

**The Effectiveness of Using Short Stories in Improving
Listening and Speaking Skills for Undergraduate Students
at the Faculty of Education in Gharyan**

Najah Moftah Al-Kamishi*

Department of English Language, Faculty of Education, University of Gharyan, Libya

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 26-04-2026

Accepted: 15-05-2026

Published: 02-06-2026

Keywords. Short Stories,
Listening Skills, Speaking
Skills, EFL, Quasi-
Experimental,
Undergraduate Students,
Gharyan.

ABSTRACT

This study examined the effectiveness of using short stories in developing listening and speaking skills among undergraduate students at the Faculty of Education in Gharyan. The study adopted a quasi-experimental mixed-methods approach, integrating a pre-test/post-test non-equivalent control group design with a qualitative case study component, using SPSS version 23. Mean scores for listening skills ranged from (1.96–2.96) with a general mean of (2.74); the general mean for speaking skills was (2.87). A one-sample t-test confirmed that students' perceptions were significantly positive: $t = 12.73$ for listening and $t = 7.07$ for speaking ($\text{sig} \leq 0.05$). Additionally, 93% of students held positive attitudes toward using short stories. Qualitative analysis showed that experimental group students demonstrated deeper comprehension and more nuanced responses than control group students. The study recommends integrating short stories into English language curricula and developing teacher training programs on story-based instruction.

المخلص .

تناولت هذه الدراسة فعالية استخدام القصص القصيرة في تنمية مهارات الاستماع والتحدث لدى طلبة المرحلة الجامعية بكلية التربية في غريان. اعتمدت الدراسة على منهج المزج بين الأساليب الكمية والنوعية باستخدام التصميم شبه التجريبي القائم على الاختبار القبلي والبعدي، مع استخدام برنامج SPSS إصدار 23. أظهرت النتائج مستوى مرتفعاً من الموافقة؛ إذ تراوحت المتوسطات الحسابية لمهارات الاستماع بين (1.96–2.96) بمتوسط عام (2.74)، وبلغ

المتوسط العام لمهارات التحدث (2.87). كما أثبت اختبار t للعينية الواحدة أن تصورات الطلاب كانت إيجابية بشكل دال إحصائياً: (ت=12.73) للاستماع و(ت=7.07) للتحدث عند مستوى دلالة (≥ 0.05). وعبر 93٪ من الطلاب عن مواقف إيجابية تجاه استخدام القصص القصيرة. توصي الدراسة بدمج القصص القصيرة في مناهج اللغة الإنجليزية وتطوير برامج تدريب المعلمين.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition is a complex process that encompasses listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Among these, listening and speaking are considered fundamental for effective real-world communication (Harmer, 2007). Despite their importance, developing these skills presents considerable challenges for EFL learners, particularly in traditional classroom settings where opportunities for authentic communication are often limited.

In the Libyan educational context, educators continuously seek approaches that go beyond grammar memorization and foster genuine communicative competence. Short stories, due to their manageable length and built-in narrative appeal, are particularly well-suited for the EFL classroom: they provide comprehensible input slightly beyond the learner's current level (Krashen, 1982) and create authentic contexts for social interaction and discussion (Vygotsky, 1978).

This paper investigates the effectiveness of short story-based instruction in enhancing listening and speaking abilities among undergraduate students at the Faculty of Education in Gharyan, Libya. In doing so, it contributes contextually specific evidence to the broader EFL research field, where studies on Libyan university learners remain scarce.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the recognized importance of oral communication skills, many undergraduate students at the Faculty of Education in Gharyan continue to struggle with listening and speaking proficiency. Traditional teacher-centered methods may not adequately engage students or provide sufficient context for authentic language use. This study investigates how short story-based instruction can bridge this gap.

1.2 Aims and Research Questions

The study aims to: (1) examine the effectiveness of short stories in improving listening skills; (2) evaluate the impact of short stories on speaking skills; and (3) investigate students' attitudes toward learning English through short stories. The corresponding research questions are:

- Does short story-based instruction contribute to improving students' listening skills?
- Do short stories help improve speaking skills, including fluency and pronunciation?
- What are students' attitudes toward learning English through short stories?

