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Integration of Skills: A Blueprint for Language Acquisition through Short Stories

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Abstract:

This paper is the result of an observational experiment that critically outlines the benefits of integrating the four skills of language acquisition based on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) through short stories. The idea of integrating the four language skills into a single inter-connected component was derived from the author's classroom experience of teaching short stories through a specific format that enhanced the motivation level of learners in the class. This paper consists of two parts. The first part describes the blueprint of the experiment, and the second part outlines the blueprint's implementation. The experiment was carried out in a post-foundation class at Dhofar University in which short stories were included as part of the syllabus. The "Arabian Night Stories" was used for the experiment because these stories are culturally relevant in the Arabian context. Moreover, the learners are familiar with the settings of the stories. Although the focus of the study is on the methodology of teaching short stories to enhance the communicative competence of L2 learners in the Arabian Peninsula, this experiment is beneficial to all L2 learners around the world. Moreover, the proposed blueprint is modeled on the theoretical foundations (CLIL). The blueprint ensures minimum teacher intervention for creating conducive learning environment for enhancing learners' language skills by utilizing stories of appropriate levels. Implementing this integrated learning process in the classroom revealed that short stories are effective tools for acquiring language skills by sustaining longer spans of learner motivation.

Keywords: acquisition, blueprint, integration, language skills, short stories.

技能整合：通过短篇小说习得语言的蓝图

摘要：

本文是一项观察性实验的结果，该实验批判性地概述了通过短篇小说整合基于内容和语言综合学习 (CLIL)

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的四种语言习得技能的好处。将四种语言技能整合到一个相互关联的组件中的想法源于作者在课堂上通过特定形式教授短篇小说的经验，这种形式提高了课堂上学习者的积极性。本文由两部分组成。第一部分描述了实验的蓝图，第二部分概述了蓝图的实现。该实验是在佐法尔大学的基础课程中进行的，其中短篇小说被列为教学大纲的一部分。“阿拉伯之夜故事”被用于实验，因为这些故事在阿拉伯背景下具有文化相关性。此外，学习者熟悉故事的背景。虽然本研究的重点是教授短篇小说以提高阿拉伯半岛二语学习者交际能力的方法，但这个实验对全世界所有二语学习者都有好处。此外，拟议的蓝图以理论基础（CLIL）为模型。该蓝图确保最少的教师干预，通过使用适当级别的故事来创造有利的学习环境，从而提高学习者的语言技能。在课堂上实施这种综合学习过程表明，短篇小说是通过维持更长的学习动机来获得语言技能的有效工具。

关键词：习得、蓝图、整合、语言技能、短篇小说。

1. Introduction

Numerous studies have been conducted, and several theories have been propounded by several EFL/ESL experts who explored different aspects of the acquisition of English as a foreign or second language. This study proposes a completely different blueprint or a new concept of language acquisition that recommends integrating skills through a framework or blueprint similar to the natural method of children acquiring their mother tongue. However, traditionally L2 learners have been acquiring different language skills separately or in isolation through pre-fabricated language drills. As a result, learners fail to acquire overall language competence in divergent discourse situations though they might use different language skills in isolation. In authentic communication contexts of real life, language skills are seldom used in isolation because genuine communication is a dynamic activity that requires an integration of skills. Communication in the L2 context demands integration and synthesis of listening and generating the required response spontaneously. This cognitive process happens automatically and instinctively in a competent L2 speaker. However, the discourse situations in real life are mainly distinct and divergent. As a result, they require very specific and completely different responses. Therefore, producing a proper response demands the synthesis and integration of different language skills simultaneously.

