



## Using Short Stories in Developing Plot for Teaching Narrative Writing in an ESL Classroom

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### Abstract

Literature has taken a back seat in recent years since the adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), an international standard to describe and measure language proficiency at each level from primary to secondary school. Newly termed as Literature in Action, this component is not part of the assessment in the Form Five public examinations, Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM). Hence, teachers are more inclined to exclude it in their lessons. This is most unfortunate considering literature is a wealth of resources in the English language teaching and learning and for this study, short stories in particular. Therefore, this study explored the effectiveness of short stories in helping students identify elements of a plot as well as to examine the use of elements of a plot in short stories in constructing plot development to enhance students' narrative writing. 20 Form Four students were selected in this mixed- method study. Data were collected using a pre and post test, questionnaire and semi- structured interview. Findings revealed that short stories indeed helped students to better identify plot elements. On top of that, it was also found that with plot elements, students could construct plot development of their narrative writing easily and of higher quality. It is suggested that for future research, similar strategy of using short stories can be employed to teach other language skills; reading, listening and speaking.

### INTRODUCTION

One of the shifts in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025 concentrates on ensuring all children to be proficient in the English language and to produce proficient users of the language to compete in the global market (Ministry of Education, 2013). To be able to communicate well, students need be well- versed in all the main macro skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, according to Din et al. (2021), writing is the most difficult out of the four language skills . Zakaria et al. (2016) concurred that students who cannot express themselves well would find writing challenging as it is a demanding and arduous task. Teachers and students indeed find writing a painstaking and laborious process. Teachers, in teaching the content and guiding students step by step and students, in learning how to write with all the bewildering mechanics of writing. Therefore, problems in writing lessons are two- sided as they do not only stem from the students but from the teachers themselves as remarked by Kwan and Yunus (2014), English teachers, in general, are inadequate in their own

writing skills which may affect their students' writing. Gündoğmus (2018) also agreed that lack of professional experience is also another factor and this is especially true among new teachers. Therefore, both teachers and students have a role to play in changing the mindset that writing is both challenging and complex.

In the public examinations Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) English Writing Paper Part 3, students are given a choice to write a piece of narrative essay. They are required to write a story which ideally should follow the generic structure of a narrative text. However, this is the problem majority of the students are facing. They have neither the knowledge nor awareness to include this generic structure when writing. Baharuddin and Mohamad (2020) opinionated that many students encounter problems in the initial stage; planning a plot, setting, characters and moral values. Therefore, it is not surprising students perform most poorly in the writing section in the English language examination (Kee & Razali, 2019). Hence, to overcome this, the use of appropriate pedagogical approach which can lead to improvement in the students' writing should be given more attention (Chan et al., 2003).

Literary texts, which not only make the language learning process interesting but also enjoyable, could be applied. They provide a platform for students to response to texts without inhibitions because they are fun, interesting, and authentic and specifically, short stories, could develop the writing skills (Elhabiri, 2013). Similarly, Pardede (2011) also concurred that short stories are both powerful and motivating to encourage ESL learners to develop their writing skills. Therefore, short stories are chosen to help students in developing a plot following the generic structure and arrange their contents in an organized manner.

In this paper, the researcher attempts to use short stories to enhance students' writing skills. The focus in the paper is to examine in what ways can plot elements in short stories help students develop plot or generic structure to enhance their narrative writing.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent can short stories help students identify elements of a plot?
2. In what ways can elements of a plot in short stories help students construct plot development in their narrative writing?

## SHORT STORIES IN NARRATIVES : WHY THEY MATTER?

### *Short stories*

Integration of short stories into the teaching of English curriculum in Malaysia will help mould more holistic ESL learners. This is because short stories are able to lend themselves to teach language skills necessary for communication in a second language besides developing literary, cultural, intellectual, and educational values. Short stories can be defined as the "narrative that can be read at one sitting of from one-half hour to two hours, and that is limited to 'a certain unique or single effect,' to which every detail is subordinate." (Abrams, 1970, p. 158). The meaning of 'single effect' here is with a single plot and a few characters. Essentially a short story has a concise plot with a setting, characters, themes, and perspective of the narrator. It is because of this unique feature of this literary genre, students can follow the storyline easily and hence makes it highly suitable to be used in ESL classrooms.

