

The Use of Short Stories as A Springboard in Teaching Grammar

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Abstract

This study aimed to determine the use of short story as a springboard in teaching grammar of teachers in two private schools. With this, the study made use of embedded mixed method design to achieve the goal of the study in both qualitative and quantitative perspectives. The data were transcribed and analyzed using Delve application based from the different parts of the grammar lessons discussion: Motivation,

Presentation and Discussion Proper, Activities and Evaluation. The respondents were then asked on the problems they had encountered in the use of short stories in their grammar lessons. From these gathered data, the Researcher proposed a lesson module with teaching guide highlighting the short story as a springboard in teaching grammar.

Keywords: *grammar instruction, short stories, literature-based approach, teaching strategies, elementary education*

INTRODUCTION

Communicating constructively is a vital life skill that helps individuals to articulate and generate thoughts from professional life to social life. Language is an important instrument in communication, and one's knowledge of own language leads to effective communicating. To be able to communicate effectively provides an opportunity to freely express one's ideas and to be understood by others. One of the fundamentals of language is grammar that dictates the structures and rules of a particular language. Linguists define grammar as the set of structural rules that governs the composition of clauses, phrases and words in any given natural language. Generally, the term grammar is a system of rules (and exceptions to those rules) that reveal and structures meaning in language (Eunson, 2020). Competency in grammar develops self-confidence in meeting and dealing with different kinds of people.

Indeed, employing a proper grammar increases one's accuracy and proficiency in language production which gives good impressions and credibility to the speaker. Moreover, one can also produce good quality writings with a competent mastery of grammar (Bradshaw, 2013). However, grammar is also regarded as one of the challenging aspects of language to master for both second and foreign language learners, specifically in English. Since English grammar has many rules and exceptions, language learners experience ambiguity in understanding its structures. Malik (2018) indicated that the language competence aspect that affects English oral proficiency the most is limited knowledge and poor understanding of the English language.

As a result, many English language teachers have been exploring suitable approaches and strategies to teach English grammar without difficulty. On the contrary, despite the availability of these approaches and strategies, grammar remains confusing and complex for language learners (Malik, 2018).

In the Philippine context, English has been a second language. It is a medium of instruction in education and a medium of communication in commerce and law. Ironically, despite these advantages of Filipino pupils in using the English language, their grammar incompetency is still evident. There are disturbing realities that the English mastery and the English quality of Filipinos have been seriously deteriorating. By common observations, Filipino pupils can no longer communicate effectively using the English language as indicated by the decline of their proficiency. In a survey conducted, it was observed that the English proficiency of Filipino overseas workers, both skilled and non-skilled, has likewise declined (Oansandasan, 2019). It is more alarming that even English teachers themselves show poor performance in English proficiency examinations. For instance, the mean score of 117, 728 permanent Grade 1 and 2 public school teachers in the entire country who took the Test of English Proficiency for Teachers (TEPT) and Process Skills Test (PST) in 2012 was 50.53. This indicates a low level of proficiency based on the descriptive equivalent set by the Department of Education (Wilson, 2019).

Relevant to this issue in terms of looking at the background, in a study conducted by Johnston (2015) in terms of the assessment of teaching-learning in "Literature-Based" classrooms, the study examined how instructors in "literature-based" language arts programs monitor and make sense of their pupils' literate growth as well as their own professional success in teaching children to read and write. Assessment was the point of contention in these confrontations, since it was connected with extremely strong sentiments of being overwhelmed, insecurity, guilt, irritation, and rage. These teachers cited difficulty in tracking and discussing children's literacy growth. Additionally, they discussed the pressures associated with external accountability testing. They varied in their assessment procedures and terminology for describing pupils' reading growth. Those who worked in highly controlled environments were more likely to use blaming language and to deliver impersonal, global, negative descriptive appraisals. Their evaluations were almost certainly based on a simplistic, linear view of literacy. The less in control of the circumstances, the less probable this would occur. This study demonstrated that evaluation in schools is far from a technological issue. Rather than that, it is profoundly social and personal.

