

An Analysis on Effects of Story Mapping in Writing Short Stories in EFL Classes, Iraqi Case

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Abstract: In this study, it is investigated that how much story map graphic organizers contribute to foster writing short stories. Eighteen EFL students from foundation year were randomly chosen and provided eight writing courses. First, the writing teacher provided a topic to the students for each course, and asked them to write three short stories about given topics. In the following two lessons, the instructor introduced graphic organizers and taught the elements of short story to the students. Later, they were given another three topics for the following three courses to create short stories using story map graphic organizers created by writing teacher. Then, the researcher selected two of their first and second pieces randomly and developed a scale to assess the students' first and second products. The results were classified by including story elements in two tables as percentage.

Keywords: EFL Class, Short Story, Story Map Graphic Organizers, Writing Course

1. Introduction

People have had the necessity to express their emotions from the beginning of civilization, so stories have been emerged as a result of this need. They are accepted as crucial instruments in all cultures that have been handed down from generation to generation. They provide a huge contribution to bond the diverse cultures. That is to say, they increase our humanitarian values and awareness for life because we mostly empathize ourselves with the characters in the stories. Over time, educators have used the stories in education considering its tutorial effects in human life, and they have generated many ways using stories. Writing is one of the courses that takes advantages of stories. It is a great opportunity given to students to express their opinions and feelings. However, the majority of EFL students believe this lesson as painful process because of lack of vocabulary, insufficient input about the topics, teaching methods, poor structure knowledge or etc. Based on this belief, teachers have embarked on a quest in order to facilitate the process and change the point of views of students towards this course. Besides writing course books, they provide short stories to the students that enable them to activate and excite about the incidents in the stories.

Educator also supply story map graphic organizers to the students help them write their short summary sprucely. Unless they use story map technique, especially most of low-level students may not be able to finalize their writing, so they may easily give up writing and ambition for achievement. That's why story

map technique takes a great role in that point to develop students' writing skills and encourage them to perpetuate desire for writing.

2. Literature Review

The ability to define the ideas and articulate them properly in writing is a significant contributor to accomplish in any kind of academic activity. Nonetheless, writing poses particular challenges for self-control (Bandura 1986; Bereiter & Scardamelia, 1987; Wason 1980 as cited in Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). The reason for this is that writing activities are generally self-programmed, demand on great effort for a long period of time with outcomes that are done on its own and conclusively the quality produced should be repeatedly reviewed to meet the personal standards. It is not unexpected that trained writers should apply to various self-discipline methods to boost their writing activities (Barzon, 1964; Gould, 1980; Wallace & Pear, 1977 as cited in Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994).

Writing is one of the most invaluable piece of the language that students can express their ideas and reveal their feelings freely. Teachers may find opportunities to generate a peaceful atmosphere that helps the students to contribute their creativity and productivity. It is considered that writing is priceless for the learners in order to clarify how the parts of the language blend in each other (Banat, 2007 as cited in Ibnian, 2010), and "writing makes our thoughts and experiences vivid and long lasting and helps us learn things in every subject area. In many ways, writing is the way we make sense of our world" (Conley, 1995 cited in Ibnian, 2010).

The majority of scholars have presumed that "writing is a cyclical rather than a linear process" (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1994; Farris, 1997 cited in Suleiman, 2000). It is emphasized on students should not instructed with fixed stages, however they may find opportunities to boost their interaction and shape the process (Block, 1997 cited in Suleiman, 2000). In the study of Suleiman (2000), it was asserted that one of the most complicated ways among language skills is writing because it requires to spend time and make a great effort for the students and teachers. Furthermore, he noted that "most importantly, writing has many aspects and dimensions in terms of its process and product".

Considering the empirical studies, writing is an element of any foreign language that requires plan, effort, and practice. Although students may learn any other components such as reading, speaking or listening of a foreign language at a certain level, most of them may fall behind in writing because of some obstacles such as insufficient vocabulary or structural knowledge, or just fear to write. In order to eliminate these impediments, language teachers should search for various ways so as to stimulate the students to pursue writing and get involved into the lesson. In this context, the preferability of short stories in writing is highly effective because of their advantages in language learning. In Collie & Slater's study (1987, p.167), it was mentioned that several benefits of short stories hereinbelow:

- They can be covered within one or two classes depend on their shortness.
- They do not discourage the students not to able to finalize the task.
- They suggest a variety of options to appeal each student due to their interests.
- They are mostly preferable for the teachers for summer classes, evening courses, sessional classes, etc.

In another study, Erkaya (2005) advocates that there are several benefits of using short stories in EFL/ESL classes to increase motivation of the students, develop them in a literary sense or boost their critical thinking skills. She also added instructors should get aware of one important point which is more essential to realize primarily than the other benefits is short stories enhance four skills of a language.