Advocates who support the use of short stories to teach ESL are convinced that students are exposed to distinctive opportunities to develop in terms of their education, motivation, intellect, literature, culture, and linguistics development. In an action research conducted by Haliem (2020), her findings revealed that incorporating short stories in language teaching has promising effects in that it helps students in their development of linguistic knowledge. Kirkgöz (2012) carried out a study to examine if the incorporation of short stories in the teaching of the English language can help students in their language skills; grammar and vocabulary besides promoting creative writing skills. It was discovered that her respondents found that the learning of grammar was more meaningful through the use of short stories as they were authentic.

To further support the benefits of short stories in language learning, Pardede (2012), in his article, discussed that among the many types of literary genres, short stories help students enhance the four skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This is in line with Murdoch's (2002) opinion that short stories are indeed greatly beneficial in improving students' vocabulary, knowledge of grammar as well as the four language skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Similarly, Sentürk and Kahraman (2020) conducted a survey with 57 Turkish students and results showed a positive difference in grammar scores and it could be concluded that the integration of short stories can boost students' grammar knowledge.

As a conclusion, short stories are a universal literary genre in all parts of the world. The benefits are manifold and which teachers should discover and introduce, to their students, this world of literary wonder.

### *Multimodality story stories*

The world is undergoing fast changes in the development of technology and globalization. In the world of education, a growing multimodality of communication is indisputable. Multimodal literature integrates audio, visual and other representations. A multimodal text usually takes the form of a digital text but they can be in the form of a book, for example picture book, infographic, or graphic novel (Eisenmann & Summer, 2020). Prensky (2001) argued that Generation Z or digital natives process information differently than their former counterparts. Prensky compared graduates reading time versus visual entertainment and discovered that a college graduate has spent less than 5,000 hours on reading but over 10,000 hours playing video-games and 20,000 hours watching television (p. 1). Therefore, language teachers need to prepare to make the shift from a monomodal linguistic explanatory to a multimodal perspective in which visual material combines with verbal text. One such combination is none other than graphic novels. Their visual nature which appeals to students with an additional mode of input makes them very feasible resources. Besides, the incorporation of text and visual elements can enhance retention of information and demonstrate how 'an educator can facilitate a better understanding of the way narratives are built' (Radan, 2017, p. 148). Predominantly, there are three main types of multimodal texts. Multimodality does not always refer to the use of technology. In fact, they can be printed on paper, live, or digital (Victoria State Government, 2020).

In this study, short stories chosen are presented in multiple modes that include words, images, graphics, animations, sounds or videos. Multimodality allows teachers to present short stories in more than one way so different learning styles can be combined and adapted to cater to their students. This makes lessons more relevant and allows students to be more engaged in the tasks besides encouraging them to explore the diverse ways of learning and retaining information to their best ability.

### *The benefits of short stories in writing narratives*

Advocates have also promoted the use of short stories with regards to teaching writing skills. Students have numerous problems when it comes to writing; having the right content, right structure, right mechanics and right down to possessing the right attitude and motivation towards the task. To solve students' problems in writing, Kirkgöz (2012) suggested that short stories can be used. She did a research on short stories incorporation in the classrooms and found that when students were asked to summarize stories, they have a purpose for writing. Besides, they can reflect on their inner thoughts and feelings in different forms while relating to their own background experiences.

In another study by Truong et al. (2020), they reported that respondents felt using short stories helped them write more effectively, upgraded their writing skills, and could expand on their word choice to assist them in better writing. Additionally, Thiagarajan (2014) agreed that short stories, which are both powerful and motivating, can help students in their writing skills.

Looking at the structure and organization of short stories, there are similarities between a short story and a narrative writing. In the past, studies were conducted by several researchers to determine the structures of short stories (Butt et al., 2003; McCabe & Bliss, 2003; Nunan, 1999). According Butt et al. (2003, pp. 225 - 226), they proposed a four structural components which were:

- 1) 'orientation' - introduces the setting of the story involving 'who,' 'where,' and 'when';
- 2) 'complication' - a sequence of events that poses a crisis or problem for the characters;
- 3) 'resolution' - a problem or crisis is resolved before a normal situation resumes; and
- 4) 'coda' (optional) - indicates how characters are changed by the previous events

Nunan (1999, p. 282) also proposed similar structure except for the fourth element which was 'coda'. On the other hand, McCabe and Bliss (2003) developed a seven-stage structure.

