

**The Impact of Cognitive
strategies on EFL
University Students'
Achievement in Short Stories**

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Abstract

Short stories are considered the avenue whereby reading novels is the ultimate aim of teaching literary genres , as the former leads to the mastery of the latter . However, EFL students may need new ways to study literary genres in general and short stories in particular .Therefore, the objective of this study is to find out how cognitive strategies affect students success in short stories. Accordingly, the population of the study was 200 EFL students in the department of English , Humanities, University of Karbala, for the academic year 2022 -2023. The sample was randomly selected and included 70 second- year college students divided into experimental and control groups. Two short stories were taught during the two-month period of this study .The result of this study revealed the effect of cognitive strategies on the achievements of the experimental group. Furthermore, the students' schema in short stories was activated. Finally, conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions for further studies are stated.

المخلص

تعد القصص القصيرة الطريق الذي تكون فيه قراءة الروايات الهدف الأسمى لتعليم الأنواع الأدبية، إذ أن الأولى تؤدي إلى إتقان الثانية. ومع ذلك، قد يحتاج طلاب اللغة الإنكليزية لغة أجنبية إلى طرق جديدة لدراسة الأنواع الأدبية بشكل عام والقصص القصيرة بشكل خاص. لذلك فإن الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو معرفة كيفية تأثير الاستراتيجيات المعرفية على نجاح الطلاب في القصة القصيرة. وعليه بلغ مجتمع الدراسة 200 طالب وطالبة في قسم اللغة الانكليزية والعلوم الإنسانية جامعة كربلاء للعام الدراسي 2022-2023. تم اختيار العينة بطريقة عشوائية وشملت (70) طالباً من طلاب السنة الثانية جامعيين مقسمين إلى المجموعة التجريبية والضابطة تم تدريس قصتين قصيرتين خلال فترة شهرين من هذه الدراسة. أضافه الى ذلك ، تم استخدام مقياسين لتحقيق أهداف هذه الدراسة كان المقياس الأول هو عنوان تقييم أداء الطالب Stockwell (2002) الشعرية المعرفية: أما المقياس الثاني فقد اعتمد من Charles (1997). وكشفت نتائج هذه الدراسة عن أثر الاستراتيجيات المعرفية في تحصيل المجموعة التجريبية. كما تم تفعيل سكيما الطلاب في القصص القصيرة. وأخيراً تم ذكر الاستنتاجات والتوصيات والمقترحات لمزيد من الدراسات.

1.1 The Problem of the Study and its Significance

Students tend to forget information during exams even though they had studied the information for a period of time .This is because students do not organize their ideas or thoughts while studying .Based on a study done by Al-Saadi during 2019 on schema and cognitive poetics , college students face difficulties in exploiting their schema and explaining the pieces of information. Thus, there is a gap in teaching literature as a discipline at university which has widened to be a chasm. Students have to know how to organize their pre-existing knowledge and information in order to know how to retrieve information when needed .

EFL learn more slowly and with greater effort, not because they are necessarily less intelligent, but because they have less prior knowledge to connect to the new information. With a less developed schema, they are not able to organize the new information (Cross, 1999, ; de Groot, 1966).

The researcher also did go and attended a lecture in short stories , and noted that the students felt bored during the lectures because the lecturer used the old traditional ways of teaching the material of the short stories without using cognitive strategies in the lecture or trying to create a vivid atmosphere during the lecture .

1.2. The Objective of the Study

The study aims to find out the effect of cognitive strategies on the Students' achievements in short stories.

1.3 The Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that:

There are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental and the control groups in the achievement test on the post-test.

1.4 The Procedures

1. A Preparation of the pre-test and the post test was done, and given to jury members to check their validity.
2. A control and experimental groups of college students were selected.
3. The obtained data were manipulated statistically.
4. Finally, conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions for further studies were stated.

1.5 The Scope of the Study

This study is limited to:

1. the second year EFL students at College of Education /University of Karbala
2. the prescribed textbook for short stories entitled " A book of Short Stories " compiled by Razzak and Al-Muttalibi (1991) (two short stories from their textbook were chosen).
3. the academic year 2022-2023.

