

Investigating EFL Students Perspective about Using Short Stories in Teaching Writing Skill

دراسة منظور طلبة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية حول استخدام القصة القصيرة في تدريس مهارة الكتابة

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- Abstract : There is nothing more precious for second and foreign language teachers and learners than experiencing language in authentic contexts. Recently, researchers and practitioners highly advocate the use of literary genres like short stories as a kind of authentic context for teaching language skills. Due to their fascinating pedagogical aspects, benefits and implications, researchers have recommended stories as an effective teaching tool. Grounding on this effectiveness, the present paper aims to investigate the use of short stories in teaching writing from the perspective of Algerian EFL students. It also examines their writing profile including their proficiencies, experiences, difficulties and strategies. The study targets answering two questions: 1. What is students' writing profile? 2. What is students' perspective about using short stories to teach writing? The study is conducted in the context of an Algerian university with sixty-nine third year students and makes use of a diagnostic test and a questionnaire. The obtained results indicate that writing proves to be a problem for the majority of students as they encounter serious difficulties in mechanics, vocabularies and ideas. Results also reveal that students do have positive attitudes towards using stories in teaching writing despite their poor experience and average proficiency in narrative genre writing. The study highly recommends the integration of literary genres like short stories into the English academic curriculum. The study findings, however, are thought to be directive for determining EFL students writing

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preferences and attitudes to conduct further research on appropriate strategies and programs to integrate short stories in teaching writing.

- **Keywords:** literature – narrative writing – short story genre – teaching writing – writing profile.

- **الملخص:** يعد اختبار اللغة في سياقاتها الأصلية أهم مسألة لدى معلمي ومتعلمي اللغة الأجنبية واللغة الثانية. وقد بات باحثو وممارسو اللغة يدعون مؤخرا لاستعمال الأجناس الأدبية كالقصة القصيرة كنوع من السياقات الأصلية لتعليم المهارات اللغوية. وقد اكتسبت القصة القصيرة بالغ الأهمية لدى عديد باحثي تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية حيث يوصون بها خاصة كوسيلة فعالة لتدريس وتعلم اللغة، نظرا لما تتمتع به من مزايا وتطبيقات وأنماط بيداغوجية أخاذة. واعتمادا على هذه الفعالية، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استقصاء استعمال القصة القصيرة في تدريس مهارات الكتابة من وجهة نظر طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بالجزائر. كما تعان مسار كتابتهم مشتتلا على تجاربهم واستراتيجياتهم والصعوبات التي تواجههم. وتسعى هذه الدراسة للإجابة على التساؤلين التاليين: ماذا يمثل مسار الكتابة لدى الطلبة وكفاءتهم في كتابة القصة القصيرة؟ وما منظور الطلبة حول استعمال القصة القصيرة لتدريس التعبير الكتابي؟ وقد تمت هذه الدراسة في إحدى الجامعات الجزائرية على عينة من تسعة وستين (69) طالبا في السنة الثالثة للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية حيث أجري عليهم اختبار تشخيصي و استبيان. وقد بينت النتائج المحصل عليها أن لدى الطلبة مواقف إيجابية حول استعمال القصة القصيرة في تدريس التعبير الكتابي، على الرغم من تجربتهم المتواضعة وكفاءتهم المتوسطة في نمط الكتابة السردية. وتوصي الدراسة بشدة بإدماج الأنماط الأدبية كالقصة القصيرة في منهاج تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية. أما عن نتائج الدراسة فتتوجه خاصة نحو تحديد ما رغبات ومواقف طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية في مقياس التعبير الكتابي للقيام بأبحاث أخرى حول الاستراتيجيات والبرامج المناسبة لإدماج القصة القصيرة في تدريس الكتابة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأدب – الكتابة السردية – نمط القصة القصيرة – تدريس التعبير الكتابي – مسار الكتابة.

1- Introduction:

Research in the second language (SL) and foreign language (FL) learning informs that literature and language are closely interconnected. They are inseparable as they constitute and serve each other. While language is the container of thought,

literature is the content of language. In other words, language is necessary to write and access to literature just as literature is important to present and teach language competences. Indeed, the rise of Communicative Language Teaching in 1980s giving credit to the use of authentic texts together with the growing interest related to the integrative approach in teaching language skills opened the way for literature to be reconsidered in language instruction. In essence, the communicative approach in language teaching advocates the use of authentic language as it is used in a real-life context, and literature affords good opportunity for exposure to real language and context. Likewise, the integrative approach encourages the implementation of literary texts in teaching language skills.