- 1) 'openers' - includes a setting up before the beginning of a story;
- 2) 'orientation/description' - the beginning of a story that explains the background (time, place, and /or characters);
- 3) 'complicating action' - describes how something occurs;

- 4) 'climax' - the highlight or intensity in a story;
- 5) 'resolution' - the part where the problem or crisis resolves;
- 6) 'evaluation' - an explanation why specific events happen and the narrator's feelings;
- 7) 'closings' - explains a refusal or inability to continue to narrate or 'codas' that bring readers back to where the story began.

All three structures proposed above bear a resemblance to one another and somewhat similar to Freytag's Pyramid found in narrative writing too. With the similarities, it would be easier for students when writing narratives by making references to short stories. When students write narratives, they would be reminded of the generic structure of short stories they read and apply it in their construction of plot development.

All in all, the benefits of short stories are multiple and students should be exposed to them and not denied this invaluable teaching medium to enhance their writing skills.

#### *Writing narratives*

Stories such as fables, folklore, legends, fairy tales or even myths are examples of popular narrative texts. Oshima and Hogue (2007, p. 24) defined narrative as story writing. Hasan & Wijaya (2016) mentioned that narrative is a story that should be told within stories and is entertaining to the readers. Moreover, Brown (2001) opined that narrative is a recounting of an incident or event. When we write narrative texts, we write about events in chronological order that happened in the past. In other words, time order is used to indicate what incidents happened first, what incidents happened after that and so on. Boyd et al. (2020) supported this notion and added that narrative is a series of connected events with a beginning, middle, and end that could be true or otherwise. The purpose of narrative texts, according to them also, is a form of entertainment to capture readers' interest besides inculcating moral values through the characters, events, and problems in the text.

The story must be written in sequence and there is a general structure that must be followed. The writer first tells readers about the characters, setting and actions that happen. In essence, it follows the orientation of an exposition, rising actions, or conflicts to move the story along, climax, falling actions and lastly resolution. According to Yao et al. (2019) in their study, they concluded that the better the story lines, the easier it is to generate more relevant and coherent stories. Another past study which supported this notion was by Fitzgerald et al. in 1987. They did a study on the benefits of instruction in story structure and the results proved that the structure of a story had a strong positive effect in organisation and general quality of the writing. Therefore, to achieve this, students need to be creative, imaginative, and knowledgeable to arrange their ideas. It is a reflective activity that requires them to think about a certain topic, to activate their schemata and to analyze.

Based on the explanations above, the researcher can sum up narrative writing as a story which gives a recount of a series of incidents which happened in the past. It essentially follows a structure to move incidents along until a satisfactory closure is reached.

#### *Generic structure in narratives*

Hardy and Klarwein (1990, p. 14) defined generic structure as "the organization of a text or the mandatory elements found in a particular genre". Every text needs a generic structure. "The generic structure of a narrative text comprises orientation, complication, and resolution" (Hardy and Klarwein, 1990, p. 20). This idea of a generic structure of narrative text is also supported by Wardiman (2008, p. 34) who stated similar elements.

- A. Orientation: Orientation introduces the setting, time and place and the characters of the story.
- B. Complication: Complication is a series of problems faced and to be solved by the characters of the story.
- C. Resolution: Resolution is the solution to the problems.