1.3 Research Hypotheses

- There is a statistically significant relationship between the use of short stories and the improvement of listening skills among language learners.
- There is a statistically significant relationship between the use of short stories and the improvement of speaking skills, including fluency and pronunciation, among language learners.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982, 1985) posits that learners acquire language when they receive comprehensible input slightly beyond their current competence ($i+1$). Short stories, when carefully selected, provide exactly this: language embedded in meaningful narrative that is engaging and contextually rich. The engaging nature of stories also lowers the 'affective filter,' making learners more receptive to linguistic input.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) frames language learning as a social process. Story-based activities — discussion, role-play, retelling — align with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, enabling learners to achieve more through peer and teacher support. Cultural dimensions are equally important: incorporating stories from English-speaking cultures conveys nuances essential for language mastery (Norton, 2000; Byram, 1989).

2.2 Short Stories in EFL Contexts

A short story is a piece of prose fiction, usually about one thing, containing a maximum of 10,000 words (Kennedy & Gioia, 2007). Wellek and Warren (1948) define literature as an institution that uses language as its medium; Peck and Coyle (2002) describe it as the expression of thought and feeling in written form. The elements

of a short story — plot (Freytag, 1863), characters (Abrams & Harpham, 2012), setting (Forster, 1927), conflict (Perrine, 1974), and point of view (Booth, 1983) — provide rich material for language analysis and discussion.

Short stories are particularly effective in EFL contexts because they provide authentic language in a meaningful context, expose learners to natural vocabulary and grammatical structures, foster critical thinking through character analysis, and reduce language anxiety (Lazar, 1993; Ghosn, 2002; Wright, 1995).

Listening to stories exposes learners to natural intonation, pronunciation, and sentence patterns, helping them recognize different accents and speech varieties (Vandergrift, 2007; Brown, 2001). For speaking, post-story activities such as summarizing, discussing characters, and predicting outcomes provide authentic oral practice. Nation (2001) emphasizes that speaking skills are best developed through regular practice in realistic contexts, which short stories naturally provide.

2.3 Previous Studies

Ompusunggu (2021) conducted a quasi-experimental study at SMPN 160 Jakarta, demonstrating significant improvement in speaking skills for the short story group. Pardede (2021), in a systematic review of studies from 2011–2020, confirmed that short story strategies were effective across multiple language skills, with motivational benefits and authentic language input as key factors. Ali et al. (2024) found improvements in vocabulary and reading comprehension that indirectly support oral skill development.

2.4 Research Gap

Despite this considerable body of international research, there remains a notable gap in studies targeting Libyan university students. Most existing studies were conducted in Asian EFL contexts with different sociolinguistic conditions, and few have simultaneously investigated both listening and speaking skills. Moreover, studies on Libyan EFL learners — who face distinct challenges related to limited English exposure outside the classroom — are largely absent from the literature. This study addresses that gap.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a quasi-experimental mixed-methods approach, integrating a pre-test/post-test non-equivalent control group design (quantitative) with a structured qualitative interview component (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 23.

3.2 Participants

Data was collected from 30 undergraduate students (aged 19–23) at the Faculty of Education, Gharyan. After excluding two incomplete responses, the final sample comprised 28 students: 23 female (82%) and 5 male (18%). The sample was divided into an Experimental Group (EG, n=14) and a Control Group (CG, n=14).

3.3 Instruments

A 30-item questionnaire was developed across three axes (Listening Skills, Speaking Skills, General Attitudes), rated on a three-point Likert scale (1=Disagree, 2=Neutral, 3=Agree). Expert validity was established through five specialists who reviewed each item for clarity, relevance, and coverage. Cronbach's Alpha values were 0.969 (Listening), 0.783 (Speaking), 0.818 (Attitudes), and 0.914 overall — indicating excellent reliability.

Five structured comprehension questions about 'The Selfish Giant' were posed to both groups for qualitative comparison. The story was presented to the EG through audio and video format as part of the short story-based instruction.

3.4 Procedure

A placement pre-test identified both groups as intermediate level. 'The Selfish Giant' by Oscar Wilde was selected accordingly. The EG received short story-based instruction: pre-reading vocabulary, audio/video story presentation, comprehension checks, character discussion, and post-story speaking tasks (retelling, role-play, moral reflection). The CG received traditional teacher-centered instruction using the same text but without interactive story-based activities.

The Likert scale and estimation thresholds are presented in Table 1.

Response	Weighted Average	General Trend
LOW	1.00–1.66	Disagree
MODERATE	1.67–2.33	Neutral
HIGH	2.34–3.00	Agree

Table 1. Estimation scale based on the three-point Likert scale

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Sample Characteristics

The questionnaire was distributed to 30 students; 28 valid responses were returned (93% response rate). Participants were predominantly female (82%), and all were currently learning English. Thirty-nine percent were aged under 20, and 61% were aged 20–25.