1.6 The Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is as follows

This study stems from the value of schema as it is very vital in reading any literary genres specially short stories . Hence ,university students are in need of activating their schema to fully understand the short stories. Besides, university professors need to use cognitive strategies

during teaching all types of literary genres like novels, poetry, and drama etc. Furthermore, decision makers need to put an emphasis on allotting time for using schema activation in the classroom .

1.7 Definition of Basic Terms

1.7.1 Cognitive Strategies

Students utilize cognitive strategies to address reading problems. Because cognitive strategies directly aid the reading process, they are referred to as direct strategies . Cognitive strategies were defined as "the procedures or operations utilized in problem-solving that require direct analysis, transformation, or synthesis of learning information," (Rubin ,1987, as cited in Ellis ,1994). The combination of metacognitive and cognitive methods used in the reading process leads to success (Oxford, 1990).The cognitive activities are as follows : (1) practicing, (2) receiving and sending messages, and (3) analyzing and reasoning .

Operational definition

Cognitive Strategies are the ones that have an effect on activating thinking during teaching and learning processes where practicing , receiving and sending messages , and reasoning put into action .

1.7.2 Short Story

According to Kurtus (2007), a short story is a piece of fiction narrative or a prose that is between 2000 and 7500 words long (<http://www.school-for-champions.com>). Menrath (2003) identified certain qualities of short stories that distinguish them from novels and other narrative literary genres. A short story is a short piece of narrative writing that may be read in one sitting. Aside from the differences, short stories have a lot in common with other narrative literary pieces.

Operational definition

A short story is a fiction story that is shorter than a novel ,and it has a few characters. It can be read in one session or more by students. It is considered the threshold to teaching novel.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Background and Related Previous Studies

2.0 An Introductory Note

This chapter is dedicated to the presentation of schema activation as well as cognitive strategies . The chapter falls into two parts, the first is to provide theoretical background on the issues that will be tackled upon within the descriptive study, whereas the second is dedicated to review previous studies that are related to the present one.

2.1 Cognitive Strategies

Reading strategies ,especially cognitive and metacognitive ones ,place emphasis on the mental decoding process in reading, including prediction, guessing, inference, analysis, synthesis, and assessment. Direct training on how to interact with a text to solve difficulties on their own can help students immensely and develop as strategic readers. They should be able to digest the information in the texts more efficiently and comprehend the author's point of view by employing cognitive methods. As a result, readers can use cognitive reading strategies (henceforth, CRSs) to receive, store, and utilize information they have learned from reading in the future. Also, a reader will comprehend the content more readily if they employ cognitive reading tactics including generating predictions, asking questions, summarizing, drawing inferences, or visualizing the text. These

tactics also require interacting with and manipulating the material or using particular methods to achieve a goal.

Students use this strategy to resolve problems or overcome obstacles . With each new learning experience, the learner's cognitive strategy changes accordingly. These advancements consist of finding methods to increase the regularity of the internal processes related to learning. Cognitive strategy refers to the processes of learning, remembering, and communicating concepts logically and reflexively. If the learner is able to effectively master the internal process, they will be able to self-instruct and learn autonomously. They will be able to solve issues and effectively communicate ideas. According to Gagne and Briggs (1979), a cognitive strategy is a skill that is internally organized and affects a learner's cognitive process, which includes problem-solving, learning, remembering, and thinking. The claim that cognitive strategies are internal processes that can be used in a range of cognitively demanding activities, such as (1) cognitive strategies for reading comprehension, (2) cognitive strategies for learning, (3) cognitive strategies for memory, and (4) cognitive strategies for problem-solving or thinking is completely true.

Several cognitive researchers have been exploring cognitive techniques for the past three decades. The great majority of this research focused on lone processes (e.g.; rehearsal, clustering, imagery paired-associate acquisition, prose recall, list learning, and other specific learning domains).

