which require L2 students to read substantial amounts of L2 texts.

Brown (2001) suggests that "instructional programs in reading should give strong consideration to the teaching of extensive reading" (p. 16). He believes that research does not suggest that focused approaches to specific strategies for intensive reading ought to be abandoned, but strengthens the notion that an extensive reading component in conjunction with other focused reading instruction is highly warranted.

### **2.4.4. Extensive Reading and Composition**

A new problem in pedagogical study on reading suggests that students will understand reading more effectively in a non-judgmental contexts of empowered place or in a proper level of direct focus to the methods of influential reading. Krashen (1981) made the case that "extensive reading is a key to students gain in reading ability, linguistic competence, vocabulary, spelling, and writing" (p. 14). There is compelling evidence that "extensive reading for genuine interest and/or pleasure, reading in which the reader focuses on the message, contributes to the development of writing ability" (Krashen, 1981, p. 14).

## **2.5 Composition**

The instruction and learning of second language composition varies from instructing other language abilities. Even as late as the 1970s, L2 writing was not viewed as a language skill to be taught to learners. Instead, it was used as a support skill in language learning. In the 1970s the English courses in second language composition programmes were, in fact, grammar classes. It was commonly assumed that learners tried to make a copy or manipulate the small parts of a composition so as to make some changes in the grammatical structure of a phrase or statement. The instruction based on such philosophy improved from procedures such as language-based procedures. It was a widely held view that learners were instructed in specific ways; that is, the mistake was hindered and the precision was required to make learners be active in grammar and patterns. At the very beginning of 1980s, when instructors realized the situation of present activities in writing, there began a change from strictly supervised composition to instructed composition: composition had been restricted to structure phrases, usually in the form of direct responses to questions or via mixing phrases.



### **2.5.1 Significance of Composition**

In previous years, the instruction of composition was considered as the chief area of significant interest in both native and non-native language situations. It seems possible that these results are due to the tools by which the examination and evaluation of instruction commonly took place as tools of writing, attracting and reshaping language comprehension, and of boosting practice via individuals' specific opinions. Different emphases have been given in language teaching to aspects of the production of written text.

### **2.5.2 Literary Texts and Composition**

Literary materials, as unique reading substance for writing, may not be proper or even suggested in the whole acquisition context. Nevertheless, according to Spack (1985), the study of literature can be beneficial to ESL students, even those in technical fields, and writing about literature can be an appropriate assignment for a composition class.

Writing instructors might criticize that a literary text does not give a pattern or input for the type of academic language learners require to compose, but they are able to compare a literary text in school to other kinds of language. As Spack (1985) points out, if students read literary works and are then asked to consider nonfiction essays, and vice versa, they can become aware of the different ways writers create texts to engage readers. An awareness of difference between these two forms, particularly in the reader/writer relationship, is crucial to an understanding of why and how texts are put together.

## **2.6 Reading-Composition Connection**

Historically, reading and composition were regarded as separate elements in education, and there were very few investigations on any reading-writing connection. But, according to Tierney (1992), researchers and educators became interested in the impact of the relationship between reading and writing in the 1970s and 1980s. He mentions that research on the reading-writing relationship showed that if reading and writing occur together, it can cause the development of both thinking and learning.

Obviously, learners understand composition in part by minute investigation of what was previously composed. That is, they acquire by seeing, or reading composed diction. As Brown (2001) says, "by reading and studying a variety of relevant types of texts, students can gain important insights both about how they should write and about subject matter becomes the topic of their writing" (p. 27). Eckhoff (1983) explores the possible influences of children's reading on their writing. Her study revealed a relationship between the reading of the literary material and the composition ability of the children. The study also found that the linguistic complexity of the sentence structure in the text could be found in the children's writing.

Barrs (2000) also investigated the impact of children's reading of literature on their writing performance. The results of this study revealed that without the reading progress there couldn't be any considerable writing progress, and also there couldn't be any significant reading progress without the writing progress. The study also found that if challenging texts were introduced to the students, it would have an influence on their interest in more demanding literature.