4.2 Research Question 1: Impact on Listening Skills

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the listening skills axis. The corrected overall mean is 2.7357 (High range). All items except Item 9 fall in the High category. Item 1 ranked highest (mean = 2.9643): students most strongly agreed that short stories help them understand spoken language better. Item 9 — understanding complex sentences — yielded the only Moderate result (mean = 1.9643), indicating mixed views on this specific aspect.

No.	Statement	Agree F/%	Neutral F/%	Disagree F/%	Mean	SD	Rank
1	Short stories help me understand spoken language better	27/96%	1/4%	0/0%	2.9643	0.1890	1
2	Listening to short stories improves my ability to recognize different accents	27/96%	0/0%	1/4%	2.9286	0.3780	2
3	I can follow the main ideas of a conversation after listening to short stories	26/93%	2/7%	0/0%	2.9286	0.2623	2
4	Short stories help me identify keywords and phrases in spoken language	19/68%	9/32%	0/0%	2.6786	0.4756	4
5	I feel more comfortable listening to native speakers after using short stories	23/82%	5/18%	0/0%	2.8214	0.3900	3
6	Short stories help me improve my listening comprehension speed	18/64%	9/32%	1/4%	2.6071	0.5669	5
7	I can understand the context of a conversation better after listening to short stories	18/64%	9/32%	1/4%	2.6071	0.5669	5
8	Short stories help me distinguish between formal and informal language	26/93%	2/7%	0/0%	2.9286	0.2623	2
9	I find it easier to understand complex sentences after listening to short stories	5/18%	17/61%	6/21%	1.9643	0.6372	6
10	Short stories make listening practice more enjoyable and engaging	26/93%	2/7%	0/0%	2.9286	0.2623	2
General Mean for the Entire Dimension					2.7357	0.3055	High

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for listening skills (Source: SPSS output)

4.3 Research Question 2: Impact on Speaking Skills

Table 3 presents results for the speaking skills axis. The corrected overall mean is 2.8714 (High), the highest of all three axes. Items 1, 3, and 8 ranked first (mean = 2.9643): students strongly agreed that short stories improve fluency, pronunciation, and conversational ease. All ten items fall in the High category, indicating consistent positive perceptions across all speaking dimensions.

No.	Statement	Agree F/%	Neutral F/%	Disagree F/%	Mean	SD	Rank
1	Short stories help me speak more fluently	27/96%	1/4%	0/0%	2.9643	0.1890	1
2	I can use new vocabulary from short stories in my conversations	21/75%	7/25%	0/0%	2.7500	0.4410	4
3	Short stories improve my pronunciation and intonation	27/96%	1/4%	0/0%	2.9643	0.1890	1
4	I feel more confident speaking in the target language after using short stories	24/86%	4/14%	0/0%	2.8571	0.3563	3
5	Short stories help me structure my sentences better when speaking	20/71%	8/29%	0/0%	2.7143	0.4600	5
6	I can express my ideas more clearly after practicing with short stories	24/86%	4/14%	0/0%	2.8571	0.3563	3
7	Short stories help me use idiomatic expressions correctly	24/86%	4/14%	0/0%	2.8571	0.3563	3
8	I find it easier to engage in conversations after using short stories	27/96%	1/4%	0/0%	2.9643	0.1890	1
9	Short stories help me improve my grammar when speaking	25/89%	2/7%	1/4%	2.8571	0.4484	3
10	Short stories make speaking practice more enjoyable and less stressful	26/93%	2/7%	0/0%	2.9286	0.2623	2
General Mean for the Entire Dimension					2.8714	0.0878	High

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for speaking skills (Source: SPSS output)

4.4 Research Question 3: Student Attitudes

Table 4 shows the attitudes dimension with a corrected overall mean of 2.7143 (High). Item 10 ranked first (mean = 2.9643): students strongly agreed that short stories make language learning feel less like a chore. Item 3 — short stories helping students stay motivated — ranked last (mean = 2.1071, Moderate), suggesting that motivation is not uniformly sustained and warrants attention in future instructional design.

