

# Using short stories to enhance English vocabulary for secondary school students

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**Abstract** - The study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of short stories in enhancing English vocabulary for secondary school students. The population samples consist of 33 secondary school students who participated in an action research project in which short stories were used in the teaching of English vocabulary in class. Data collected from the questionnaires and tests showed that after using short stories to teach vocabulary, the students became more interested in learning vocabulary, and their vocabulary was greatly developed.

**Index Terms**- teachers' and students' perspectives, new grade 10 English textbook, high school, Vietnam

## I. INTRODUCTION

Learning vocabulary is an important aspect of academic study. It is often observed that without grammar, little can be communicated, but without vocabulary, nothing can be communicated. It is clear then that vocabulary is essential for any language learner.

There is an association between reading interest, reading habits, and vocabulary. Because of this, teachers should use the method to assist students in improving their source of vocabulary. Language learners can grasp some items of vocabulary quickly, while others are harder for them to master. There are probably various reasons for this: how much we 'need' the word, whether it is similar to a word in our own language or 'makes sense' to us in some ways. However, repetition is certainly a key part of learning vocabulary, and if we keep coming across a word or phrase while reading it will either make more and more sense to us, because we're seeing it in different contexts, or we may even be motivated to go away and look it up.

However, even if we read a lot, only pretty high-frequency words will keep coming up time after time. This is where a concept called 'narrow reading' comes in. The idea here is that learners are encouraged to read around the same topic for a while, thus increasing their chances of coming across the same, topic-related, lexical items again and again. Language learners may find it challenging, nevertheless, when they read lengthy reading texts. The challenges they encountered - they do not grasp some of the words in the reading passage, it is difficult for them to understand the words, but it makes them have to face reality if reading is complicated, so that is why they do not understand the reading passages. On the other hand, it uses complex vocabulary, and the way the teacher teaches it is also not fascinating. Therefore, teaching vocabulary through short stories is an exciting strategy to enhance students' interest in learning vocabulary and help them understand what they are reading. In order to motivate the learners, teachers need to apply what is needed to be learned to encourage the learners to study vocabulary more effectively.

Students can enjoy learning reading comprehension through short stories, and it can help them develop their vocabulary. They will be entertained by short stories that are provided by the teacher. It is also useful and suitable for the student to enhance their source of vocabulary because it provides an exciting and useful story to read. Additionally, it also has various interesting topics, and it has pictures that can make students interested in reading and learning new vocabulary.

According to Vural (2013), pleasant short stories will motivate students and propose a fictional and interesting world. Therefore, the author has chosen the topic: Using Short Stories to Enhance English Vocabulary for Secondary School Students.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate the current situation of learning vocabulary of secondary students, the effectiveness of short stories in enhancing English vocabulary for secondary school students and their attitudes toward using short stories in vocabulary lessons, the chosen research design for the study is action research.

The respondents were 33 eighth-grader students at a secondary school. They are in a class where the researcher teaches them English. The class includes 17 girls and 16 boys.

The pre-test was used as the placement test to identify the students' vocabulary level.

The post-test was carried out in order to help the researcher draw a conclusion on whether the use of short stories is effective in enhancing students' vocabulary.

The prequestionnaire was employed to collect information on the current situation of vocabulary learning of secondary students. The postquestionnaire investigated the students' attitudes toward using short stories in vocabulary lessons and how short stories helped enhance students' vocabulary.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**1. Findings from the tests**

**1.1. Pre-Test results**

**Table 1. Results of the Pre-Test**

Students No.	Score (... /30)	Percentage	Students No.	Score (... /30)	Percentage
1	10	33.3%	18	17	56.7%
2	15	50.0%	19	20	66.7%
3	22	73.3%	20	24	80.0%
4	26	86.7%	21	16	53.3%
5	24	80.0%	22	17	56.7%
6	15	50.0%	23	24	80.0%
7	15	50.0%	24	12	40.0%
8	16	53.3%	25	17	56.7%
9	19	63.3%	26	14	46.7%
10	10	33.3%	27	18	60.0%
11	24	80.0%	28	24	80.0%
12	26	86.7%	29	17	56.7%
13	11	36.7%	30	16	53.3%
14	15	50.0%	31	15	50.0%
15	17	56.7%	32	12	40.0%
16	15	50.0%	33	15	50.0%
17	15	50.0%			
Mean:	<b>17.4</b>	<b>52.6%</b>			

According to the above table, the average score of the Pre-test is 17.4 (out of 30), accounting for approximately 52.6% of the total score, which is 2.6% higher than the mid-score (15).