Shanahan & Lomax (1986), in another approach, examined three theoretical models for the relationship of reading and writing. According to their findings, it can be logically inferred that the traditional belief that reading should be learned before writing was not effective

because, when reading and composition are unified, a student can experience the opportunity for sharing knowledge and take advantage of it, while this doesn't happen when reading and writing are disconnected. Shen (2009) worked on the reading composition relationship in EFL university students' literacy improvement. It was affirmed that "evidence arising out of these findings suggests that reading and writing should be integrated in teaching for the reason that they are not separated skills, but mutually reinforced in EFL classroom" (Shen, 2009, p. 23).

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Participants**

The present paper was conducted at Fan-e-Bayan Language Institute in Ajabshir. The total number of learners in the group was 34. The participants were Iranian students in an English as a second language programme. They were all female, and their ages ranged from 17 to 26 years old. They had taken the Oxford Placement Test when they registered in the institute classes, and their level was recognized as upper intermediate. They were chosen from upper intermediate learners of Interchange 3 level. These students were randomly divided into two groups: a control group and an experimental group. There were 17 learners in each group at the very start of the measurement, but when the investigation finished there were just 15 learners in each group. Although four learners were not used for this study (because they had missed the classes or not taken the post-test), the entire sample group of learners in the institute experienced similar methods and did the similar work and exams as the others. The pre-test scores were analysed by two expert raters, who determined the level of the learners as being in the same level (upper-intermediate). When the pre-test was completed, just those students who were at this level were asked to participate in the experimental part of the study. The learners chosen for this research, therefore, created a unique group regarding L2 composition skill, having been in the study on a volunteer basis. All students received the same instruction for the writing test.

#### **3.2 Instrument Material**

Writing pre-test was used to determine the learners' writing proficiency levels in the English language. This test required students to write a true or imaginary story about a memorable experience. (e.g., a frightening, dangerous, or embarrassing experience, a memorable journey, a memorable wedding). A post-test, which had the aim of evaluating and comparing the learners' performance after administration of an extensive short story reading program, required students to write a biography about a person who had a major influence on the world or their country.

Following the aforementioned purposes of the research, the other material used in this study comprised three short stories: "Misery" by Anton Chekhov, which is about five pages; "A dog's Tale" written by Mark Twin (Samuel Clemens), which is about seven pages long; and "The Rocking-Horse Winner" by D. H. Lawrence, at 14 pages.

#### **3.3 Procedure**

Those who took part in the aforementioned course had been pre-tested via a composition examination to determine their inclusion in the course to make sure that the entirety of those who took part possessed similar skills in second language composition. The learners included in the investigation took a composition skill pre-test prior to completion of a wide reading of

literary materials programme so as to specify the cut-off quality for the compositions of the second language learners.

The learners were required to write a true or imaginary story about a memorable experience using creativity and the vocabulary, grammar, and skills they had in the target language. They were informed that they could write about a frightening, a dangerous, or an embarrassing experience, a memorable journey, a memorable wedding. The students' writings were assessed according to linguistic precision and complexity. The scores of all learners were analysed by two expert raters who diagnosed the level of the learners as being the same. Then the learners were randomly separated into two classes: the experimental and control classes, each consisting of 17 students.

The control group followed the usual procedure of writing assignments, which was conducted using Interchange books. The experimental part of the study was conducted over the three weeks of the application of a wide short story reading plan. They were given three short stories to read at home, and they were told that they could ask their questions about short stories. In order to make sure that all the participants read the short stories, each week they were asked questions about that week's short story from the Reading Diary (Penguin Readers Teacher's Guide to Using Graded Readers) which is summarized in the form of a 15 page booklet (Dawson, 2005). When the research was completed, both groups took a composition skill post-test and were asked to write a biography about a person who had a major influence on the world or their country. The scores of both the experimental and control parts of the research were assessed concerning linguistic precision and difficulty.