No.	Statement	Agree F/%	Neutral F/%	Disagree F/%	Mean	SD	Rank
1	Short stories are an effective tool for language learning	26/93%	2/7%	0/0%	2.9286	0.2623	2
2	I enjoy using short stories as part of my language-learning routine	21/75%	7/25%	0/0%	2.7500	0.4410	4
3	Short stories help me stay motivated to learn the language	7/25%	17/61%	4/14%	2.1071	0.6289	8
4	I find short stories more engaging than traditional language learning methods	24/86%	4/14%	0/0%	2.8571	0.3563	3
5	Short stories help me learn about the culture of the language I am studying	20/71%	8/29%	0/0%	2.7143	0.4600	5
6	I would recommend short stories to others for language learning	24/86%	4/14%	0/0%	2.8571	0.3563	3
7	Short stories are suitable for learners at all proficiency levels	15/54%	11/39%	2/7%	2.4643	0.6372	7
8	I find it easy to access short stories for language learning	18/64%	10/36%	0/0%	2.6429	0.4880	6
9	Short stories help me develop critical thinking skills in the target language	25/89%	2/7%	1/4%	2.8571	0.4484	3
10	Short stories make language learning feel less like a chore and more like a fun activity	27/96%	1/4%	0/0%	2.9643	0.1890	1
General Mean for the Entire Dimension					2.7143	0.2597	High

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for general attitudes (Source: SPSS output)

4.5 Hypothesis Testing

A one-sample t-test was applied to assess whether students' mean perceptions on each dimension were significantly different from the neutral scale value (2). This test measures whether students' attitudes are significantly positive — it does not measure actual performance improvement versus the control group, which requires pre/post-test comparison data.

Dimension	t-Value	Sig	Conclusion
Listening Skills	12.728	0.000	Hypothesis 1 Supported
Speaking Skills	7.071	0.000	Hypothesis 2 Supported

Table 5. One-sample t-test results (Source: SPSS output)

Both t-values are statistically significant ($\text{sig} = 0.000 < 0.05$), confirming that students' perceptions of short stories' positive impact are significantly above the neutral value for both listening and speaking skills. Both research hypotheses are therefore supported.

4.6 Structured Comprehension Question Analysis

Qualitative analysis of five comprehension questions about 'The Selfish Giant' revealed clear differences between groups. EG students gave specific, nuanced answers: correctly identifying the setting ('The Selfish Giant's garden'), both characters ('the giant and the children'), the character's gradual transformation from selfish to kind, and the deeper moral lesson. CG students gave vague, general responses. Approximately 90% of EG students who watched the video presentation grasped the story's main idea. These findings align with Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis — meaningful, contextualised input facilitates deeper comprehension and more elaborate language production.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the effectiveness of short story-based instruction on listening and speaking skills among undergraduate students at the Faculty of Education, Gharyan. Quantitative results from the 30-item questionnaire show that student perceptions were significantly positive for both listening (mean = 2.74; $t = 12.728$) and speaking (mean = 2.87; $t = 7.071$), with all perceptions significantly above the neutral scale value ($\text{sig} = 0.000$). Qualitative

analysis of structured comprehension questions confirmed that EG students demonstrated deeper, more nuanced comprehension than CG students.

The study concludes that short story-based instruction is a promising and effective method for developing oral communication skills in the Libyan EFL context. It recommends:

- Integrating short stories systematically into English language curricula, with particular attention to oral skills development.
- Designing interactive story-based activities — group discussions, role-playing, narrative retelling — to maximise linguistic benefits.
- Developing teacher training programs on effective short story-based instruction, including the use of audiovisual (video) formats.
- Selecting stories appropriate for different proficiency levels with rich cultural and linguistic content.
- Conducting future studies with larger samples and full pre/post-test performance data to strengthen causal claims.

REFERENCES

- Abrams, M. H., & Harpham, G. G. (2012). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cengage Learning.
- Ali, M., Khan, S., & Yousaf, S. (2024). The Effectiveness of Blended Learning in English Language Teaching. *International Journal of Language Education*, 28(3), 129–142.
- Baldick, C. (2008). *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Booth, W. C. (1983). *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. University of Chicago Press.
- Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by Principles*. Pearson Education.
- Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* (5th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Byram, M. (1989). *Cultural Studies in Foreign Language Education*. Multilingual Matters.
- Chomsky, N. (2006). *Language and Mind*. Cambridge University Press.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2017). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Ellmann, R. (1988). *Oscar Wilde*. Vintage.
- Forster, E. M. (1927). *Aspects of the Novel*. Edward Arnold.