The general problem of this study was to determine the use of short story as a springboard in teaching grammar. Specifically, this study aimed to answer the following question:

1. What are the Grammar topics and competencies in Grades 4 – 6 as seen in the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCS) taught by the teacher?
2. How is short story used as a strategy in teaching grammar topics in terms of:
 - 2.1. Motivation,
 - 2.2. presentation and discussion,
 - 2.3. activities, and
 - 2.4. evaluation?
3. What are the challenges encountered by the Grade 4 – 6 English teachers in using short story in teaching grammar?
4. What teaching guide and teaching material for grammar using short story as a springboard in English 4 – 6 can be proposed in order to mitigate the problem?

The main objective of this study was to determine how short stories are used as a springboard in teaching grammar. This research used an embedded mixed method type of research whereas the quantitative data is embedded to the qualitative data. It utilized questionnaires for the focus group discussion and interviews to gather data and information about the study as the qualitative part. Moreover, it utilized the observation checklist as the embedded quantitative part. This study utilized Purposive Sampling technique under the non-probability sampling. Since the needed participants are English teachers, it is important that the knowledgeable are the one to partake in the completion of the research study.

The respondents are grade school teachers. These teachers are undergoing distance learning with the aid of modules. This research was conducted in the second semester of School Year 2020-2021 in St. Paul College of Makati and Good Shepherd Academy of Taguig, which translated to the Third and Fourth Quarter. The study determined the use of short stories as a springboard in teaching grammar through the use of survey-questionnaires and observation checklists. The findings obtained may apply only to this particular case and generalizability may be a great problem. Due to the limited time and resources of the Researcher, this study incorporated other external factors that may have contributed and influenced the results of the study. Due to the pandemic persistence, data gathering procedure was done through online, and face to face interaction with the respondent may be strictly limited.

The Language teachers may benefit from the result of the study in broadening their knowledge and improving their teaching strategies in teaching grammar effectively using short stories as a springboard. The language learners are provided with ideas on how they can enhance their communicative competence, especially grammatical competence. The language coordinators are provided with different grammar strategies using Literature-Based Approach that they can recommend to their respective English teachers.

Literature Review

Grammar is the rules of language. "Grammar is a system of meaningful structures and patterns that are governed by particular pragmatic constraints" (Larsen-Freeman, 2014). In another definition, grammar is a description of the rules for constructing sentences, and an explanation of the meanings delivered by these structures. Oftentimes, grammar is noted as a difficult subject to teach and to learn for its structures are complex and intimidating (Mart, 2013).

Teaching grammar has been a subject of a debate since then, and language Researchers' views on how grammar should be taught are divided into two. Krashen's (1972) theory of language acquisition and some specialists have argued that grammar teaching is less important and should be taught in an implicit way. On the contrary, some other experts have argued that grammar instruction is important in the foreign language teaching process and that it should be taught in an explicit way (Jakobsson, 2020). Nevertheless, Larsenn-freeman (2014) mentions that although grammar is learned in the natural process, it is necessary to explain grammar rules in order to improve it.

To the contrary, Ho (2016) researched rote, knowledge-based instruction versus grammar taught in the context of communication, finding moderate gains in two seventh grade classes instructed in context, but discovered the largest difference was present in pupils' increasingly positive attitude about grammar. Louis (2016) also saw modest gains in her pupils' abilities and contributes the results to the innovative and non-traditional activities provided for learning and practice while Westman (2016) pitted traditional, rules-based instruction against an alternative strategy-based method, and also found the strategies-based pupils to perform marginally better than their peers. Though these results show promise, the study of three different methods of grammar instruction over a more linear timeline discovered no significant differences in the quality and content of pupils' writing ability.

In the Philippine context, English has been a second language. It is a medium of instruction in education and a medium of communication in commerce and law. Ironically, despite these advantages of Filipino pupils in using the English language, their grammar incompetency is still evident. There are disturbing realities that the English mastery and the English quality of Filipinos have been seriously deteriorating. By common observations, Filipino pupils can no longer communicate effectively using the English language as indicated by the decline of their proficiency.