Cognitive strategies are the methods language users utilize to carry out and actualize their plans when using language. Although Bachman and Palmer (2010) view them as "peripheral" rather than "focal" characteristics of test takers, academics have focused a lot of effort on examining cognitive strategies in language usage. For instance, O'Malley and Chamot

(1990), who were influenced by Anderson's cognitive theory of learning (1982, 2010), described cognitive strategies as actions that "involve mental manipulations or translations of materials or tasks" and enhance "comprehension, acquisition, or retention" .

2.1.10 Short Stories

Short stories are the most valuable and suitable genre for triggering the college students' motivation and language skills. The inherited characteristics and qualities being short and miniature of the long novel is one of its benefits .

Parade (2011) has aptly stated that. "since it is short , and aims at giving 'a single effect ' ,there is usually one plot , a few characteristics ;there is no detailed description of setting . So, it is easy for the students to follow the story line of the work".

What entails a language learning journey of competency enhancing methods, such as being exposed to the literature of the goal language, has elements that attract the attention of both literary critics and methodology experts; a critic pays attention to the literary, while the methodology expert focuses on the student's four cognitive strategies (henceforth ,Cs); which are higher thinking abilities made of "communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity," clarifies Al-Alami (2016). In this study, double attention is paid, on a literary-methodology consciousness processes the learning journey elements.

(Shen ,2010, as cited in Al-Alami,2016) says that different points of view can use different linguistic modes, the "I" as a first-person point of view could identify and "observer" or "protagonist,". The marker of this difference in perception of the narrator is due to a difference in the point or place of viewing; someone viewing the event or character from outside

falls into a dichotomy with someone viewing the same elements from within the story. The insider's view opens the way for the reader to settle inside a character's mind, its consciousness stream, while the outsider's observation of manners and behaviors cannot achieve the same literary effect of deeply diving and understanding a character's mind.

However, for (Simpson ,2010, as cited in Al-Alami,2016) the gap between these two points of view "extends "from the first person's limited knowledge to the wider, unlimited knowledge of the "omniscient "viewer. As the gap blurs, readers and students are to be aware of this extension as an element and use it to practice higher thinking skills such as differentiating between what is fictional yet true to the reporting narrator and the perspective the narrator views from.

Among perspectives, (Clark ,2007, as cited in Al-Alami,2016) makes a distinction for a "visual" perspective. The point of view may as well embody the" ideological "structure of the short story. Or to name a point of view and mean to clarify the representative relationship between the narrator and the narrative.

While (McRae ,2007, as cited in Al-Alami,2016) compares and examines the relationship between a point of view and the other mental processes or perspectives, McRae finds that between a view and its narration are elements of time ,reality, and distance; the viewer assesses these elements before reporting and thus building the narrative; the reportage is then separated as "free direct" or "free indirect speech ".

One could add to McRae's understanding of the relationship between the point of view and the building blocks or elements in a narrative piece the work of (Durant et al. ,2000) that a single view point and the choice of how to structure the blocks make for different aesthetical effects

and differences in genre, such as a first or a third-person narratives, and the aesthetical effect can be sensed as many short stories use a first-person narrator, which is also the protagonist, or a minor character as he or she comment on the main character, for example.

2.2 Previous Related Studies

2.2.1 Al-Saadi (2019)

This study entitled " A Cognitive Poetic Schema Interpretation of Selected Poems by EFL University Students". The study aimed to identify the cognitive poetic schema (henceforth, CPS) used in the interpretation of the poems involved in the study, determining whether there are any changes in the CPS of the three selected poems. The sample of the study was fourth –year college students. The instrument of the study was a CPS management model which was identified and adopted from Stockwell's book entitled *Cognitive Poetics* (2002). The procedures of the study were three poems from Liverpool poets were purposively selected as the researcher wanted to check whether the students activate their background knowledge on reading and understanding the poems.

2.2.2 Sua (2021)

This study entitled "Cognitive strategies for developing students' reading comprehension skills using short stories". The study found that using cognitive techniques can enhance second-language reading comprehension abilities. Data collection methods included a students' blog, two questionnaires, and class artifacts. Results showed that cognitive strategies facilitated comprehension of a text, allowing readers to construct meaning and increase the motivation to read.

2.3 Discussion of Previous Studies

The previous studies are discussed in terms of aims , samples , instruments and procedures .