- Freytag, G. (1863). *Die Technik des Dramas*. Leipzig: Hirzel.
- Ghosn, I.-K. (2002). Four Good Reasons to Use Literature in Primary School ELT. *ELT Journal*, 56(2), 172–179.
- Harmer, J. (2007). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Pearson Longman.
- Hughes, R. (2019). *Teaching and Researching Speaking* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Kennedy, X. J., & Gioia, D. (2007). *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and Writing*. Pearson Education.
- Klarer, M. (2004). *An Introduction to Literary Studies* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Pergamon Press.
- Krashen, S. D. (1985). *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications*. Longman.
- Lazar, G. (1993). *Literature and Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N. (2013). *How Languages Are Learned* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Mays, K. J. (2013). *The Norton Introduction to Literature*. W.W. Norton.
- Murphey, T. (2001). *Music and Song in Second Language Learning*. Cambridge University Press.
- Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Nation, I. S. P., & Newton, J. (2009). *Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing*. Routledge.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and Language Learning*. Longman.
- Ompusunggu, R. M. (2021). The effectiveness of short story use on students' speaking skill development at SMPN 160 Jakarta. *Journal of English Teaching*, 7(3), 346–358.
- Pardede, P. (2021). The Influence of Short Stories on English Language Learning. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning*, 12(4), 55–67.
- Peck, J., & Coyle, M. (2002). *Literary Terms and Criticism* (3rd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Perrine, L. (1974). *Story and Structure*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Pierre, J., et al. (2014). *Cognitive Abilities: Definitions and Processes*. Academic Press.
- Richards, J. C. (2008). *Teaching Listening and Speaking*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rost, M. (2011). *Teaching and Researching Listening* (2nd ed.). Pearson Education.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2019). *Research Methods for Business Students* (8th ed.). Pearson Education.

- Thornbury, S. (2005). How to Teach Speaking. Pearson Education.
- Underwood, M. (1989). Teaching Listening. Longman.
- Vandergrift, L. (2007). Recent developments in second and foreign language listening comprehension research. *Language Teaching*, 40(3), 191–210.
- Vandergrift, L., & Goh, C. C. M. (2012). Teaching and Learning Second Language Listening. Routledge.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in Society. Harvard University Press.
- Wellek, R., & Warren, A. (1948). Theory of Literature. Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Wright, A. (1995). Storytelling with Children. Oxford University Press.
- Zou, Y. (2021). Investigating the Impact of Digital Platforms on Language Acquisition. *Journal of Educational Technology*, 10(1), 23–34.

APPENDIX: RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

The Effectiveness of Using Short Stories in Improving Listening and Speaking Skills

Faculty of Education — University of Gharyan — Academic Year 2024–2025

Dear Participant, please answer all items honestly. Responses are confidential and for academic purposes only.

Thank you.

Section One: Demographic Information

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female 2. Age: ☐ < 20 ☐ 20–25 ☐ 25–36 ☐ 36+

3. Are you currently learning English? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Section Two: Please indicate your level of agreement (1=Disagree 2=Neutral 3=Agree)

Axis 1: Listening Skills

No.	Statement	Disagree (1)	Neutral (2)	Agree (3)
1	Short stories help me understand spoken language better.			
2	Listening to short stories improves my ability to recognize different accents.			
3	I can follow the main ideas of a conversation after listening to short stories.			

4	Short stories help me identify keywords and phrases in spoken language.			
5	I feel more comfortable listening to native speakers after using short stories.			
6	Short stories help me improve my listening comprehension speed.			
7	I can understand the context of a conversation better after listening to short stories.			
8	Short stories help me distinguish between formal and informal language.			
9	I find it easier to understand complex sentences after listening to short stories.			
10	Short stories make listening practice more enjoyable and engaging.			

Axis 2: Speaking Skills

No.	Statement	Disagree (1)	Neutral (2)	Agree (3)
1	Short stories help me speak more fluently.			
2	I can use new vocabulary from short stories in my conversations.			
3	Short stories improve my pronunciation and intonation.			
4	I feel more confident speaking in the target language after using short stories.			
5	Short stories help me structure my sentences better when speaking.			
6	I can express my ideas more clearly after practicing with short stories.			
7	Short stories help me use idiomatic expressions correctly.			
8	I find it easier to engage in conversations after using short stories.			

9	Short stories help me improve my grammar when speaking.			
10	Short stories make speaking practice more enjoyable and less stressful.			

Axis 3: General Perceptions and Attitudes

No.	Statement	Disagree (1)	Neutral (2)	Agree (3)
1	Short stories are an effective tool for language learning.			
2	I enjoy using short stories as part of my language-learning routine.			
3	Short stories help me stay motivated to learn the language.			
4	I find short stories more engaging than traditional language learning methods.			
5	Short stories help me learn about the culture of the language I am studying.			
6	I would recommend short stories to others for language learning.			
7	Short stories are suitable for learners at all proficiency levels.			
8	I find it easy to access short stories for language learning.			
9	Short stories help me develop critical thinking skills in the target language.			
10	Short stories make language learning feel less like a chore and more like a fun activity.			

Thank you for your participation!