### **3.4 Measures**

Two measures of writing performance were calculated. It is believed that the number of error-free T-Units per t-unites was used as a measure of accuracy (ac) of writing. Therefore, complexity (com) of writing was calculated by the ratio of clauses to T-Units. These measures were used for analysis of writing accuracy and complexity because, as Larsen-Freeman (2006) says, "these indices have been determined to be best measures of second language development in writing" (p. 30).

In linguistics, as Hunt (1965) points out, "the term T-unit is defined as the shortest grammatically allowable sentences into which (writing can be split) or minimally terminable unit. Often, but not always, a T-unit is a sentence. More technically, a T-unit is a dominant clause and its dependent clauses" (p. 20). T-units are mainly applied for the measurement of composed and expressed language, like in research about mistakes in foreign language composition.

Regarding grammar, a clause can be viewed as a small structural unit that can observe a full proposition. In the case of a number of languages, it can be a pair or part of diction which involves a subject and a verb, but in some languages in specific sentences the subject may not seem obviously to be a noun clause, being in turn marked on the predicate. The most fundamental kind of sentence consists of a single (independent) clause.

## **4.0 RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS**

In this study, two research questions were investigated regarding the effect of the application of wide short story reading over the precision and complexity of EFL students' compositions.

#### 4.1 The First Hypothesis

The null hypothesis: Extensive short story reading does not have effects on EFL learners' complexity of writing.

The alternative hypothesis: Extensive short story reading has effects on EFL learners' complexity of writing.

The obtained scores of the pre-tests for both the experimental group and the control group were analysed.

Tables 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 show the paired sample statistics and paired samples test for the two groups for the pre-test.

Table 4.1.1: Paired Instances Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Ratio of clauses to T units experimental.	1.5873	15	.23936	.06180
	Ratio of clauses to T units Control	1.4380	15	.26756	.06908

Table 4.1.2: Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Ratio of clauses to T units experimental	.14933	.40962	.10576	-.07751	.37618	1.412	14	.180
	Ratio of clauses to T units control								

In order to compare the experimental and control groups' complexity of writing in the pre-test and before the implementation of extensive short story reading and in order to choose a homogeneous group of students, a paired samples test was used.

The results in Tables 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 show the means of the scores for the experimental group (M=1.587, SD=0.2393) and for the control group (M=1.438, SD=0.2675). The significance (2-tailed) of the paired sample test was 0.180, which is greater than 0.05 (the least significant level) at df=14. These results reveal that there was no significant difference between the two groups in the pre-test and before the implementation of extensive short story reading and that the two groups are homogeneous.

Tables 4.1.3 and 4.1.4 show the paired sample statistics and paired samples test results for both the experimental and control groups from the post-test.

Table 4.1.3: Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Ratio of clauses to T units experimental Post-test	1.8700	15	.39805	.10278
	Ratio of clauses to T units control Post-test	1.4787	15	.34315	.08860

Table 4.1.4: Paired Instances Exam

		Paired Discrepancies			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Ratio of clauses to T units experimental post-test	.39133	.63049	.16279	.04218	.74048	2.404	14	.031
	Ratio of clauses to T units control Post-test								

After the implementation of extensive short story reading, a writing post-test was administered for both the experimental and control groups. The results of the post-test were analysed by t-test and are shown in Tables 4.1.3 and 4.1.4.

The results in tables 4.1.3 and 4.1.4 show the mean scores for the experimental group in the post-test ( $M= 1.870$ ,  $SD=0.3980$ ) and for the control group ( $M=1.478$ ,  $SD=0.3431$ ) with a significance (2 tailed) of 0.31, which is smaller than 0.05 (the least significance level). Since the means of complexity scores in the experimental group increased in the post-test, and this improvement is statistically significant, it can be concluded that the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis stating that extensive short story reading has effects on the complexity of students' writing skill is confirmed.

## 4.2 The Second Hypothesis

The null hypothesis: Extensive short story reading does not have effects on EFL learners' accuracy of writing.

The alternative hypothesis: Extensive short story reading has effects on EFL learners' accuracy of writing.

The obtained scores of the pre-tests for both the experimental group and the control group were analysed.