Following this paradigm, research in SL and FL teaching has supported the convergence and integration of English language and literature, which became a continuing concern in modern language teaching. This approach has attracted the interest of practitioners and researchers alike and more studies on how to implement literature in EFL/ESL classes were conducted. Prominent researchers have shown an increased interest in exploring essential issues in using literary texts as language tools (Kramsch, 1985; Littlewood, 1986; Brumfit and Carter, 1986; Collie and Slater, 1987; Oster, 1989; Lazar, 1993). They point out that the incorporation of literary works written in English into English curriculum can develop the four skills and raise cultural awareness among second and foreign language learners. Such integration is particularly effective in assisting learners improve in one of the most frustrating and exacting skills which is writing. Stern (2001) in a more confident tone argues that exposing students to literary content improves their writing.

Researchers provide more evidence on the importance of literature in teaching language and improving learners' writing. Ideally, being intended for native speakers, literary authentic texts are models for language learners to explore different linguistic uses, forms and conventions of the written mode (Collie & Slater, 1987). According to Oster (1989), teachers can model different genres, and students can explore language

in context, learn to generate ideas and to write more creatively when literature is implemented in writing classes. They can further gain additional familiarity with the genre in focus as well as with native speakers' life and culture. This claim has been supported by researchers who maintain that integrating literary reading in teaching writing is very advantageous enhancing learners' writing (Blanchard, 1988; Carson et al., 1990; Stern, 2001; Grabe, 2003; Hervila, 2004). Yet, not all literary genres are practically suitable for EFL writing classes. Considering the particular situation of teaching English in foreign context, Murdoch (2002) emphasizes that short stories are suitable pedagogical tools to integrate language skills like reading and writing for better learning.

Hence, from the body of literature (e.g., Oster, 1989; Murdoch, 2002; Erkaya, 2005; Pardede, 2011; Ibnian, 2013; Pathan, 2013), the short story is recognized as the most appealing literary genre. In pedagogical theory and among researchers, there is strong support for the short story approach because stories are by nature attractive and motivational carrying aspects of cognitive, linguistic, and cultural diversity. From a broad perspective, short stories are energizers teaching life lessons, providing moral value systems and sometimes shaping beliefs and attitudes. By reading short stories, students immerse themselves in a world of imagination and explore the art and craft of writing in English.

Principally, awareness of the gains of including literature into language teaching programs and the use of literary texts in classroom to promote learners' writing and to stimulate creative thinking has expanded innovative views and perspectives towards teaching writing through literature. The story approach is one of the innovative models of integrating literature in teaching writing and other language skills. In the light of the researcher's observations and experience in the field of English language teaching, very few teachers at university implement short stories in their writing classes. Some teachers are sceptical because they think stories are materials for teaching creative writing, which is not included in the curriculum as a subject matter.

Another possible reason is instructors' lack of motivation, knowledge, training and guidance to exploit literary texts. The result is a mechanical approach to writing characterized by paramount emphasis on teaching about good writing to have students' product correct instead of exposing them to good models of writing from the literary genres they appreciate. Consequently, students lack the impulse to write about their life experiences and dreams.

Despite the importance of short stories in enhancing language learning, little concern is devoted to this component in Algerian teaching programs especially at university. Likewise, research in Algeria in the field of English language teaching does not allocate much attention to the role of short stories in developing language skills especially writing. Hence, this study attempts to address these limitations and contribute to the development of a new paradigm in research writing agenda in Algeria based on a short story pedagogy in teaching writing at university. As such, this paper explores the use of the short story in teaching writing from the perspective of a sample of Algerian third year students. The study also aims at examining students' profile in writing skill to understand the teaching learning situation of writing. To this end, two research questions are investigated:

- What is students' writing profile?
- What is students' perspective about using short stories to teach writing?

2- The use of literature in teaching language and writing

Literature has been strongly recommended in EFL classes for its countless benefits for the target language learning. Collie and Slater (1987) are among the proponents of literature inclusion in language classes who affirm that literature encourages learners' positive engagement, provides valuable source of authentic materials, and contributes to the enrichment of readers' culture and language. Likewise, Kramsch (1985) and Lazar (1993) suggest that literature can be considered as valuable resource of motivating material that would provide access to cultural background. Lazar (1993, p. 18) further explains that literary texts supply the students

with some cultural knowledge about the target language and its use in context and helps in interpretation. She maintains that teaching literature stimulates the imagination of learners, develops their critical abilities and expands their language and emotional awareness. Khatib et al. (2011) have also supported the view that literature can be a rich source for nurturing our “emotional quotient”. Explaining the rationale of using literature in teaching language, Collie and Slater (1987) defend the importance of literature stating that literary texts enable EFL students to learn authentic English and understand the cultural norms and values of native speakers.