The lowest score is 10 (out of 30), which means the students could only do one-third of the test. There were 2 students who got 10, accounting for about 6% of the surveyed students. The highest score is 26 out of 30 (this means the students did 78.8% of the questions correctly), and there were also 2 students who scored this, accounting for about 6%.

There were 14 students who got 15 or under the number of correct sentences, taking up 42.4% of the total surveyed students. We can also see that there are 57.6% of the surveyed students got higher marks than the mid-score. The score which most students got is 15 (the mid-score) with 8 students, making up 24.2% of the students.

The number of students who got fair scores (65% to 80% of the total score) is 5 students, which is equivalent to 16.7% of the students, and three students (10%) got good or excellent scores (>80%).

**1.2. Post-Test results**

**Table 4.2. Results of the Post-Test**

Students No.	Score (... /30)	Percentage	Students No.	Score (... /30)	Percentage
1	11	36.7	18	22	73.3
2	22	73.3	19	27	90.0
3	25	83.3	20	25	83.3
4	30	100.0	21	22	73.3
5	27	90.0	22	23	76.7
6	21	70.0	23	26	86.7
7	18	60.0	24	20	66.7
8	23	76.7	25	25	83.3
9	14	46.7	26	19	63.3
10	17	56.7	27	24	80.0
11	27	90.0	28	26	86.7

12	28	93.3	29	25	83.3
13	19	63.3	30	20	66.7
14	24	80.0	31	21	70.0
15	26	86.7	32	20	66.7
16	21	70.0	33	20	66.7
17	21	70.0			
Mean:	<b>22.4</b>	<b>74.6%</b>			

After the time of using short stories to enhance English vocabulary for secondary school students, we collected the data shown in Table 4.2. Observing the table shows us:

The average score is 22.4 out of 30, equivalent to 74.6%. There is an increase of 5 points in comparison with the score of 17.4 of the result of the pre-test.

The lowest score is 11 out of 30 and only 1 student got this score, this means the student only got one-third of the test correct. Meanwhile, the lowest score in the pre-test was 10, and 2 students got the score.

The highest score is 30 and 1 student got this highest score. Meanwhile, there were 2 students who got 26 out of 30 sentences correct, the highest score in the pre-test.

The number of students who got under mid-score (15 and under) is 2 students, this is a remarkable decrease from 14 students in the pre-test. The percentage of this decrease is 36.6%.

The number of students who got good or excellent scores is 13 students, accounting for 39.3%, and there is one student who got a full score of 30 correct sentences. The percentage of 39.3% is noticeable because there was no one who got this score in the pre-test.

**Table 3. Comparison between the results of Pre-Test and Post-Test**

	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Difference
<b>Highest Score</b>	26	30	4
<b>Lowest Score</b>	10	11	4
<b>Mean Score</b>	17.4	22.4	5

As could be seen in the table, the highest score increased from 26 in the pre-test to 30 in the post-test. The lowest score increased from 10 to 11, and the mean score increased from 17.4 to 22.4.

The increases in all 3 figures showed that the application of using short stories to enhance English vocabulary for secondary school students is effective.