The aims of these studies are different from those of the current study .The first study of Al- Saadi (2019) aimed to identify the cognitive poetic schema (henceforth, CPS) used in the interpretation of the poems involved in the study, determine whether there are any differences in the CPS of the three selected poems, determine whether there are any differences in the six components of the CPS rubric between the four levels of college students. And the aim of Sua's study (2021) was to emphasize the significance of using cognitive techniques to enhance second-language reading comprehension abilities. Whereas the aim of the current study is to find out the effect of cognitive strategies on the Student's achievements in short stories.

The sample of the first study Al-Saadi (2019) was the four levels of college students in the Department of English, College of Education for Women, University of Baghdad during the academic year 2017-2018. The sample of Sua's study (2021) was forty ninth-grade students' reading comprehension . On the other hand the sample of the current study is seventy EFL students of the second year students at College of Education for Humanities /University of Karbala.

Al-Saadi's (2019) instrument was a CPS management model was identified and taken from Stockwell's book *Cognitive Poetics* (2002).A test was constructed and given to the students. Whereas, Sua's study (2021) used two questionnaires, a student blog, and a portfolio of class materials. The instruments of both studies were different from that of the current study where pre and post tests were given to the students .

The procedures of the first study of Al-Saadi (2019) were after selecting three poems from Liverpool poets , questions and their rubric were made and presented to the jury members .Then , a final application of the test to four levels of college students at the Department of English, College of Education for Women. On the other hand ,the procedure of Sua's study (2021) involved three stages: pre-intervention, while-intervention, and post-intervention. Pre-intervention involved analyzing factors affecting ninth-grade students' reading comprehension, using a learning styles inventory to identify predominant learning styles. While-intervention involved five cycles of instruction on cognitive reading strategies, collecting artifacts for portfolios. Post-intervention allowed deeper analysis of students' insights, using the same questionnaire from the while-intervention stage. Additional posts were used to analyze the effectiveness of cognitive reading strategies in short stories. The procedures of these studies were completely different from those of the current study as the researcher used and administered a pre-post-tests.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.0An introductory note

This chapter attempts to provide details about the research design used for this study. It includes a comprehensive overview of the experimental design, population and sample selection, pre- and posttests, sample equivalence, and statistical methods for data analysis.

3. 1 Experimental Design

One of the most common quantitative research criteria is experimental design. Without permitting any change in the outcome to be

attributed to the technique or independent variable variance, the experiment is carried out with a high degree of control and manipulation over the test environment and variables (Easterling ,2015).

Pretests and posttests were used in the experiment to collect data from the experimental and control groups. The impact of the treatment on the dependent variable is then assessed by contrasting the results (Riazi, 2010).

The two non-randomized pre-post design groups are followed to achieve the objectives of the study and to verify its hypotheses. Two groups have been chosen .One group represents a control group ,and the other group is an experimental one.

3.2 Population and Sample of the Study

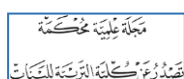
An identifiable group of people that the researcher can identify and investigate is called a target population. According to Creswell (2012), a population is a collection of people who share a particular trait. A sample is a subset of the target population that a researcher attempts to research in order to draw conclusions about the target population as a whole.

The target population of the current study consists of (200) EFL second-year students college from University of Karbala, at Department of English for the academic year (2022-2023). The sample has been randomly selected and included (70) EFL students, of whom (35) were randomly chosen from section (A) to serve as the experimental group , and (35) served as the control group.

Table (3.1)

Population and Sample of the Study

The groups	Population	Sample	Percentage
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Experimental group	100	35	35%
Control group	100	35	35%
Total	200	70	35%

3.3 Equivalence of the Two Groups

The researchers equalized the two groups on the basis of mother and father's academic background ,the students' grades from the previous months , and the two groups pretest.

3.4 Validity of the Test

According to Gronlund (1998), validity is the degree to which conclusions are drawn from evaluating the results as they are relevant, meaningful, and helpful in light of the assessment's goal.

The degree to which a test captures the expected outcome is referred to as validity. It is the most crucial tenet of language evaluation. It is impossible to recollect a final and absolute measure of validity, but various types of evidence can be used (Brown,2004).