Regarding the studies above, writing teachers' main task is to facilitate the process and gain the writing ability to the students effectively. Short stories take a great role in that point in order to draw writing course from monotony and make it more fun and achievable for learners. In present study, it is indicated that students can be able to write short story and exploit story map technique in their writing. Furthermore, it is revealed that the comparison between the products in the event of using and not using story mapping.

A story map is a strategy that uses a graphic organizer to help students learn the elements of a book or story. By identifying story characters, plot, setting, problem and solution, students read carefully to learn the details. There are many different types of story map graphic organizers. The most basic focus on the beginning, middle, and end of the story. More advanced organizers focus more on plot or character traits. ("Story Maps", 2017).

In addition to what is mentioned above, story map may be considered as a guide that helps the students perceive each detail in the story, relationships between the events and the characters, and not to skip any elements of the story because it includes the main components of that genre that should be included in a story. Furthermore, the learners may enhance their comprehension ability while both analyzing and writing a short story using story map technique. Some of the elements of story map organizers in that study are described below:

Setting: It describes where and when the story takes place.

Plot: It refers to chain of the events in the story.

Characterization: Fantastical characters who have a part in the story fictionalized by the writer.

Conflict: The problem that occurs in the story.

Climax: Peak of the problem.

Resolution: It defines the solution at the end of the story.

Theme: It states the main idea of the story.

2.1 The Purpose of the Study

It is probably accepted by the majority of the teachers there is a great impact of stories on students' education. Not only do they use the stories to give the students moral values, but they also use them as a tool to teach skills in a foreign language. In order to facilitate the process of writing short stories, story map is a tool that helps the students not to forget any detail in the story and put all the components of the story into place. The present study aims to reflect the effects of using story map on students' short story writing ability in EFL classes.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

Eighteen EFL students were randomly chosen from Foundation Year of English Language Teaching Department. At the beginning of the semester, these students were examined to measure their English level and divided into classes according to their level.

3.2 Design of the Study

Initially, the researcher taught the students how to structure a sentence and how to write a paragraph within the first semester and at the beginning of the second semester. Then, she set eight courses with the students to study short story writing. The instructor asked the students to write three short stories with 150-200 words about given topics in three courses. In the following lessons, she introduced the story elements and story map graphic organizers in depth, presented some samples, and provided several short stories to the students to analyze them considering the organizers. The students were demanded to write three short stories with 150-200 words in next three courses using the story map organizers created by instructor.

3.3 Data Collection

The researcher filed the writings of the students to compare them as first and second product of each of the student. She created a data collection form which contains the elements of short story to compare the learners' first and second products.

3.4 Findings and Results

Table 1: Scoring Tools

NO	Setting (Time)	Setting (Place)	Main Character	Starter event	Problem	Climax	Resolution	Logical order	Theme	Total Points	%
S1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	7	77.7
S2	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	6	66.6
S3	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	33.3
S4	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	8	88.8
S5	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8	88.8
S6	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	33.3
S7	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	4	44.4
S8	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	6	66.6
S9	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	7	77.7
S10	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8	88.8
S11	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	3	33.3
S12	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	33.3

S13	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	4	44.4
S14	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	33.3
S15	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	7	77.7
S16	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	5	55.5
S17	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	7	77.7
S18	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	33.3
%	38.88	61.11	88.88	61.11	77.77	33.33	55.55	50	61.11	Average	58.63
									1		

Table 1 shows the students' first stories scoring points according to whether they include short story elements.

Table 2: Scoring Tools

NO	Setting (Time)	Setting (Place)	Main Character	Starter event	Problem	Climax	Resolution	Logical order	Theme	Total Points	%
S1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	8	88.8
S2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8	88.8
S3	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	7	77.7
S4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9	100
S5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9	100
S6	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	6	66.6
S7	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7	77.7
S8	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	9	100
S9	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8	88.8
S10	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9	100
S11	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	5	55.5
S12	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	7	77.7
S13	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	6	66.6
S14	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	5	55.5
S15	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9	100
S16	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8	88.8
S17	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	8	88.8
S18	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	6	66.6
%	88.88	94.44	100	88.88	100	50	83.33	83.33	94.44	Average	87.02
									4		

Table 2 illustrates the students' second stories scoring points according to whether they include short story elements.