This study aims to integrate the four language skills and continuously practice them as a natural activity similar to children's acquiring their mother tongue. The optimum communicative competence in L2 learners can be achieved if this method is practiced regularly. The natural sequence of acquiring one's mother tongue begins with listening and speaking and finally moving on to writing and reading. However, L2 learners, who are mostly teenagers or adults, mastering a second language, begin with writing and reading. The framework of their learning process has to be reversed and made similar to that of children who naturally learn their mother tongue from their daily situations as they grow up. Therefore, L2 learners should integrate the four skills through a practical framework that can develop their communicative competence involving real-life discourses. The traditional method of acquiring the skills in isolation will not make an L2 speaker

competent, as most L2 learners start with writing and reading skills and gradually move on to the communicative components of listening and speaking. In the case of native speakers, responses to discourses are always instinctive and automatic. However, second language learners can produce such instinctive responses through a conscious mental strategy of naturally synthesizing and integrating the four language skills. When this strategy is practiced consciously in the classroom context by L2 learners, multiple discourse structures will get embedded in their unconscious psyche. As a result, they can achieve communicative competence similar to that of native speakers. Therefore, the blueprint that is presented in this study is completely different from other L2 acquisition models that are currently popular.

2. Literature Review

Numerous researchers have explored effective instructional strategies for effective second language acquisition. This study will specifically analyze certain popular theories and highlight their impact on classroom practices versus their practical application. After that, a practical blueprint for L2 acquisition through short stories will be formulated based on the author's practical experience in teaching short stories in an EFL/ESL class. Emelogu (2019) distinguishes between methods and techniques in L2 acquisition by declaring that methods are practical applications or teaching activities in the class that help learners learn a language. However, the techniques are teaching strategies implemented in the class for achieving the intended goal. Currently, instruction strategies are more important in L2 teaching-learning situations, as Mora (2018) identifies four vital theoretical orientations or strategies indispensable for effective L2 acquisition. They are:

- Structural/linguistic orientation;
- Cognitive orientation;
- Affective/interpersonal orientation;
- Functional/communicative orientation.

In addition to the above four essential orientations for L2 acquisition, in educational settings, Lou and Noels (2019) have shown that learner motivation and appropriate teacher intervention during the learning process are more important than how learners evaluate

their learning ability. In other words, the learning environment and appropriate mentor intervention are key factors in effective L2 acquisition. Most of the recent studies on second language acquisition attest to this finding. For example, Brown and Hanson (2019) claim that teacher intervention will equip L2 learners with tools that enhance their confidence and improve their performance considerably. Similarly, in their survey, Molway and Mutton (2019) found that learners with low levels of L2 achievements improved their motivation level and L2 competence significantly over a seventh-month period of special instruction through appropriate teacher intervention. Therefore, this author's unique blueprint for L2 acquisition through short stories is built upon the foundations of conducive learning environment and appropriate teacher intervention. Therefore, the research question addressed in this study can be summarized as follows: Why is the integration of skills through short stories necessary for effective second language acquisition?

Many linguists consider language and literature as two distinct and separate entities. They strongly believe these two disciplines should be considered separate branches of study. For example, Carter and McRae (2016) consider them "disconnected pedagogic practices." Treating language and literature as two distinct entities has been traditionally accepted for ages. As a result, "language instruction is fully oriented towards imparting skills in isolation through a series of mechanical language drills orchestrated by experts in the field" (Baby, 2014). Therefore, the communicative proficiency to deal with authentic situations of real life has been found lacking in several second language learners. The lack of authentic instructional materials for language acquisition is another serious problem affecting learner motivation (Setiawan et al., 2021). Moreover, L2 learners have developed an aversion to the monotonous repetition of meaningless instructional materials purely orchestrated for linguistic drills practiced in many traditional language classrooms.

According to McDonough et al. (2013), "competence in the foreign language will involve an effective combined use of the four skills, which will depend on the nature of the interaction." Employing authentic discourse situations from real life is necessary to enhance the communicative competence of second language learners. They can be motivated to learn language by using graded short stories that are culturally relevant because these stories interestingly depict real-life situations to prolong and sustain the attention span of the learners. McDonough et al. (2013) emphatically claim that "as integrated skill materials are more likely to involve learners in authentic and realistic tasks; their motivation level will increase as they perceive a clear rationale behind what they are being asked to do." Since motivation is the chief driving force behind any successful activity, a paradigm shift in the language learning approach is necessary to enhance the communicative competence of second language learners.