As it relates to what it is supposed to test, the validity of the test is concerned with its accuracy. The accuracy, significance, and applicability of the specific conclusions drawn from test results are known as validity (Davies, 1990 and Bachman, 1990).

3.4.1 Face Validity

According to Mousavi (2002) face validity refers to "the degree to which a test looks right, and appears to measure the knowledge or abilities it claims to measure, based on the subjective judgment of the examinees

who take it, the administrative personnel who decide on its use, and other psychometrically unsophisticated observers" .

Face validity is the review of people who are thought to be aware about the variable being assessed (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2011).

Richards and Schmidt (2002) define face validity as the extent to which, in the subjective opinion of the observer, a test appears to measure the knowledge or abilities that it claims to evaluate. According to Brown (2001), face validity is crucial from the viewpoint of students because they must be persuaded that the test measures what it promises to measure. Therefore, the test has been exposed to a jury member of specialists to rate its items according to the intended objectives .

3.4.2 Content Validity

According to Pennington (2003), a measure of content validity is how well it captures all aspects of a certain notion.

The degree to which the test items genuinely measure or are primarily concerned with the trait for which the test is created and utilized is referred to as content validity by Best & Kahn (2006). The information should cover the problems, the real formulation, the general item design, and the desired skills that a student performs.

3.7 Reliability of the Posttest

An important quality of a good test is reliability. If the level of accuracy of the test remains constant over time and is administered to the same sample of students under the same conditions, it is said to be reliable .The reliability of a test is a critical characteristic of a good test. It is said that a test is trustworthy if the degree of accuracy of the exam is stable and

consistent each time it is administered under the same conditions to the same sample of pupils (Veram and Beard, 1981).

The stability of scores from the same individuals is what reliability is all about. If these scores are constant and consistent, the test is considered dependable. On the contrary, if the scores change, the test is unreliable (Habeeb, & Abbas, 2018).

One of the necessary characteristics of a good test is reliability. Alderson (1995:294) states that "reliability is the extent to which test scores are consistent". According to Ravitch (2007), reliability is defined as "a measure of consistency in testing. " A person who took two distinct versions of the same test on two different days should have received equal results on both tests. Hence, Alpha-Cronbach formula is used in this study to measure the reliability of the post-test. The coefficient is found to be (0.87), which refers to the homogeneity of the test questions.

3.5.1 Inter-Rater and Intra-Rater Reliability

Inter-rater reliability refers to the consistency of data recorded by two or more raters, measuring the same subjects over a single trial. Inter-rater reliability is a measure of consistency used to evaluate the extent to which different judges agree in their assessment decisions (Scheel, et al, 2018). Inter-rater reliability determines the extent to which two or more raters obtain the same result when using the same instrument to measure a concept (Woldoff, 2004). In this study Cohen's kappa coefficient is used to find out the consistency between two judges, which calculated to be (0.59) as a moderate agreement.

Intra-rater reliability refers to the consistency of the data recorded by one rater over several trials and is best determined when multiple trials are administered over a short period of time (Innes & Straker, 1999). Intra-

rater reliability is estimated by having the rater read and evaluated each paper more than once (Cohen, 2017). Cohen's kappa coefficient is used to find out the consistency between two raters . It is (0.78) and this is considered strong consistency.

3.6 Item Analyses of Literary Analysis

3.6.1 Difficulty Level(DL)

Item difficulty refers to the extent to which an item appears to be complicated or facilitated for a given number of tests .The difficulty level is specified as the ratio of the students who replied correctly to each item (Rosas, 2000). It just reflects the percentage of learners who responded correctly to the test item. The most suitable test item will have item difficulty varying between 0.15 and 0.85 (Brown, 2010). It was found that the current test items' DL ranges from (0.25) to (0.70), as shown in table (3.2).