Literature as an ally of language (Brumfit and Carter, 1986) and a source of content knowledge has been used largely in modern ELT through incorporating literary text reading in teaching writing. In this sense, Stern (2001) identifies two major uses for literature. Teachers can implement literary texts as subject matters or as writing models. The first use is concerned with students’ analysis and interpretation of the literary works they read, whereby the second use is meant for exposing students to authentic writing models from literature to help them develop their writing and produce samples that resemble the experts’ works in terms of content, structure or style. Using literature to model good writing is also one of the benefits of literature-based instruction listed by Collie and Slater (1987).

Despite the advantages of using literature in teaching language skills like writing, researchers admit that there are major challenges that need to shed light on. Implementing literary works in writing classes is a challenge for ESL and EFL teachers and students mainly at the levels of literary knowledge and language (Lazar, 1993), linguistic complexity, and cultural connotation (Collie and Slater, 1987). Teachers who lack the required literary background and pedagogical experience will find themselves inevitably facing serious problems in selecting, preparing, and presenting literary texts and activities targeted for teaching language in the classroom. They find it difficult to cope between lecture’s objectives and focus and students’ proficiency level on the one hand, and literary text content and language on the other hand. The task becomes

more daunting for teachers if students are not motivated because they are poor in English, they do not have the necessary background in literature, or because they have negative attitudes towards reading (literature) and writing in English. For most foreign learners, literary texts are typically difficult to decipher due to the use of literary language and figurative meanings. Hence, encouraging literary reading among learners at early learning stages is necessary to improve their linguistic and literary competency and better interact with literary texts.

It is vital to point out that one of the major values for exposing EFL students to literary texts is its cultural content. Short stories, for instance, like all literary texts are culturally loaded materials. Such texts offer language learners the chance for cultural understanding, cultural tolerance and most importantly intercultural enrichment. Eventually this leads to learners' open-mindedness. Nevertheless, the target language culture can be problematic for students and teachers alike who are reluctant to some English literary texts that carry an undesirable freight of cultural and religious connotations. This is especially the case for conservative societies where the target language culture is perceived as a threat to the learner's cultural identity. For this reason, the careful selection of the literary pieces on the part of the teacher is requisite.

3- The use of short stories in EFL teaching:

Among literary genres that are very advantageous in EFL teaching and motivating in improving the four skills is the short story (Collie and Slater, 1987; Lazar, 1993; Stern, 2001; Murdoch, 2002; Erkaya, 2005; Pardede, 2011). Implementing short stories in language classes is one of the widely known instructional approaches used in ELT to increase learners' motivation, involvement and creativity. It is the literary genre that enables learners explore and practice a wide range of ideas, vocabularies, sentence structures, and artistic expressions. Researchers who recommend the utilization of the short story consider it as the lens through which learners can see the whole world's diversity, simplicity and complexity and having it brought to the classroom and transformed into settings, characters, events, conflicts and resolutions.

Being a created world, the short story increases the foreign learner's insight into the target language and its society. In accordance with these ideas, Collie and Slater (1987) highlight the benefits of the short story:

It offers a full and vivid context in which characters from many social backgrounds can be depicted. A reader can discover their thoughts, feelings, customs, possessions; what they buy, believe in, fear, enjoy; how they speak and behave behind closed doors. This vivid imagined world can quickly give the foreign reader a feel for the codes and preoccupations that structure a real society. (p. 6).

Likewise, Lazar (1993) affirms that literary genres like short stories enhance EFL learners' cognitive, linguistic and social skills, and assist in expanding their cultural awareness and fostering educational moral values. Likewise, Pathan (2012) and Pathan (2013) stress the role of short stories in developing not only learners' language skills but also their moral characters. On the same vein, Erkaya (2005) advocates using short stories in teaching English for their cognitive, literary, cultural and motivational benefits.

The studies carried out in contexts where Arabic is the mother tongue reveal that using stories at class assists instructors to teach the four language skills to all levels of language proficiency. Pathan (2012, p. 31) goes further and states that in foreign language teaching situations, where learners often have negative attitudes towards reading in English, short stories can attract learners' attention spans and transfer these negative attitudes into positive ones. Before the introduction of short story reading, 70% of Libyan EFL learners, who participated in Pathan's descriptive study, did not like to read in English for its difficulty in one hand and their low language proficiency on the other hand. After using short story reading technique in class for three months, 94% of the sample said that they enjoyed reading in English.

Investigating the same issue of short story role in improving reading in English in the same setting and following the same methodology as Pathan (2012), Pathan

and Al-Dersi (2013) administered questionnaires to a larger sample (100 students) and came out with a detailed description to learners' reading comprehension problems. The study revealed that short stories were praised as one of the effective remedial teaching tools to overcome these problems and enrich students' linguistic, socio-cultural, personal and emotional experiences.