3. Methodology

In this study, a descriptive-analytic method of comparison and contrast is employed to analyze the effectiveness of language acquisition through short stories. In addition, the proposed blueprint was implemented in a post-foundation ESP class on an experimental basis, and its outcome is discussed in detail in this research. As a result, the dynamics of integration through short stories for language acquisition constitute the essential discourse of this study. Short stories are an excellent tool for language instruction because they can easily generate motivation and sustain students' attention span. The most important aspect of sustaining motivation in language acquisition can be realized by employing culturally relevant stories of reasonable length (less than a thousand words). Most level-one stories consist of around a thousand words. Moreover, they can be read in less than twenty minutes because they comprise simple vocabulary and lexis suited for an average L2 learner of pre-intermediate level. Therefore, level-one graded stories are ideal for language learning activities in EFL/ESL classrooms. Short stories have many other features that make them excellent tools for language learning activities. According to Snow et al. (1989), short stories generate high interest because they are concisely written with carefully selected vocabulary, contemporary colloquial language, and authentic natural dialogue.

Since short stories can generate motivation in learners, several researchers have constructed different models of learning activities by integrating fictional literature and even other subject contents for promoting communicative competence in L2 learners. As a result, content-based language instruction (CBI) has recently become popular. Most of these models were designed primarily to generate and sustain learner motivation in their chosen field of discipline by using them for language learning. Many experts believe fictional literature can offer the highest motivational element in a language classroom. Ideally, the motivational element can be ensured and sustained by "carefully selecting the reading materials, starting with simple level one stories consisting of easily understood vocabulary" (Baby, 2014). According to Snow et al. (1989), short stories quite readily lend themselves to capturing and holding the brief attention spans of learners in predominantly non-reading societies. The high degree of motivation that learners displayed in the author's experimental post-foundation class in the Arabian context clearly indicated the efficacy of integrating short stories into language learning activities.

The communicative competence of second language learners can be enhanced considerably by using short stories for language instruction because they embody all the necessary characteristics essential for genuine communication in real-life situations. According to Gargiulo (2014), "stories are fundamental to how we communicate, learn, and think." He argues that they "provide us with a way of understanding the underlying

operating principles behind effective communication and learning." Gargiulo (2006) shows the pivotal role of short stories in the language learning activity by outlining nine basic functions of short stories that make them an ideal tool for genuine language learning activity:

- Stories empower a speaker.
- Stories create an environment.
- Stories bind and bond individuals.
- Stories engage our minds in active listening.
- Stories negotiate differences.
- Stories encode information.
- Stories are tools for thinking.
- Stories serve as weapons.
- Stories bring about healing.

According to Denning (2011), stories enhance the overall language competence of L2 learners by integrating language skills and generate and sustain motivation throughout the learning process. Denning (2011) further claims that "stories can help us understand life's complexity and enhance or change our perceptions. Moreover, they are easy to remember and help us overcome our inhibitions and normal defense mechanisms through active participation and engaging our feelings with the characters and situations portrayed in the text". Considering the primary role of motivation in language learning, Gargiulo (2014), says, "The motivational factor emanating from the stories sustains the learner's interest throughout the learning process. In this sense, we can say that the universe is made of stories, not atoms". Similarly, Denning (2011) believes that "stories provide continuity in our lives and give us a sense of history and heritage. They are pervasive in our lives and have been central to communication since the beginning of the human race".

Short stories are excellent tools for learning a language primarily due to their interesting theme or subject matter. Secondly, they deal with real-life situations and embody authentic discourses for communication. The simple vocabulary and lexis of graded stories are ideally suited for language learning activities. Therefore, the didactic division of language and literature into two separate and distinct entities cannot be accepted fully. According to Carter and Nash (1990), "the separation of literature from language is a false dualism since literature is language and language can indeed be literary. Instead of classifying literary and non-literary discourses, we should acknowledge different varieties of text types in a linear progression with some texts being more literary than others". If this view is accepted, we can conclude there is no fundamental difference between language and literature. Moreover, literature should be integrated into language learning activities because it can generate and sustain learners' motivation.