## 2. Findings from the questionnaires

### 2.1. Current situations of learning vocabulary through short stories

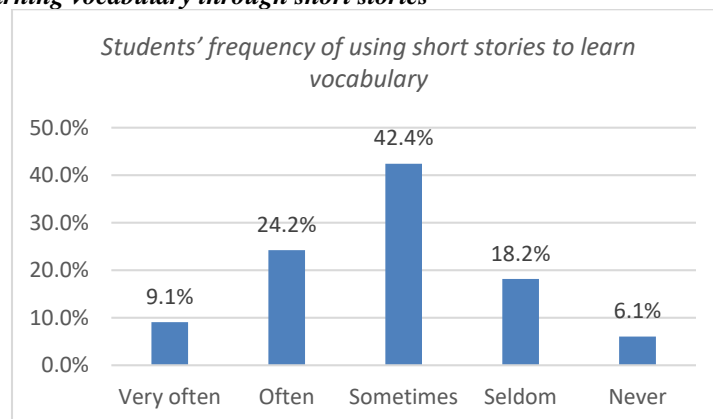


Figure 1. Students' frequency of using short stories to learn vocabulary

According to the figure above, they did not use stories to learn vocabulary frequently. Only one-third of them applied short stories in vocabulary learning often or very often. More than forty percent of them just used short stories occasionally. There were even 6.1% who never used this method to learn. It could be seen that students needed specific guidance and instructions to use this method in learning vocabulary.

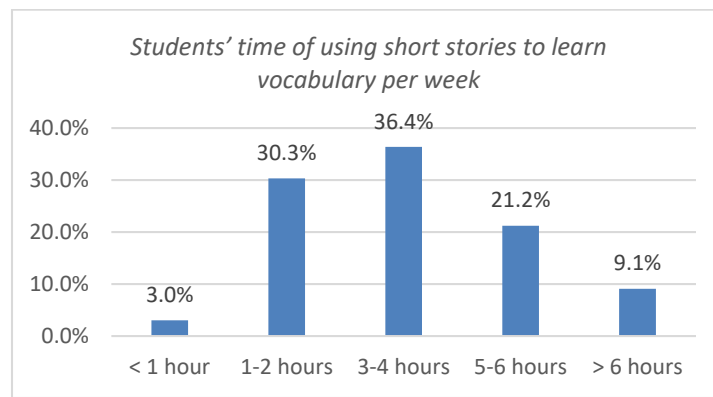


Figure 2. Students' time using short stories to learn vocabulary per week

One-third of the students spent from three to four hours a week learning vocabulary. Almost the same number only spent one or two hours a week. Only 9.1% spent more than 6 hours a week studying. Ultimately, there was a student who studied vocabulary for less than one hour a week. It could be concluded that most students spent insufficient time studying vocabulary.

**2.2. Students' interests in using short stories to learn English vocabulary after the trial teaching period**

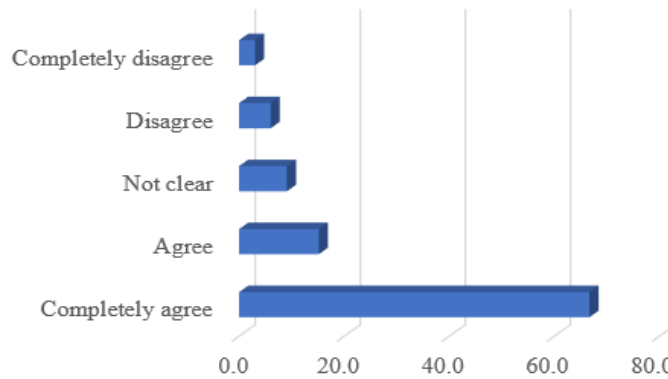


Figure 3. Students like using short stories in the vocabulary learning periods rather than the traditional methods

Looking at the above figure, it is clear that most of the students liked using short stories in the vocabulary learning periods. Only a small proportion of them disagreed with this view.

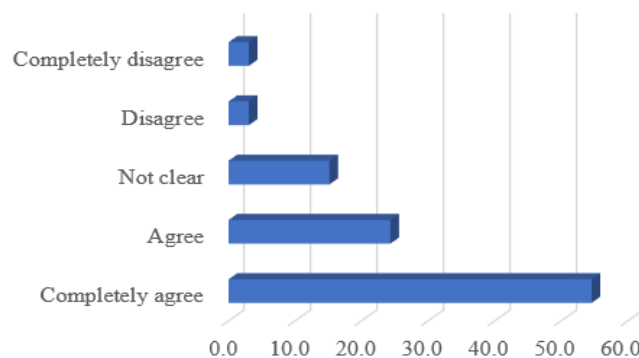


Figure 4. Using short stories in vocabulary learning periods makes the lessons more interesting

A similar number of students thought that the vocabulary learning process would be more interesting using short stories, but there was still a small proportion of the students who did not find learning vocabulary using short stories interesting.