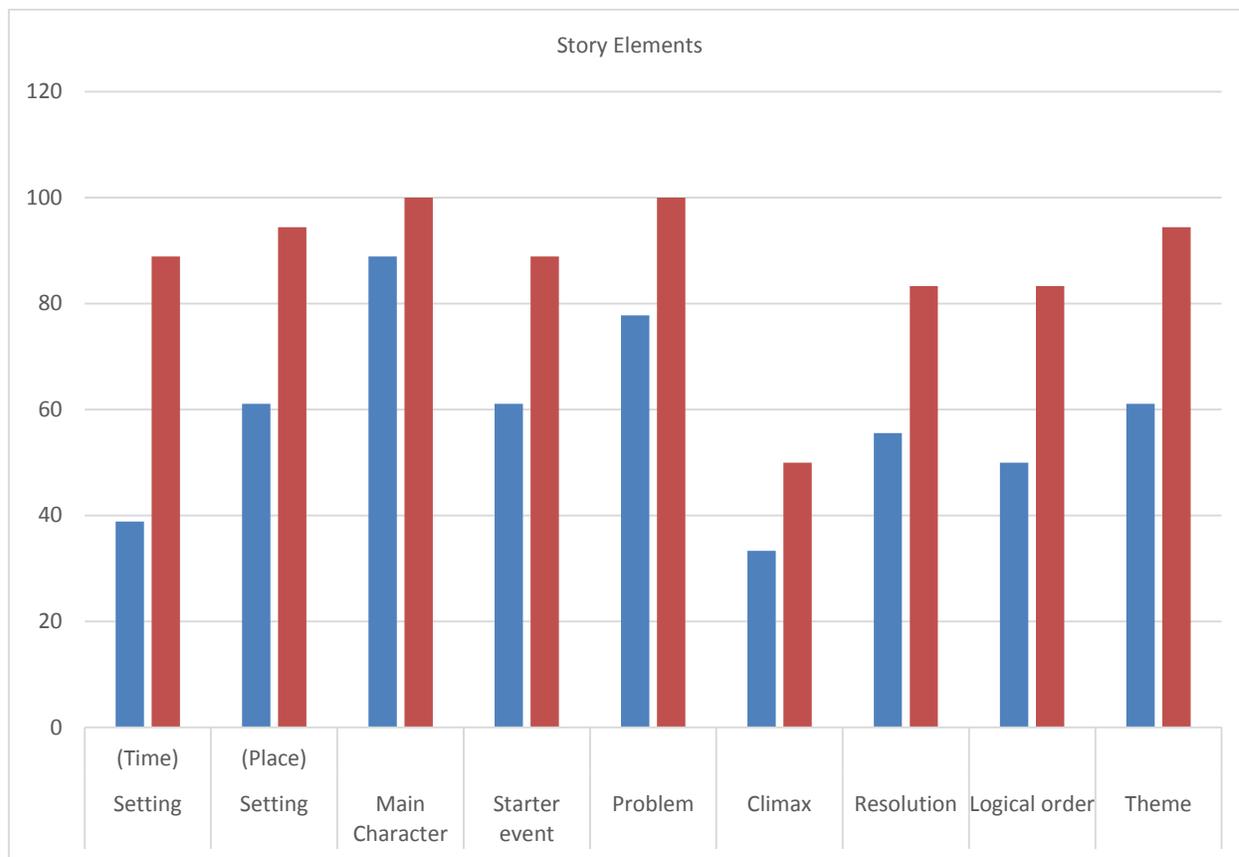


Figure 1: The variation of the usage story elements in first and second writings

Considering Table 1, it may be noted that the majority of the students showed quite low performance for indicating time with %38.88 and climax with %33.33 in their studies, on the contrary, they made a notable success in main character with %88.88 and problem with %77.77. By the way, just %50 of them could write their stories in a logical order; nonetheless, it does not mean hundred percent of this amount could apply that element thoroughly. It may be implied that most of the students did not recognize the elements of short story while they were jotting down their stories, and %58.63 is not satisfactory considering overall performance of the students.

Table 2 illustrates that the students scaled up the percentages dramatically for theme, time, place, problem, starter event, main character, logical order and resolution whereas they increased approximately just %17 in climax. Table 2 proves that once the students were presented the elements of the story, and how to use a story map graphic organizer, they could outscore in overall performance comparing their first scores. Regarding the percentages of climax in both tables, it may be deduced that the students may not have scored up significantly in climax because their English level may not be sufficient to perceive that element and apply it in their writings.

4. Conclusion

Writing is one of the most crucial skills of a foreign language; however, it is accepted hard to understand of its components like structure of language, grammar, process, modes and genres, traits and assessments by the majority of the students. In order to facilitate that painful process for them, short story writing is one of the most effective ways because of some advantages. It does not bore the students because most characters or events are already in our daily life. There is no limitation that confines their imagination. They shape every character or event according to their sense of humors, that is, they create their own scripts. Further to that, at the result of the study, it is concluded that using story map graphic organizers takes a great role to understand the elements of the story and not to skip any detail in the story. First, the students are needed to teach the components of short stories, and then how to use these organizers. Thus, the learners will be able to create more accurate pieces.

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