Pardede (2011) provided a valuable critical account about the effectiveness of using short stories in EFL instruction, the criteria for selecting a story and how to exploit a short story to enhance students' language skills. Accordingly, he pointed out that short stories seem to be the most suitable choice to help students enhance the four skills - listening, speaking, reading and writing - more effectively because of their motivational benefit (Ibid, p. 14). For many students, literature can be an impulse to read and write in English.

3.1- The use of short stories in teaching writing:

The idea that short stories are one of the most appropriate literary genres to teach ESL/EFL skills is supported by the practice-based studies undertaken by Ibnian, 2010; Pathan, 2012; Pathan and Al-Dersi, 2013; Saeed Adam, 2015; Ibnian and Al Samadani, 2015 and others. Their findings explain and validate the use of short stories in teaching language skills. They agree that the short story not only permits students acquire different literary devices, vocabularies, language styles and functions, but it offers copious opportunities to familiarize the language learner with others' life experiences, beliefs, ethics and cultures across different places and times. That is, the real vivid language, strong emotions and attitudes, rich ideas and events contained in the short story affect the learner and deepen his knowledge about world cultures, enable him to better understand others' way of living and thinking, and raise his awareness of the literary language. Moreover, students can make use of the experiences and skills acquired from short story reading and incorporate them into their own writing.

Furthermore, reading stories can be a fertile source of motivation for foreign learners to write and can generate positive attitudes towards writing in the target language (Stern, 2001). In support to Stern's point of view, Pardede (2011, p. 21) asserts that "Short story can be a powerful and motivating source for writing in ESL/EFL, both as a model and as a subject matter. Moreover, short stories are useful in classroom context as they are not much time consuming and can be grasped when read and covered when written by EFL learners.

Ibnian (2010, p. 182) maintains that, "short story writing forces students to discipline their writing, emphasize consciousness and sharpen grammar skills" and even their thinking skills. Moreover, stories provide learners with authentic contexts for English language use. Worthily, the study done by Saeed Adam (2015) provides evidence about the role of short stories in developing students' imagination and strengthening thinking when writing. He attempted to correlate between teaching short stories and enhancement of 60 students' narrative writing. He compared between the narrative writing performance in the post test of 30 students from the experimental group, who received short stories instruction, and that of 30 students from the control group, who are not included in the experiment.

The test result in Saeed Adam's (2015) study showed a significant difference between pre-test and post-test of the experimental group. The mean in the pre-test was 9.50 while in the post-test was 15.00. The progress in the post-test narrative writing was attributed to the use of short stories. It should be noted, however, that grammar accuracy was not included in the evaluation grid adopted by Saeed Adam despite its relevance for EFL writing. He limited his assessment to the content features of students' narrative essays such as protagonist and antagonist, point of view, use and format dialogue, description of setting, events, and resolution.

3.2- Important considerations in using short stories in writing classes:

In order to ensure that short stories are working effectively as teaching materials in writing classes, researchers hint that teachers need to consider some

important criteria in selection and implementation. Among them are issues in relation to the learner, the short story, and the writing course objectives. All these issues are interrelated. In selecting story material, teachers primarily need to diagnose students' writing strategies, difficulties and preferences as well as their objectives and expectations. Knowing their experience in reading and writing stories and their views about using this genre in teaching writing is also a pre-requisite condition to respond to learners' needs.

Hill (1994) outlines some criteria for short story selection that concurs with khatib et al.'s (2011) general factors for literary selection and Lazar's (1993). suggestion for English teachers when implementing literature in the classroom. They stress the importance of considering learners' interests and needs, language proficiency, and background knowledge and culture. Among the criteria Hill (1994) suggests when selecting a narrative text are students' abilities and needs, story's linguistic and stylistic level of complexity, and the required schemata for a true appreciation of the text.

Students usually read and write about themes that are relevant to their interest and proficiency. In this respect, Nation (2009), Pardede (2011) and Pathan (2012) strongly stress the use of graded or simplified stories that are suitable for the level of students in a second or foreign language environment to avoid struggling with lexical difficulties and grammar complexities. If the teacher wants to help learners promote their writing skills, Nation (2009, p. 95) suggests that he/she has to "get them to work on writing tasks that will take them beyond their present level of proficiency". This view goes hand in hand with Krashen's (1981) Input Theory in which he declares that acquisition or learning takes place when the learner comprehends language at a level just beyond that of his current state of knowledge or competency. Lazar (1993) adds that learners' age, intellectual maturity and emotional understanding are decisive for students to appreciate and enjoy what they read.