3.1. The Analysis of the Proposed Model

The proposed blueprint is a simple learning activity for enhancing L2 competence with the aid of short stories. The component consists of an uninterrupted

sequence of reading, writing, speaking, and listening in a session for at least one hour. The session can begin with an introduction to the sequence of activities that will be carried out in the class. The process starts with students quietly reading a simple level-one story consisting of less than a thousand words and writing the summary immediately after the reading activity. These two activities should be completed within the first half of the session. The remaining half of the session can be utilized for speaking and listening activities by individual students. The students are required to speak about the story they have read and should initiate a discussion on it by inviting the views of other students in the class. The teacher can act as a facilitator to streamline this activity by allotting five to ten minutes for individual students. The listening and speaking activity can be continued into the next class until everyone completes this activity.

The proposed blueprint effectively incorporates all four skills in a continuous succession as an integrated activity with adequate learner autonomy. The author used the "Tales from the Arabian Nights" storybook in his/her class. All the learners were familiar with the stories' setting and cultural background. Moreover, these level-one stories were written in simple language suitable for the level of the author's learners. The author conducted the experimental sessions in a post-foundation literature class at Dhofar University. Short stories were part of the course syllabus, but the teacher could choose relevant stories for story reading sessions. Since the emphasis of the class was on a new methodology of teaching short stories, the experiment can be termed action research in the classroom. Moreover, the proposed blueprint is modeled on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) principles. Therefore, it can be implemented in all L2 learning contexts for acquiring language skills by utilizing stories of appropriate levels. As short stories are the most interesting form of fictional literature, they are effective tools for acquiring language skills through an integrated learning process. Although there are different models of content-based language instruction, this blueprint is developed on the basic principles of CLIL.

3.2. The Basic Principles of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

CLIL can be summarized as an innovative methodology for learning a second language and teaching the content of a subject area in humanities or science. The primary focus of this methodology is on achieving proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In addition, the learners' cultural background and first language are considered while designing the teaching-learning activity. Generally, the CLIL methodology is flexible and allows greater freedom for designing the framework. However, it mentions the following 4Cs as the broader framework of CLIL methodology:

Content - Progression in knowledge, skills, and

understanding related to specific elements of a defined curriculum;

Communication - Using language to learn while learning to use language;

Cognition - Developing thinking skills that link concept formation (abstract and concrete), understanding, and language;

Culture - Exposure to alternative perspectives and shared understandings, which deepen awareness of otherness and self (Darn, 2015).

In addition, CLIL should combine and integrate the four language skills into the teaching-learning activity in order to achieve proficiency in a second language as outlined below:

Listening is a normal input activity, vital for language learning.

Reading, using meaningful material, is the major source of input.

Speaking focuses on fluency. Accuracy is seen as subordinate.

Writing is a series of lexical activities through which grammar is recycled (Darn, 2015).

According to the CLIL lesson framework, the lesson plans should incorporate all the characteristics given above in their learning activity. The guideline says that all CLIL lessons should “integrate the receptive and productive skills into the texts, and the language focus should not be on structural grading, but it should be functional and dictated by the context of the subject. Language is approached lexically rather than grammatically, and learner styles are considered in task types” (Darn, 2015).