Based on studies, it is palpable that the Filipinos' grasp of the English language is stumbling while other Asian countries' English competence are striving. It is alarming that the percentage of incompetency in English is rising which doubled from a measly 7% in 1993 to 14% in 2006 (UK Essays, 2013). In 2008, an online article by Karl Wilson in "The National" revealed that Filipinos scored an overall mean of 6.69 for the macro-skills in English in terms of listening, writing, reading, and speaking. Sioco (2018) stated that the overall mean of 6.69 indicates a rather low profile at the backdrop of international standards. Historically, the English proficiency of Filipinos has been consistently stable across 1993 to 2000 before a gradual decline was reported in the following years. Oansandanan (2016) asserts that there are several issues related to the development of pupils' oral and writing proficiency. Some of these issues concern the current pedagogical practices that may have a contribution to pupils' low oral and writing examination results.

The use of literature in teaching English had been seen effective in developing the communicative competence of the pupils. It was mentioned by Saeed in 2018, who argues that literature is a rich source of meaningful input especially in EFL settings. Additionally, it concluded that, "Literature was a new material in teaching and learning communicative competence of the language. In the literature-based classroom, literature can be the primary material of teaching the target language, providing authentic and real contexts of communicative situations. It also provides the pleasure of learning a new language with and through interesting stories (Saeed, 2018).

Research after research have shown the positive outcomes of using literature in teaching language and developing communicative competence among language learners. For instance, Starja (2015) concludes in her case study that the use of literature, specifically drama, in teaching foreign language has increased pupils' imagination and developed critical thinking. She also observed that there was an increase in the pupils' motivation, participation, autonomy, delightfulness, and eagerness to engage in the class. Moreover, a currently important field of research deals with the benefits of literary texts as an essential part of integrative language teaching.

The use of literature might have a lot of benefits in language teaching. Nonetheless, it is an undeniable fact that the use of literature in the language classroom is challenging as well. By common observations, most language learners are not motivated to read literary texts. They see reading as a difficult and boring activity. Their lack of comprehension skills and insufficient vocabulary worsen the status of the use of literature. Hence, the selection of literary texts by the language teachers is also seen as significant. Amongst the various genres of literature, language Researchers suggest that short stories are the most considerable literary texts. The inner construction of short stories is easier to comprehend, more so, they are short and feasible enough to be utilized in a class considering the length of time in the classroom (Shah, 2014).

Moreover, in a study on the interest, perceptions, and the perceived needs of the pupils of the English teachers training of Christian University of Indonesia towards the incorporation of short stories in language skills classes. It reveals that the majority of respondents regarded short tales to be engaging to use as self-indulgence materials and as components of language competence workshops. Additionally, the majority of them agreed or strongly agreed that including short tales into language skills lessons assisted pupils in achieving greater mastery of language skills. They also felt that prospective English teachers should be proficient in the use of short tales to teach language skills. Additionally, the statistical analysis demonstrated a positive and substantial correlation between pupils' interest and perceptions, and that both variables had a significant effect on one another (Sailak, 2016).

In a study conducted by Upreti (2015) on the challenges and issues faced by the teachers in teaching short stories, she found out that the majority of teachers with one year of experience had preparation time and thinking of how to connect the short tale with the tasks that were meant to be taught by the instructor were obstacles for teachers when employing short stories. They reasoned that they had no prior exposure to constructing their own interpretations of short stories. In order to decrease the difficulties associated with teaching short tales, training, seminars, refresher courses, and orientation classes were provided.