Indeed, appropriate short story selection provides students with samples of well -selected authentic reading materials that do not contradict students' social, religious and cultural background. These materials should fit the learner's interest and proficiency level and should articulate the qualities of skilled writing. In this way, the short story samples can be utilised for modelling in the input from which learners inspire themes and ideas, learn new vocabularies and expressions, explore different writing styles, and experience life through the lens of different characters in different settings and events. To sum up, teachers in EFL contexts particularly need to select short stories in accordance with students' general language proficiency and writing level, writing preferences and attitudes, cultural background as well as with the writing syllabus and course objectives. Nowadays, it is difficult to claim that there is a shortage of short stories with good writing quality. On the contrary, the over-availability of short stories sometimes cause dilemma for teachers when making selection and adaptation.

4- Method:

This study is part of a research project about teaching the writing skill through literature among students majored in English language and literature in M'sila university. It is used as a pre-writing course design tool and conducted with 69 fifth semester EFL students (third-year level). The researcher opts the descriptive method to understand the current situation of teaching and learning writing and to identify participants' needs and attitudes. The data was collected through students' questionnaire and a diagnostic test. Participants were given questionnaires consisting thirteen items to elicit information about -a) their writing skill profile including proficiency level, purpose, focus, preferences, difficulties and strategies; -b) Their perceptions towards the use of short stories for developing writing skill. The test, however, was administered to gauge students existing proficiency in writing in general and in narrative writing in particular.

Out of 69 students, 53 participants sat for the test for 60 minutes and were required to write their own version of "The Little Match Girl" story. The test achievements were graded holistically according to the essential four dimensions of writing skill: Relevant fluent ideas, logical organization, correct language and appropriate use of mechanics. Four categories were used to classify students writing performance level on the light of test score that ranges on a four points scale from 0 to 20. The data obtained from the two tools are analysed quantitatively using frequency and percentage values.

5- Results and discussion:

This section discusses and interprets the main results obtained from the diagnostic test and the questionnaire in order to answer the stated two research questions the study is set for. First, the researcher discusses the results in relation to the first research question, which deals with participants' general profile in writing skill. Second, she reports and interprets data to answer the second research question about informants' perspective pertaining to the use of the short story genre in teaching writing.

5.1- Students' writing profile:

Below are results in relation to the first research question. This includes discussing data and reporting the study findings about participants' writing proficiency level, purpose, focus, preferences, difficulties and strategies.

5.1.1- Sample's writing proficiency level:

The first component of students' writing profile is their writing proficiency. It is examined using the diagnostic test and cross- checked through the questionnaire. As shown in table 1 bellow, informants' mean score in the diagnostic test is 9.4340 with standard deviation $SD= 2.08944$. The participants' lowest score is 6, and the highest score is 14.5. The mean is slightly below average reflecting students' relative deficiency in writing. Results of the diagnostic test reveal that students writing in

general is not to the expected level of third year whose performance indicate a very modest handle of the writing skill qualities required.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the diagnostic test

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Diagnostic test	53	9.4340	2.08944	6.00	14.50

As read in table 2 bellow, diagnostic test results indicate that only 15.09% of the participants display good writing, while no one proves to be neither excellent nor very poor writer. Nearly half of the informants are average writers (47.16%), and 37.73% of them are poor writers (see appendix A for detailed scores). This result confirms that writing still poses problems to these students probably due to poor exposure, limited practice, and lack of motivation.

In responding to the first question about participants' introspective data about their writing proficiency which are crucial for their motivation and performance (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Hidi, et al. 2007), 71.01% of them consider themselves as being average, and 20.28% think they are good writers. Those who perceive themselves as being poor writers are only 8.69%. However, no informant believes his/her writing is very poor or excellent. When comparing these results in table 2 below to the ones of the test in the same table, little correlation is found between students' self-belief about their writing level and their actual performance in the diagnostic test. This might be due to the gap between teacher's evaluation and student's self- evaluation and perception. The latter is not objective and scientific most of the time. Graham and his colleagues (1993) explain that sometimes young students overestimate or may not be able to assess their writing abilities accurately. They may also be misled by the good marks they got in written expression module.

Table 2. Participants' writing proficiency

Writing proficiency levels	self-evaluation		diagnostic test	
	N	%	N	%
Excellent	00	00	00	00
Good	14	20.28	08	15.09
Average	49	71.01	25	47.16
Poor	6	8.69	20	37.73
Very poor	00	00	00	00
Total	69	100	53	100

5.1.2- Students' writing skill:

The second component of the writing profile students are asked about is their writing purpose. To this question, 75.36% of the informants respond that their aim is to improve their writing and 71.01% of them write to practice language (item 2, appendix B). One can understand that they strongly believe in "practice makes perfect" since exposure to English is limited and their chances to practice writing are poor (just one hour and half per week). Few participants mention that they write in order to do assignments. This is either because they are not discipline and serious about their learning duties or because their teachers of writing are not issuing much writing tasks and assignments. However, informants' modest concern with writing for pleasure, which is one of the useful sources for initiative learning, can be attributed to poor motivation, poor lexis, and modest linguistic proficiency.