3.3. The Implementation of the Blueprint in the Classroom

The author modified the theoretical foundations of CLIL to create the blueprint for teaching short stories. The blueprint's development resulted from the author's classroom experiment of innovative teaching of short stories. When it was noticed that the students did not effectively utilize the story reading class hour, some task-based activities were introduced in the class to achieve the desired learning outcome. Therefore, the class time was equally divided into two parts. The first half was allotted for the input activity of reading the story and writing the summary. The principle of learner autonomy was integrated into the input activity of reading by allowing students to choose any story from the seven shortlisted titles. Similarly, critical thinking was promoted in the summary writing activity by asking students to write the main ideas in less than two hundred words. Likewise, limiting the time for the output activity of speaking and discussion helped learners enhance their communicative competence by spontaneous generation of required discourses. The outline of this blueprint explained above was carried out in the author's post-foundation literature class at Dhofar University. Short stories were included as part of the syllabus. Since it was only an observational experiment employing a different methodology of teaching short

stories, it cannot be called pure research. However, it can be termed action research in the classroom context. Therefore, it is necessary to recount the different steps of implementing the blueprint in the classroom.

Initially, the different stages of the learning methodology were introduced to the students and explained the rationale behind the learning activities. After that, they were asked to read one of the stories from the book and write a summary in less than two hundred words. During the reading activity, there was absolute silence in the class as all the students were seriously absorbed in the reading process, obviously due to the simple language and the familiar cultural background of the stories. During the summary writing stage, there were slight distractions as most students struggled to construct proper sentences within the prescribed time. Finally, each student was required to speak about the story by using the summary written by them. The learning process is completed when a discussion is initiated on the story by inviting the opinion and addressing the questions of other students in the class. In short, the blueprint provided the learners with enough autonomy to practice the different language skills simultaneously as an integrated activity.

3.4. An Observational Analysis of the Blueprint

For testing the blueprint, all the students were asked to read the same story, 'The Genie in the Bottle,' in the first class. In this experimental class, most students completed the reading activity within twenty minutes. In order to test the comprehension level of the participants, they were asked some simple questions which would help them to write the summary concisely. The students' answers confirmed that most of them could understand the story fairly well. After the reading activity, the learners were required to write the summary in less than two hundred words. The time factor was important as the author had to integrate all the skills in a single session to achieve the desired output. However, all the students finished writing the summary within the allotted time. While writing the summary, there was an interesting query from one of the learners. He wanted to know how to write the summary of the following line from the text: "I am a genie and can do anything I want." He was confused about properly summarizing this idea. In other words, he asked the author which pronoun he should use to refer to the genie: "The genie said that *he/she/it* could do anything *he/she/it* wanted." Although his question confused the author initially, he/she told him that normally the genie is considered genderless. Therefore, one can use the word "*it*" to refer to the genie.

Before the end of the writing session, the author approached him again to see how he wrote the summary of that idea. He had changed the sentence into reported speech correctly: "The genie said it could do anything it wanted." The author was surprised that he could do a grammar task correctly without being aware of it. To test him, the author asked again, "What did you do actually when you removed the speech mark and wrote

the sentence in your own words?" Although he did not know that he used reported speech, he knew that the quotation marks refer to the speaker's original words. This episode clearly illustrates that short stories can effectively teach grammar. Since one of the major problems in a traditional language class is a lack of motivation among the learners, so short stories can effectively bridge this gap. According to Yanguas (2010), "effective motivation is something which lasts throughout the learning process, and it can be divided into three phases: choice motivation, generated motivation, and executive motivation. If motivation can be actively maintained and protected as long as the action lasts, it can be considered genuine motivation". Therefore, a careful selection of short stories can generate and sustain the motivational force of language learners throughout the learning process.

3.5. Integration of Skills through Short Stories

Short stories are effective tools for integrating language acquisition skills because simple and easy-to-read stories are available to readers nowadays. Short stories are classified or graded based on their content, vocabulary, lexis, and difficulty level. For instance, the "Arabian Night Stories" are excellent tools for language learning due to their simple language and realistic descriptions of the cultural background familiar to the readers of the Arabian Peninsula. As a result, motivation for further reading is generated by the simple language and easy comprehension of the storyline. Highlighting the role of short stories as an effective tool for language acquisition, Baby (2014) says: "If the social background, lifestyle, and customs employed in the stories are the same as those of the learner's immediate surroundings, it can be a great motivating factor for the learner through his/her empathetic identification with the characters and incidents in the stories."