3.6.2 Discrimination Power

Discrimination Power means that an object is deemed to have weak power of discrimination if it is correctly scored by high-skilled students as well as low-skilled students. Discrimination power means calculating the degree to which the results of a particular item correspond with the those of the entire test (Alderson, 1995). This means that an object is deemed to have weak power of discrimination if it is correctly scored by high-skilled students as well as low-skilled students. Item discrimination refers to the degree to which an object makes a difference between a good and poor testers. An object has good power of discrimination if it discriminates the right answers from the good students and the wrong answers from the weak students. It is worth noting that the high power of discrimination will be

close to 1.0, and no power of discrimination will be nil at all (Brown, 2010). The results obtained indicate that the test item DP ranges from (0.31) - (0.47). Table (3.2) below shows the test items in DP and DL:

Table (3.2)
Difficulty Level and Discrimination Power

Task Components	Item	Higher	Lower	Difficulty	Discrimination
Reaction	1	36	15	0.29	0.47
Summary	1	34	16	0.70	0.40
Support	1	35	20	0.50	0.33
Recommendation	1	40	26	0.28	0.31
Grammar/Mechanics	1	29	13	0.25	0.36

Chapter Four

Analysis of Data and Discussion of Results

4.0 Introductory Note

This chapter is allocated to the statistical analysis of the collected data and the discussion of the results in order to verify the following hypotheses:

4.1 Comparison between the Mean Scores of the Experimental Group and that of Control Group in the Literary Analysis

To find out if there is any significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group and that of the control group in the posttest, all mean scores are obtained and compared. Statistics shows that the mean scores of the experimental group is (17.14) and that of the control group is (11.82), with standard deviations of (2.27) and (3.63), respectively. By using the t-test formula for two independent, the calculated t-value is found to be (7.331), while the tabulated t-value is

found to be (1.994) at the degree of freedom (68) and level of significance (0.05). This indicates that there is a significant difference between the achievement of the two groups in favor of the experimental group. Thus, the second hypothesis which states that "there is significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group and that of the control group in the literary analysis posttest is accepted ", as shown in the Table (4.1).

Table (4.1)
Means, Standard Deviation, and t-Values of the Two Groups
in the Literary Analysis

Groups	No. of students	Mean	SD.	T-Value		DF	Sig.
EG.	35	17.14	2.27	Calculated	Tabulated	68	Sig.
CG.	35	11.82	3.63	7.331	1.994		

4.2 Discussion of Results

The obtained results show that the students of the experimental group are scientifically better than those of the control group in their achievement in short stories . Furthermore, they are better in their schema activation. On the other hand, the results show that there is no correlation between EFL students' literary analysis and schema activation.

According to the test results, it has been discovered that literary analysis of the students' developed through cognitive methods influences the experimental group; that the calculated t-value is determined to be greater than the tabulated t-value. Because the experimental group is subjected to cognitive methods that have a significant impact on the development of the students' achievements in short stories.

The findings of the current study demonstrate the importance of the cognitive strategies .The finding is also similar of the findings of AL-Saadi's (2019) which show that there are significant differences among college students in the four levels of the college .

Finally ,the findings of the current study was similar with the findings' of Sua's (2021) which demonstrated that the application of cognitive techniques increased text comprehension by allowing readers to engage their schema, understand the major ideas, and learn new terminology. Furthermore, participants were able to deduce meaning from the text, identify a reason for reading, and so enhance their drive to read. Furthermore, the findings of this study may provide ideas for other English or foreign language teachers who want to improve their students' reading comprehension skills.

4.3 Conclusions

From the obtained results a conclusion can be made which is that using cognitive strategies can change very well in remembering the most important things in short stories which can as well help students in getting high results during exams. Cognitive strategies have an important effect on the results of students in short stories .These strategies can help students in remembering the important details of short stories like (setting , characters, etc .).Using cognitive strategies can help instructors change the classroom into interesting classroom.

4.4 Recommendations

After analyzing the data, the researcher provides certain recommendations.

1. It is time for The Ministry of Higher Education to start courses that can help instructors have many and different strategies which can add a different atmosphere for the lectures of short stories.

2. It is the time for The Ministry of Higher Education to start to teach cognitive strategies in a course that can help students know what are these strategies .

3. Another workshop can be done to the instructors as well as students about how to implement cognitive strategies in teaching and studying literary genres .

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