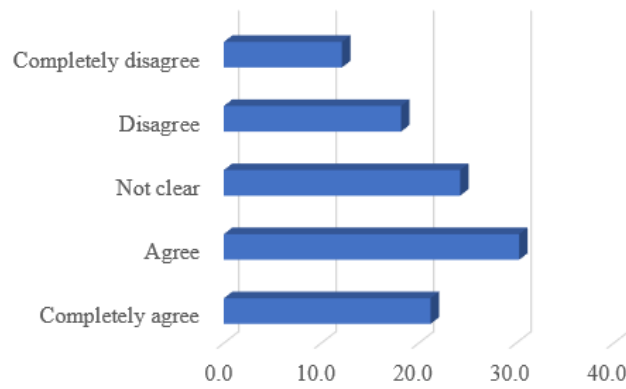


Figure 5. Using short stories helps me know how to use correct vocabulary in different contexts

Although 30.3% of the students who were surveyed declared that they did not know how to use correct vocabulary in different contexts, 51.5% of them agreed that they could use correct vocabulary in different contexts.

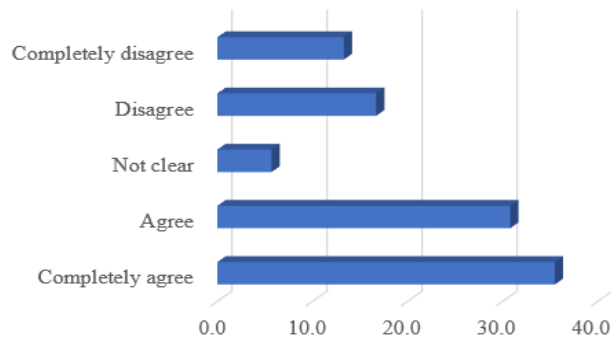


Figure 6. Using short stories helps the students memorize vocabulary more quickly

66.3% of the students reported that learning vocabulary using short stories helps them memorize the words more quickly and 30% of them disagree with this idea, they did not think using short stories will help them memorize the given vocabulary better.

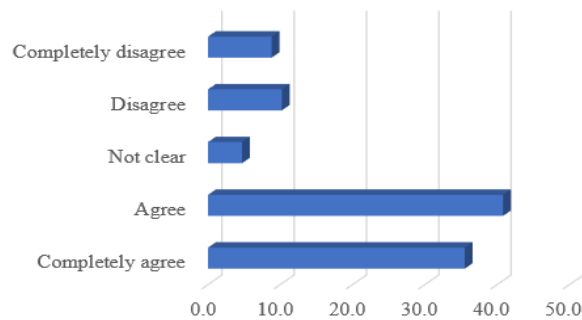


Figure 7. Using short stories helps students remember vocabulary longer

It could be seen that 76.3% of the students thought that using short stories in learning vocabulary would help them remember vocabulary longer and only 21% of these students did not agree with this idea.

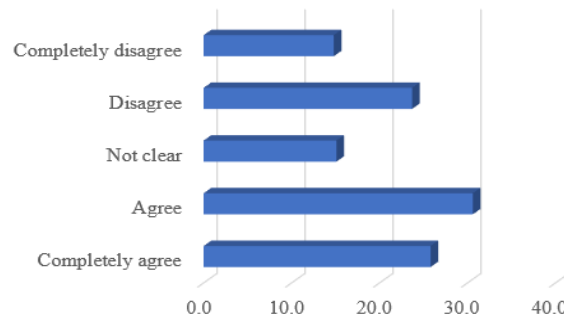


Figure 8. Learning vocabulary using short stories helps students know how to use more idioms

It seems that learning idioms is an important aspect of learning vocabulary, and 56.4% of the surveyed students agree that they could know how to use more idioms thank to using short stories to learn vocabulary. Meanwhile, 38.5% of the students claimed that they did not agree with this point of view.