As for writing focus, 63.76% of the students assert that they primarily focus on generating and organizing good ideas, and 21.73% of them check grammar accuracy (item 3, appendix C). However, selecting appropriate vocabularies and inserting punctuation and spelling prove to be secondary issues for them. That is, the main concern of EFL learners at university is finding interesting ideas and expressing them correctly. This makes sense when taking into account teachers' evaluation focus that considers both form and content. Accordingly, students prioritize ideas and

organization to show appropriate content and good flow and care about grammar to ensure accuracy.

Table 3. Participants' writing preferences

Item 4. Writing preferences	N	%
Stories	23	33.33
Notes	19	27.53
Messages	16	23.18
Poems	8	11.59
Argumentative texts	3	4.34
Total	69	100

Another important factor that has a significant influence on informants' writing skill profile is their writing preferences. Students' top choice as illustrated in table 3 above goes to short stories (33.33%) followed by taking notes and texting messages (27.53%, and 23.18% respectively). Few students show interest in writing poems and argumentative texts. Although assessment in different subjects requires students to write argumentatively, it is still a demanding task for most of them. It requires writer's skill of elaboration and persuasion. This task calls for students' ability to transfer beliefs into knowledge, to analyse and restructure facts to establish evidence and to present arguments and counterarguments to support different opinions. Many of these argumentation skills are actually challenging to students who may not try them unless they have to.

Writing short stories, however, can be seen as less frightening since students will narrate about life experiences using their own ideas and style that are not necessarily subject to teacher's evaluation. Students are in fact naturally inclined to write about their feelings and daily life events. Harmer (2001) goes further arguing that "when teachers set up imaginative writing tasks so that their students are thoroughly engaged, those students frequently strive harder than usual to produce a greater variety of correct and adequate language than they might for more routine

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assignments" (p. 259). Students make greater efforts to generate good ideas and use precise words and artistic style in creative writing tasks than they do in other tasks. For this reason, the inclusion of the short story genre writing at university as a source of motivation and an impulse for creation among students is recommended.

Table 4. Students writing difficulties and strategies

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
Item 5. Students writing difficulties	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
a. starting writing	3	4.34	9	13.04	26	37.68	26	37.68	5	7.24
b- developing ideas	1	1.44	16	23.18	31	44.92	20	28.98	1	1.44
c- organizing ideas logically	5	7.24	11	15.94	24	34.68	24	34.68	5	7.24
d- finding appropriate vocabularies and sentence structures	3	4.34	18	26.08	43	62.31	5	7.24	00	00
e- finding the right expressions	3	4.34	12	17.39	48	69.56	6	8.69	00	00
f- using appropriate spelling and punctuation	8	11.59	13	18.84	31	44.92	13	18.84	4	5.79
Item 6. students writing strategies										
a- brainstorming	25	36.23	21	30.43	12	17.39	9	13.04	2	2.89
b- planning	6	8.69	22	31.88	24	34.68	14	20.28	3	4.34
c- proofreading	31	44.92	27	39.13	8	11.59	3	4.34	00	00
d- peer-reading	4	5.79	13	18.84	25	36.23	17	24.63	10	14.49
e- editing	33	47.82	23	33.33	4	5.79	8	11.59	1	1.44
f- further revision	11	15.94	20	28.98	20	28.98	15	21.73	3	4.34

What is striking in table 4 above about writing difficulties is that most respondents have neutral attitudes. This could be interpreted either as lack of awareness of the difficulties they encounter while writing or as inability to detect them. Teachers know that students face immense problems while trying to voice out the ideas and meanings they have in mind into correct written English. From students' perspective, poor mastery of mechanics together with poor lexicology shaped their major difficulty in writing. These writing traits, however receive poor attention on the part of students as discussed earlier (see item 3, appendix C). In addition to language deficiency, participants state that developing ideas coherently is also problematic for them.

Usually, the difficulty in spelling and punctuation for students stems either from over focus on content, or from the little matching between the sound and the

letter systems in English language which is different from Arabic language system. The shortage of lexicon indicated by informants which can be attributed to lack of reading and poor exposure to English creates a major obstacle preventing learners from expressing themselves comprehensively. Hence, encouraging students to read and write using practical motives like extra marks for students reading out of the class will enrich their vocabulary, spelling, and knowledge bank.

Regarding the sixth statement about basic process writing application, findings in table 4 reveal that participants frequently use editing, proofreading, and brainstorming strategies while poorly make use of strategies like peer -reading and planning. The only deduction one makes here is that students lack considerable knowledge and training on writing strategies because teachers themselves who are constrained by time and syllabus focus on the writing product at the expense of the writing process.