Another issue is, if there are more than 20 or 25 pupils in a class, it becomes difficult to teach short stories. Due to the actions of the pupils, not every kid in the class has an equal opportunity to learn the lesson. Additionally, the linguistic skill of the pupils presents a challenge while teaching short stories. Nearly all professors employ both Nepali and English while instructing short stories. Very few teachers exclusively instruct short tales in the English language. The majority of educators teach short stories without supplemental resources. There is significant controversy regarding whether the short stories should be taught or narrated (Upreti, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

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To apply the above-mentioned research design, the qualitative aspect of this research, which was the major approach, use a focus group discussion (or FGD). FGD is a qualitative research approach used in the social sciences, with a focus on and use in the evaluation of developmental programs. FGDs were semi-structured interviews that were guided by a competent moderator. The moderator posed wide questions in order to elicit comments and stimulate discussion among the audience. The moderator's purpose was to stimulate as much conversation and opinion as possible in a certain length of time. When there was a need to grasp a problem at a deeper level than a survey could provide, focus group talks should be conducted. They were useful for elucidating the "why" and "how" of a topic, and adding meaning and insight to current information (Humans of Data, 2017). This FGD was done through interviews of the respondents who were exposed to the use of technique.

Furthermore, the quantitative approach was the embedded one. An observation method was incorporated to achieve the goal of the research. This meant that viewing the teachers incorporating Short Story as a springboard in teaching grammar in a virtual setting since the schools are all set in an online context. This is to analyze the individual's way of teaching grammar in the perspective of Literature-Based Approach in English (Iterators, 2021). This was in a Likert Scale as this was be the Quantitative part of the Embedded Research Design.

Study Population and Sampling Technique

The study included six (6) teachers who were teaching English in Grade School particularly in Grades 4 – 6 under K-12 program. It was conducted in Good Shepherd Academy of Taguig Incorporated, and in St. Paul College of Makati. This study utilized the Purposive Sampling technique under non-probability sampling. Since the needed participants were English teachers, it was important that those who are knowledgeable were the ones to partake in the completion of the research study. There were three (3) English teachers from St. Paul College of Makati and three (3) English teachers from Good Shepherd Academy of Taguig Incorporated. Based on the article of Foley (2018) published in Alchemer website on Purposive sampling, this method required the participants to fit on the particular profile needed by the study. These participants should have prior knowledge about the research (Foley, 2018).

Research Instrument

The Researcher formulated a Researcher-made questionnaire and a checklist which had two sections: Focus Group Discussion Questions and Observation.

The first part was the questions for the Focus Group Discussion. The subparts were as follows: Probe Questions; Follow-up Questions and Exit Question. Probe questions were questions that introduced participants to the discussion topic and encouraged them to share their thoughts with the group. In this case, the research study could dwell on the lighter view of the topic. The questions, in the follow-up part, look further into the conversation topic and the viewpoints of the participants. Meaning, this was the specific crisis they have undergone during their experiences. Also, it gave room for their experiences on how they have dealt with the problems. The questions in the Exit Questions entailed the recommendation of the participants about the issue involved. It summed up all the needed points to ponder on the target result of the research.

For the second part, the research instrument was the observation. This was to see if the use of short stories was reflected in the classroom discussion. Also, this was to validate the manifestations of the short story in the achievement of the competencies in the lesson. The research tool consisted of five divisions: Motivation, Presentation, Discussion, Activities and Evaluation.

Data Gathering Procedures

A permission from the Principal or School Heads was solicited through a letter in order to make an appointment for the availability of the participants. Upon approval of the aforementioned authority, the Researcher immediately conducted the data gathering. A letter was given to the chosen participants of the focus group online discussion. The Researcher was the moderator of the focus group. The Researcher asked the research questions. She properly supervised the respondents. Moreover, for the observation part, there were communication letters cascaded asking for participants' permission in achieving the goal of the research. Copies of their recorded videos of the classroom discussion, lesson plans and modules were viewed for the observation of the use of short stories in teaching grammar. The Researcher prioritized the process of asking permission and processing consent necessary. She approached the participants and presented the letter of approval before conducting the data gathering procedure. Each step of the data collection was supported with full consent from all the respondents involved. The Researcher provided a letter of agreement that discussed matters like confidentiality and honesty. Finally, the qualitative data analyzed, coded and characterized using the data analysis. It was presented and interpreted. The quantitative data, on the other hand, was statistically treated using the statistical tools. From which, the answers to the SOP and the goal of the research was concluded.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Grammar Topics and Competencies in Grades 4–6 Based on MELCs