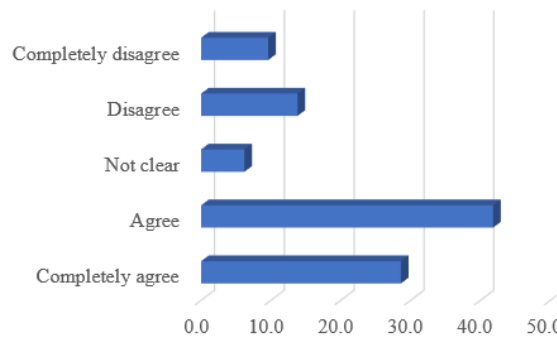


Figure 9. Learning vocabulary using short stories helps students predict the meanings of the words better

Most of the survey students (70.4%) agreed that when reading short stories, they had to guess or predict the meanings of the unknown words, so it would help them to predict the meanings of the words better. However, 23.4% of the students thought that learning vocabulary using short stories did not help them predict the meanings of the words better.

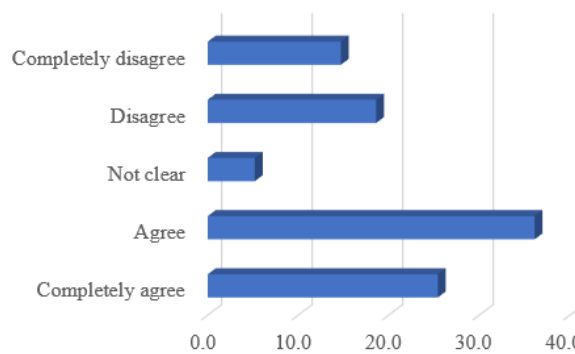


Figure 10. Learning vocabulary using short stories helps improve students' communication skills

The majority of the surveyed students (61.5%) believed that their communication skills were improved by learning vocabulary using short stories. Nevertheless, one-third of the students did not think that their communication skills were improved thanks to the process of learning vocabulary using short stories.

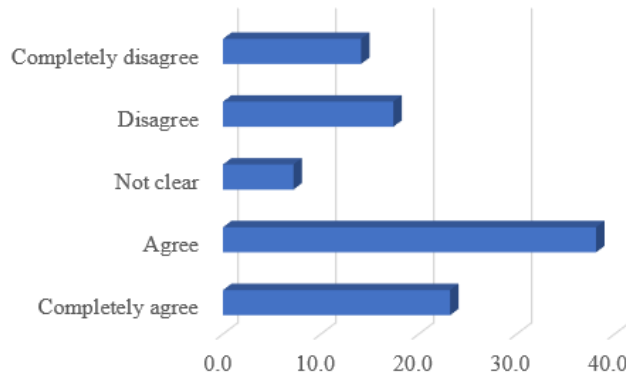


Figure 11. Learning vocabulary using short stories makes students feel more confident in communication

61.3% of the students thought that learning vocabulary using short stories makes them more confident in communication; on the other hand, 31.5% of the students did not agree, they did not think that learning vocabulary using short stories would make them feel more confident in communication.

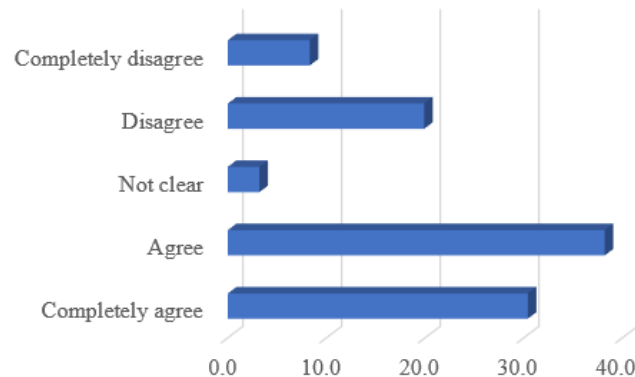


Figure 12. Learning vocabulary using short stories makes students more interested in learning vocabulary

69.2% of the students claimed that learning vocabulary using short stories makes students more interested in learning vocabulary, this means the new methods of learning vocabulary are more effective than the traditional ones. However, 28.2% of them still did not agree with this point of view.