5.2- Students' perspective about the use of short stories in teaching writing:

The second research question is based on a set of questions about the perspectives and attitudes of third year students on the use of short story as literary teaching resource to enhance their writing skill. With reference to results spotted in table 5 bellow, we find that some participants (36.23%) are very keen to improve their writing depending on learning about writing theories and techniques trusting the theoretical knowledge. Actually, this is the method students are familiar with resulting in the preponderance of teaching about writing instead of teaching writing through authentic writing models from literature.

Certainly, teaching writing through writing theories and techniques can increase students' content knowledge about the skill but not necessarily leading to improvement in their writing. Students (34.68%) who believe in practice and like to change routine and bring excitement and newness to the classroom prefer develop writing through reading and writing short stories. This last result is in agreement with Brumfit and Carter's (1986) conclusion that short stories are useful as attractive tools

and alternatives to boring materials in ELT classrooms. It is also in line with the finding of Collie and Slater (1987) and Murdudh (2002) who defend the suitability of this genre for ELT classrooms and for all proficiency levels especially intermediate.

Table 5. Students views about ways to improve writing skill

Item 7. Appropriate ways to improve writing according to students	N	%
Learning about writing theories and techniques	25	36.23
Reading and writing short stories	24	34.68
Having more opportunities to write	14	20.28
Having reading tasks in writing course	6	8.69
Total	69	100

When asked about their most preferred literary genre, more than half of the students (59.42%) opt for short stories as shown in table 6 bellow. This seems evident considering the natural attractiveness of the concept of story and its countless learning benefits. They find stories more stimulating than other genres. Students, however, display poor interest in other literary genres like novels, drama (plays), and poetry. Unlike novels and plays that are long to read and poems that are difficult to understand even for natives, short stories are practical and accessible for most EFL learners. This is in line with Pathan's (2012) argument that stories are good ways for learners to release their own feelings and strengthen their motives for creative writing. In essence, what learners acquire through narratives exceeds language and ideas to life domains, human experiences, cultural and moral values, and imaginative worlds. For all these benefits, informants love short stories.

Table 6. Students' literary genre preferences

Item 8: literary genre preferences	N	%
Short Story	41	59.42
Novel	13	18.84
Drama	9	13.04
Poetry	6	8.69
Total	69	100

The stories students like reading and writing are mostly about love, fiction and mystery, adventure, and morals (57.97%, 55.07%, and 42.02% respectively). Participants are drawn to love stories because love is one of the common universal themes that allows readers experience wonderful feelings and permits writers portray and share personal or imaginative emotions. Knowing that sample's age ranges between 21 and 23 years old, we understand informants' desire for romance, mystery, and adventure as a means of escapism. Algerian students are accustomed to moral stories at home and at school from their childhood, and they seem to be attached to this type of stories to satisfy their spiritual needs. However, writing and reading about tragedy, horror, and humour themes are not much attractive for participant (item9, appendix D).

As far as their awareness of the short story genre is concerned, students think of generating creative ideas and following a clear narrative structure with some care about accuracy as the indicators of good narrative writing. They consider using descriptive language and selecting words as secondary issues for writing a good short story (item 10, appendix E). Surprisingly, no of the students' choices goes to punctuation, spelling and capitalization matters when writing a short story whereby mechanics proved to be participants' most frequent difficulty according to their responses to item 5 (table 4). Although, students are not trained on creative writing, they exhibit some awareness of the short story genre writing, but with over focus on ideas and organization that unfortunately make them ignore about the style and form.

Table 7. Students' attitudes towards the short story genre

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Item 11. I often read short stories in English	1	1.44	7	10.14	27	39.13	31	44.92	3	4.34
Item 12. I often write short stories in English	1	1.44	1	1.44	15	21.73	35	50.72	17	24.63
Item 13. I think short stories help me improve my writing	28	40.57	36	52.17	4	5.79	00	00	1	1.44

As read in table 7 above, informants' practical experience in reading and writing short stories is very poor. Only 10.14% agree with statement "I often read stories in English", while 44.92% of them disagree with it. More than half (50.72%) of the informants disagree with the statement "I often write short stories), and 1.44% of them disagree with it. Interestingly, the study findings show students' strong positive attitudes to short stories on the one hand (see tables 3 and 6), and their poor narrative reading and writing in practice on the other hand. This means they do not make use of their interest in short stories to increase their narrative reading and writing.