The findings indicated that the grammar subjects instructed in Grades 4–6 corresponded with the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs) established by the Department of Education. For Grade 4, the specified grammar themes encompassed verbs and prepositions, emphasizing accurate temporal expressions in the present tense and the construction of clear and logical sentences utilizing suitable prepositions. These qualities underscore essential grammatical skills required for sentence formation and fundamental communication.

In Grade 5, grammatical abilities advanced to more intricate language structures, including adjectives and conjunctions. Students were required to accurately employ adjectives, including comparative degrees and order, and to construct sentences that exhibit subject-verb agreement and appropriate usage of coordinate and subordinate conjunctions. This trend illustrates the transition from word-level syntax to sentence-level precision.

In Grade 6, the grammar curriculum progressed to adverbs and sentence structure, specifically focusing on compound and complicated phrases that illustrate cause-and-effect and problem-solution links. These qualities reflect an emphasis on advanced grammar skills that facilitate logical thinking and cohesive text construction.

The findings indicate a cumulative advancement of grammar education through grade levels, with each level enhancing previously attained grammatical understanding. This process validates the suitability of utilizing short tales as educational catalysts, as narratives inherently include grammatical structures that evolve in complexity in tandem with learners' cognitive and linguistic advancement.

Utilization of Short Stories as a Springboard in Teaching Grammar

The results indicated that short tales were widely employed in several aspects of grammar training, specifically motivation, presentation, discussion, activities, and assessment. During the motivation phase, educators employed short narratives to stimulate learners' existing knowledge and engagement using approaches such as tale-within-a-story, games, rapid drawings, story mapping, and guided visual analysis. These tactics facilitated learners' contextual and emotional engagement with the session, rendering language instruction less abstract and more significant.

During the presenting phase, short stories functioned as a source of genuine linguistic input. Educators extracted grammatical components, including verbs, adjectives, conjunctions, and adverbs, straight from the text via marking words, emphasizing phrases, and evaluating sentences from the narrative. This method facilitated the inductive introduction of grammar principles, enabling learners to examine the functionality of grammatical forms in authentic circumstances rather than via isolated exercises.

During the discussion phase, the short stories enabled a more profound understanding of grammatical structures. Students grouped verbs, elucidated the roles of prepositions and adjectives, contrasted conjunctions, and classified sentences according to instances identified in the story. This technique fostered active engagement and analytical reasoning, since learners were not only recognizing grammatical structures but also elucidating their application and forming their own phrases.

Short narratives served as the foundation for both solo and collaborative activities, including written exercises, group assignments, and vocabulary retention exercises. These exercises strengthened

grammatical proficiency through practice while preserving a link to the narrative context. During the evaluation phase, short tales were utilized in genuine activities and summative assessments, enabling learners to exhibit grammatical proficiency through significant outputs related to real-life events.

The findings suggest that employing short tales as a catalyst enhances contextualized language training. This method integrates grammar acquisition with understanding, communication, and practical application, rendering grammar training more student-centered and pragmatic.

Challenges Encountered by Teachers in Using Short Stories for Grammar Instruction

Although the advantages were noted, the study also identified several problems faced by educators in employing short tales as a foundation for grammar education. A significant challenge was the length and intricacy of many short stories, which might result in learner disengagement, particularly among younger students. Choosing a suitable narrative that equilibrates engagement, duration, and grammatical emphasis was difficult.

Educators indicated that utilizing short tales necessitated considerable preparation, encompassing story selection, lesson planning, and activity development. This laborious approach was seen as challenging, especially without accessible teaching aids or modules tailored for literature-based grammar training.

Moreover, technical constraints and inconsistent internet access presented difficulties, particularly when educators endeavored to utilize digital narratives or online materials. These limitations hindered the effective execution of story-based grammar instruction, especially in mixed or distant learning environments.