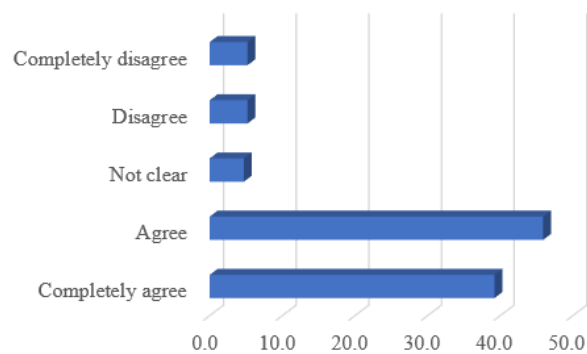


Figure 13. Students' interests in learning vocabulary using short stories

The majority of the surveyed students like learning vocabulary using short stories, accounting for 85.1% of the students and only 10.4% of them disagree with this idea.

In summary, based on the data collected from the post-questionnaire, students could recognize the benefits of using short stories in learning vocabulary. They also had positive attitudes and a great interest in learning vocabulary through short stories.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis of the findings, the following conclusions could be drawn:

##### 1. The current situation of learning English vocabulary for secondary students

Firstly, students had some difficulties learning English vocabulary. All of the challenges mentioned in the questionnaire (memorizing the pronunciation of the words, memorizing the spelling of the words, forgetting learned vocabulary, only remembering the Vietnamese meanings of the words, and selecting the suitable vocabulary to communicate) were selected by students with different numbers. The two most common challenges were selecting suitable vocabulary to communicate and remembering the spelling of the words.

Secondly, regarding the students' learning methods, the most common vocabulary learning method of students was looking up the word's meaning in the dictionary.

Besides, the current situation of using short stories in learning vocabulary was not really positive. Although two-thirds of the students have used short stories to learn vocabulary and the majority of students love stories, they did not apply them to learn vocabulary frequently (nearly half of the students occasionally, 18.2% seldom, and 6.1% even never used short stories to learn).

Furthermore, the time for studying vocabulary varied among students. While a small number spent more than 6 hours a week studying vocabulary, there were quite a lot of them just spent one or two hours a week. There were also 3% of them who spent less than one hour a week learning vocabulary.

In summary, students still had difficulties in learning vocabulary and most of them did not have useful plans to improve their vocabulary. This fact raised the need of finding effective ways to help them enhance their vocabulary.

## **2. How the use of short stories enhances vocabulary for secondary students**

Before the treatment, the students were let to take the pre-test. The results of the pre-test showed that students' vocabulary levels were quite low. The average score of the Pre-test was 17.4, only 2.4 points higher than the middle score. Over 42% of the students got the mid-score or under. Only 24.2% of the students got fair scores (65% to 80%) is 8 students, which is equivalent to 24.2%. Furthermore, the students who got excellent scores were only three.

After the time of using short stories in vocabulary lessons, based on the post-test, there was a considerable increase in the results of the students. Firstly, there is an increase of 5 points compared to the result of the pre-test (from 17.4 to 22.4). In contrast to the pre-test, with 14 students scoring below the mid-score (15), there were only 2 students in the post-test.

Thirteen students, or 39.3% of the respondents, received good or excellent marks, while one student received a perfect score of 30 accurate sentences. No one received this score on the pretest, therefore the percentage of 39.3% is notable.

The increases in students' achievement illustrated the great impact of using short stories in students' vocabulary learning process.

## **3. The students' attitudes toward using short stories in vocabulary lessons**

The results of the post-questionnaire survey show that the students have positive attitudes toward using short stories to learn vocabulary.

The majority of students enjoy including short stories in their vocabulary-learning sessions. A comparable proportion of students believed that using short stories makes learning vocabulary more engaging.

In addition, most of the students (85%) claimed that studying vocabulary through short stories is beneficial. All of the advantages listed in the post-questionnaire were approved by at least more than half of the students. Specifically,

51.5% of them said they could use appropriate words in various situations; 66.3 improved word memorization; 76.3% increased their vocabulary retention; 56.4% of the students could learn how to use more idioms; 70.4% felt they were better at guessing or forecasting the meanings of words; 61.5% communicated more effectively; 61.3% increased their communication confidence; 69.2% developed students' interest in the subject.

These figures indicate that the use of short stories in learning vocabulary is more successful than the traditional methods.

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