Tables 4.2.1 and 4.2.3 show the paired sample statistics and paired samples test for the two groups from the pre-test.

Table 4.2.1: Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Number of error free T units Experimental pretest	.5927	15	.22005	.05682
	Number.of.error.free.T.units Control pretest	.6513	15	.15537	.04012

Table 4.2.2: Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Number of error free T units Experimental pretest	-.05867	.24928	.06436	-.19671	.07938	-.911	14	.377
	Number of error free T units Control pretest								

So as to compare and contrast the experimental and control parts' complexity of composition in the pre-test and prior to the accomplishment of the wide range of short story reading and in order to choose a homogeneous group of students, a paired samples test was used.

The results presented in Tables 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 show the means of the scores for the experimental group ( $M=0.5927$ ,  $SD=0.2200$ ) and for the control group ( $M=0.6513$ ,  $SD=0.1553$ ). The significance (2-tailed) of the paired sample test was 0.377, which is greater than 0.05 (the least significant level), at  $df = 14$ . These results reveal that no important discrepancies exist between the two groups of the pre-test in their precision and prior to the accomplishment of the wide range of short story reading, and that the two groups are homogeneous.

Tables 4.2.3 and 4.2.4 show the paired sample statistics and paired samples test for the two groups from the post-test.

Table 4.2.3: Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Number of error free T units Experimental post test	.7300	15	.17304	.04468
	Number of error free T units control post test	.6573	15	.13387	.03456

Table 4.2.4: Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences							Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Number of error free T units Experimental post test Number of error free T units Control post test	.07267	.22086	.05703	-.04964	.19497	2.874	14	.023

After the implementation and application of wide extensive story reading, a composition post-test exam was conducted for both experimental and control groups. The results of the post-test were analysed by t-test and are shown in Tables 4.2.3 and 4.2.4.

The results of Tables 4.2.3 and 4.2.4 show the mean scores for the experimental group in the post-test ( $M=0.7300$ ,  $SD=0.1730$ ) and for the control group ( $M=0.6573$ ,  $SD=0.1338$ ) and significance (2-tailed) of 0.023, which is less than 0.05 (the least significant stage). Since the means of accuracy scores in the experimental group were increased in the post-test, and this improvement is statistically significant, we can deduce that the null assumption is not accepted, and the alternative hypothesis stating that “extensive short story reading has some influences on the precision of students’ writing skill” is confirmed.

## 5.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The main area of investigation in the present study was to explore whether wide story reading has influences on the precision and difficulty of EFL students’ accuracy and complexity of writing. The first research question for this study was “Does extensive short story reading have effects on EFL learners’ complexity of writing?” The data regarding this question were gathered through post-test scores, and discussion of the data analysis is provided in the previous section of this paper. According to the results, the participants in the experimental group performed well in their post-tests in comparison to the control group. From comparing the scores of the two groups, we learn that extensive short story reading provides an excellent environment for improving EFL learners’ complexity of writing. The second research question was “Does extensive short story reading have effects on the accuracy of EFL learners’ writing?” The outcomes reveal that the students in the experimental group produced more accurate sentences in their writings.

The data from this study revealed that extensive short story reading enhances learner’s precision and complexity of composition. In recent years, more and more EFL teachers have become interested in using literature, especially short stories, in teaching contexts because of its motivational effects. It is clear that integrating reading and writing skills for the aim of acquiring English as a second language is helpful.

The outcomes of this study may be of importance for both EFL teachers and learners to use literary texts, especially short stories, in their learning contexts in order to motivate learners for learning a foreign language and for enhancing the learners' proficiency in writing skill (accuracy and complexity) in natural, not artificial, contexts. This research was implemented on female learners ranging in age from 17 to 26 years old. In order to gain better insights on the results of this study, the research could be replicated on male students from different age groups. The present research worked on the effects of extensive short story reading on the precision and complexity of composition writing. Researchers interested in this area of study could perform it on the other skills such as speaking. In addition, other types of literary texts, like novels, dramas, and plays could be used to find their influence on writing skill and other language skills.

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