These problems indicate that although short tales serve as useful educational tools, their successful incorporation into grammar instruction necessitates sufficient support, resources, and organized direction for educators.

Development of the Teaching Guide and Module

In response to the stated issues, the researcher created a teaching guide integrated inside a module that emphasizes the methodical application of short tales as a catalyst for teaching grammar. The book offers sequential methods, recommended tasks, and evaluative methodologies matched with grammar abilities for Grades 4 to 6.

The suggested instructional guide seeks to tackle challenges associated with time limitations, lesson preparation complexities, and insufficient reference resources. The handbook provides a systematic framework that aids teachers in the efficient and successful implementation of literature-based grammar education. This intervention highlights the study's practical role in connecting theory with classroom practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are hereby recommended based on the findings of the study:

1. For teachers, it is recommended to use short stories as a springboard in teaching grammar. Based on the results, it manifested the different utilization of short stories in different parts of class discussion. More so, the Researcher recommends the following:
 - a. In the motivation part, teachers may use the strategies of letting the pupils narrate life experience that is connected from the story in terms of language or the theme, use of gamification and game-based strategy, injecting art or illustrations on the short story, utilization of story maps in understanding the short story, and use of pictorial scenes from the short story;
 - b. For presentation and discussion, teachers are recommended to use locating or identifying the sample words discussed in grammar lesson using the short story, mural of the sketches with word descriptions, underlining and classifying words from the short story.
 - c. For the Activity part, it is recommended to design grammar activities that are multidisciplinary yet connected to the short story, encourage pupils to ask questions to strengthen their comprehension of language, and utilization of written analysis from the short story.
 - d. For the Evaluation part, it is suggested that teachers establish summative assessment procedures that are timely and congruent with learning goals, grammar instruction, and short stories. It is also proposed that they include the language skills using a short story as a springboard for employing 21st century language abilities. Also, collaborative group works could also be a good avenue to spark application of the grammar lesson within the bounds of the theme of the short story.
2. With the underlined challenges pointed out by the respondents, the following recommendations are to be proposed by this study to the teachers:
 - a. Since it is time consuming, it is recommended that the teacher should be mindful of the bounds of the lesson objectives and to choose an enticing but relevant short story for the level of comprehension of the learners and within the time frame. Be mindful of the time period. Structure and control who will give their story. Hence teachers should be consistent in setting the goal, so pupils will be able to get used to what is supposed to be done. Be mindful of the goal of the topic.
 - b. Teachers also need to have guidance of the words by giving clues or hints. Include in the directions the connection of the task to the short story. Teachers may link the items or sample questions of the short story to the other short story that has a similar theme. Also, teachers could spark the prior knowledge of the pupils about the story. It can manifest understanding about the short story by giving a little backdrop of the story. Link the items or sample questions of the short story to the other short story that has a similar theme.
 - c. Using a short story is noted as a good strategy since this involves more retention followed by grammar, the teacher should make sure that the alignment and consistency of the use of short story as a springboard is there towards the end. They may use it in real-life scenarios. However, the teacher should review the short story that is suitable for their level. Scheduling of the tasks should be implemented by the teacher since it can be done through group works.
 - d. To be able to recognize a well-planned lesson, the conceptualization should be emphasized. This meant that the focus should also be developing various activities that cater to learners' needs. Include in the directions the connection of the task to the short story through the establishment also of HOTS questions. Mostly, teachers should be mindful of the time period.
3. Based on the results and findings, the Researcher recommends the grammar modules for Grades 4 – 6 attached in this study to be used by the teachers of English. This has reflected the answers of

the respondents in terms of how to use short stories as a springboard and the problems that were being experienced by the teachers.

4. It is recommended for the future Researchers to also look at the grammar topics in Junior High School. Since it is at a different level, it is recommended to look at how competencies are achieved through the use of short stories as a springboard in a higher level. They can also do this research through qualitative approach.

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