In the context of a traditional language classroom, it can be said that the learners usually master the form and structure of discourses through the mechanical repetition of language drills. However, such drills cannot guarantee communicative competence in real-life situations, where genuine discourses are required. Short stories are not only materials for reading pleasure, but they can also be employed as effective tools for learning grammar. For example, basic sentence structure, different types of questions, and different forms of verbs used for active and passive sentences can all be taught in the class by using appropriately graded short stories. Baby (2014) says that "grammar can be taught in context and alongside the storyline. Such language instruction can produce good results because of associations and interwoven images embodied in the storyline. Hence, stories can be used as effective tools for achieving overall competence in a second language".

The author had multiple reasons for selecting an Arabian Night story for the observational experiment. First of all, the stories in disconnected contexts are not

ideal for an integrated learning activity, as Gargiulo (2006) argues, "The learning materials should be viewed as a collection in order to discern patterns and relationships among the characters and their actions within the matrix of the text which can help us to increase our knowledge of people and situations." Secondly, the "Tales from Arabian Nights" is used for the learning process because the characters in these stories are familiar to the learners of Arabia. For developing adequate competence in a second language, culturally relevant stories should be "brought within the gamut of easily understandable actions and situations, and the learning activity should combine reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills in a single learning component for the optimum result" (Baby, 2014). In effect, the proposed blueprint satisfies most of the abovementioned conditions by selecting a culturally relevant set of stories to achieve optimum results.

The blueprint contains activities specifically designed for developing critical thinking and autonomous learning. According to Gargiulo (2006), "stories are tools for thinking; they are the best way to encode complex information that can be squeezed into succinct, easy-to-digest packages. Listeners can unwrap the story's packaging and uncover a wealth of information in the process". In other words, stories can provide us with new awareness about the innermost thoughts of our mind in a subtle manner. Gargiulo (2006) claims that "stories offer a fresh way of looking at the inner work of our minds. Thoughts are the by-products of our experiences, and we build a perceptual filter for the world based on our specific experiences. Hence each new story acts as a tendril tying us to the past, making the present significant and shaping the future". In short, stories can be considered the best medium for achieving second language competence.

4. Results and Discussion of the Experiment

One of the important observations from this experiment was that learners developed critical thinking as reflected in their output. Secondly, most learners developed motivation as evidenced by completing the task within the allotted time. As stories mostly reflect real-life situations, most incidents and situations naturally generate and sustain the learner's interest. The learners were completely absorbed in the task during the reading activity. The principle of learner autonomy was integrated into the input activity of reading by allowing students to choose any story from the seven shortlisted titles for the consequent classes. Similarly, critical thinking was promoted in the summary writing activity by asking learners to write the main ideas in less than two hundred words. Furthermore, limiting the time for the output activity of speaking and discussion helped enhance learners' communicative competence through their spontaneous generation of the required discourses. Certain learners sought clarifications from their peers or the teacher during the summary writing

stage. In short, the blueprint encouraged collaborative learning as some of the learners quietly exchanged ideas with their peers and requested the partial intervention of the teacher during the learning process.

During the reading stage, the participants focused their attention on the content and enjoyed the reading activity because they could easily understand the story's content. During the summary writing stage, most participants displayed cognitive and critical thinking skills. The entire activity finally culminated in a speaking activity which included discussion and listening to the views of other participants. In general, the experiment enhanced different language skills through continuous and interconnected activities using the short story. Furthermore, all the learning activities were conducted in a relaxed manner within the allotted time, and the learners could improve their skills further through appropriate teacher intervention at critical moments. As a result, implementing this blueprint on an experimental basis brought about visible enhancement in all four skills of the participants.