One of the factors that contributes to students' poor reading and writing is lack of motivation from their teachers, which results in students' finite writing production state. Data in table 7 also show that students practice reading more than writing. This result partially fosters Hirvela's (2004) finding that English language learners prefer to read while generally dislike writing in their L1 as well as in the target language. Instructors' role then is to encourage their students read and write stories in order to develop their reading-writing habits and to gain insight into the different linguistic, cultural, and social components of the target language.

Students' perspective about the role of short stories in enhancing their writing is very positive as more than 92% of them either strongly agree or agree with the proposition "I think stories help me improve my writing". For the countless benefits already discussed in this paper, third year EFL students in Msila university believe in

using stories as a practical means to overcome their writing problems. Worthily, this result confirms participants positive attitudes towards the story genre expressed when answering items 4, 7, and 8 (see tables 2 and 5 and appendix E). Moreover, the result confirms findings from previous studies that asserted that EFL students held positive attitudes towards using short stories to teach writing (Lazar, 1993; Murdoch, 2002; Ibranian, 2010; Pardede, 2011; Khatib et al., 2012).

6- Conclusion

The present study was designed to explore Algerian EFL students' writing matters and investigate their views about using short stories to enhance writing. Results related to participants' profile in writing reveal that little match is found between students' self- evaluation and their writing proficiency level which ranges from poor to average. Training students then on using self-evaluation grid in writing can bridge the gap between learners and teachers' evaluation and encourage partnership in writing classes. According to questionnaire and test data, writing proves to be a problem for the majority of students who encounter serious difficulties in writing matters like inserting spelling and punctuation, finding vocabularies, and developing ideas. To deal with these difficulties in writing, students focus on ideas and organization aspects and make use of a range of strategies with editing and proof-reading being the most frequent. Teachers here are recommended to raise their students' awareness of the relevance of writing strategies by engaging them in process writing tasks.

The study also informs that students like writing stories but fail to turn out their interest in short story genre into narrative reading and writing practice. The overall findings of the study reveal that the students enrolled in third year in EFL department at M'sila University do have positive attitudes towards using short stories as a literary genre in teaching writing. Worthily, they consider short stories as a helpful component in improving their writing. This is consistent with finding from several studies namely

the ones conducted by Collie & Slater, 1987; Oster, 1989; Lazar, 1993; Murdoch, 2002; Pardede, 2011; Ibnian, 2010; Khatib et al., 2012; Saeed Adam, 2015).

Based on the present study findings, the researcher recommends the pedagogical system at university to bring back literary texts and short stories into the writing classes. Importantly, instructors can build on students' positive attitudes and encourage story reading and writing habits by providing a supportive interesting learning atmosphere. An appropriate learning environment in writing classes should be characterised by integrating authentic literary texts like stories while taking into consideration students' proficiency, interest, culture and background. Teachers can make use of these stories both as reading materials and as models of good writing. Undoubtedly, the cognitive, cultural, social and linguistic experiences embedded in short stories will increase students' motivation in reading and writing skills, raise their awareness of the genre, and enhance their writing.

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Writing Skill

Appendices

Appendix A. Diagnostic test results

students	diagnostic test/20	students	diagnostic test/20
S1	10	S28	7.5
S2	7.5	S29	11.5
S3	8	S30	13
S4	9.5	S31	7.5
S5	8	S32	7
S6	12.5	S33	8
S7	7.5	S34	8
S8	11.5	S35	13.5
S9	7	S36	9
S10	8	S37	10.5
S11	14.5	S38	8.5
S12	11	S39	9
S13	8	S40	7.5
S14	8.5	S41	14
S15	9	S42	8
S16	6	S43	8
S17	10	S44	10
S18	7	S45	8
S19	12.5	S46	10
S20	8.5	S47	9
S21	13	S48	8.5
S22	7	S49	9
S23	10.5	S50	9
S24	11.5	S51	10.5
S25	9.5	S52	12.5
S26	11.5	S53	9
S27	6.5		

Appendix B. Item2.Writing purpose

	Mentioned %	Not mentioned %
To improve my writing	75.36	24.64
To practice language	71.01	28.99
To do my assignments	40.58	59.42
For pleasure	30.43	69.57

Appendix C

Item 3. Writing focus	N	%
Ideas and organization	44	63.76
Grammar accuracy	15	21.73
Vocabulary selection	6	8.69
Spelling and punctuation	4	5.79
Total	69	100

Appendix D

Item 9. Narrative reading and writing preferences	N	%
Love	40	57.97
Fiction & mystery	38	55.07
Morals	29	42.02
Adventure	29	42.02
Tragedy	26	37.68
Horror	26	37.68
Humour	10	14.49

Appendix E

Item 10: story writing aspects	N	%
Creative ideas & narrative structure	40	57.97
Grammar accuracy	16	23.18
Description & style	8	11.59
Vocabularies & expressions	5	7.24
Mechanics	0	0
Total	69	100