4.1. A Critical Evaluation of the Blueprint

Many linguists believe that literature cannot be used as an effective medium for learning a second language because they believe it is inadequate to include in the practice of specific language skills. In other words, they believe that literature cannot be used effectively for language learning activities requiring clear and precise instructions. Several critics think literature is beyond the compass and comprehension of many L2 learners. According to Savvidou (2004), "it is difficult to imagine teaching the stylistic features of literary discourse to learners who have a less than sophisticated grasp of the basic mechanics of the English language. Literature is considered inappropriate for the language classroom may be found in the common beliefs held about literature and literary language". Although there is no close connection between genuine discourses of real life and commonly used poetic and literary language used in dramatic discourses, short stories are an exception to this rule. Short stories mostly portray authentic discourses of real life based on its imaginative recreations.

The application of literary and poetic discourses may not be suitable for language classrooms. However, short stories are ideal tools in language classrooms for enhancing learners' competence for several reasons. According to Baby (2014), "short stories offer greater flexibility in content as they are more culturally specific and try to portray life situations realistically and interestingly. Moreover, they are fairly easily understood as they are intimately linked to people and events which sustain the interest of an average reader". Similarly, Lasagabaster (2010), who made a comparative study of traditional EFL class and CLIL approach in the Spanish L2 language context, established the efficacy of using literature for language instruction. The results obtained in this study indicate that the two cohorts of students were highly motivated

to learn English. However, the students enjoying a CLIL experience were significantly more enthusiastic than those in traditional EFL classrooms. It can therefore be concluded that there is a strong relationship between the CLIL approach and motivation.

Lasagabaster's (2010) findings corroborate the results obtained from the observational experiment based on my blueprint implemented in the post-foundation literature class at Dhofar University. Therefore, the view that literature is inadequate for teaching language cannot be accepted fully because short stories embody certain social and cultural elements that can generate and sustain learner motivation throughout the learning process. The proposed blueprint for language acquisition through the integration of skills invalidates the notion that a second language can be acquired by learning skills in isolation. As communication is mainly an individual's self-expression or spontaneous responses to certain unique situations, it is not always possible to measure the actual level of competency in L2 learners. Linguists commonly recommend learning the different language components in isolation to achieve different linguistic skills. However, mastering the various language skills in isolation does not necessarily help a learner to achieve adequate communicative competence.

The integration of skills is essential for achieving linguistic and communicative competence for a learner to deal with multiple situations in real life because language is a dynamic entity, and each situation demands a different set of responses. The traditional concept of language testing was built upon a set of pre-fabricated situations and artificially generated language activity. Therefore, they cannot be considered genuine yardsticks for measuring language competence. If we want to enhance a learner's linguistic and communicative competence, we need to shift the emphasis to the process rather than the product. As a result, the proposed blueprint presents an innovative methodology completely different from the traditional approach adopted by several linguists in the past. The proposed blueprint offers a paradigm shift from the traditional EFL/ESL approach. Although many linguists do not approve of language instruction through literature, several benefits can be derived from integrating short stories into language learning activities. This view is supported by some experts, such as Savvidou (2004). He says, "An integrated approach to the use of literature in the language classroom offers foreign language learners the opportunity to develop their linguistic and communicative skills and knowledge about language in all its discourse types."

5. Conclusion

The present study has firmly established that short stories are effective tools for second language acquisition. The proposed blueprint presents an innovative methodology completely different from the traditional approach adopted by several linguists in the past. The proposed blueprint offers a paradigm shift

from the traditional EFL/ESL approach that recommends teaching language skills in isolation. On other hand, it advocates integrating the different skills into an inter-related organic component that promotes critical thinking and autonomous learning in mastering a second language. Finally, this blueprint can be implemented in any L2 learning context by carefully selecting culturally relevant short stories suitable for the level of learners. However, this study has certain limitations as it was done in a limited environment with a very small sample on an experimental basis. As a result, the validity of the findings of this study can be questioned. Moreover, the study did not provide specific data to support the findings. To a certain extent, these drawbacks can be justified on the ground that it was only task-based action research conducted by a teacher in a classroom and not formal scientific or structured research. However, in the future, this research can be expanded into a scientific and structured study by collecting data from diverse learning situations for analysis as this topic presents a vital aspect of L2 language acquisition.

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