In a research paper by Mou et al. (2013), they brought up that Aristotle (384 BC~322 BC), a famous Greek philosopher, scientist, and poet, came up the idea of plot structure (cited in Arnold and Eddy, 2007). According to Aristotle, a plot consists of a beginning, a middle and an end and the events must be connected to one another. A German novelist and playwright, Gustav Freytag (1816~1895) also talked about similar concept. He regarded plot as a narrative structure that can classify a story into five parts, which is known as Freytag's pyramid (Mou et al., 2013)

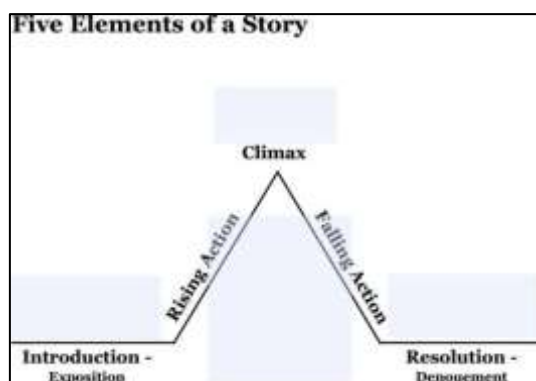


Fig. 1.  
Freytag's Pyramid

Similarly, Richmond County School System (n. d) also proposed similar generic structure. However, the term plot is used rather than generic structure. Fundamentally, the plot also follows the three main characteristics.

As a conclusion, all four theories highlighted the generic structure for narrative writing to be similar as having three main elements; orientation or introduction, complication, and resolution. The orientation or introduction talks about the setting; when and where the story occurs and characters are introduced. The complication comprises rising actions, climax and falling actions and this part talks about the conflicts and problems faced by the characters which lead to the most important part of the story known as climax. The last part, resolution, tells how the characters solve all conflicts which leaves the readers a satisfying closure.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research design*

In this paper, short stories are integrated into the teaching of writing narratives focusing on plot elements. Students are exposed to plot elements through the aid of short stories and subsequently, developing their own plot in their narrative writing. A quantitative descriptive research design was conducted. The paper employed two sets of instruments; a pretest and post test scores and a questionnaire using Google Form.

### *Research sample*

In this study, the researcher used judgmental sampling or better known as purposive sampling whereby samples are chosen based on the researcher's knowledge and judgment. In this paper, the researcher, who is also the teacher, chose a particular class to be the representative of the population as the samples, through her experience and wisdom. The participants for this study are 20 Form 4 students from the same class in an urban co- education school in Kuching, Sarawak. They consist of ten male and female students of mixed- ability and their proficiency level in the English language ranged from low intermediate to high intermediate.

### *Research instruments*

Research instruments involved in this paper are pre and post tests and a questionnaire via Google Form. The aim of the tests is to investigate the quality of students' writing, particularly in narrative writing. Therefore, two separate tests were administered; pretest and post test, after which 20 essays were collected from both tests for analytical scoring. Essays were graded based on an assessment rubric with a total of 20 marks. Constructs for evaluation were orientation, conflicts, resolution and language with a maximum of 5 marks each. A questionnaire was also used in the data collection. The questionnaire aims to determine students' opinions on the effectiveness of using short stories in identifying elements of plot and in helping them develop plot in their narrative writing.

The 20-item survey questionnaire consisted of three sections (See Appendix 1 for the questionnaire). Section A asked the students' opinions regarding writing stories in general about their feelings and issues with story writing. This section had five statements in total. Section B aimed to find out students' opinions concerning the effectiveness of short stories in presenting the generic structure of narrative writing. This section had ten statements. The last section, Section C, had a total of five statements which set out to determine the effectiveness of plot elements in short stories in helping the students develop plot in their narrative writing.

Students were asked to indicate their answers on a five-point Likert scale, in which value 1 represented ‘Strongly Disagree’ and value 5 ‘Strongly Agree’. The questionnaire was given out after the post test was administered.

#### *Data collection procedure*

A total of 40 essays were collected by the end of the 8- week intervention. At the beginning of the intervention, participants were given a pretest in which they were asked to write a 250- word length essay of a story. There was also a time limit of 45 minutes set to simulate the condition of the real SPM examinations as closely as possible. To ensure congruence, everyone wrote on the same title and was not given the freedom to choose any topic they liked. The researcher collected all 20 essays after the stipulated time. Similarly, at the end of the 8th week, participants were given another post test. Participants underwent the exact same thing as in the pretest whereby they had to write a 250- word length essay in 45 minutes. However, the essay question was different from the one participants did in the pretest. The researcher collected all 20 essays at the end of the post test. All 40 essays were then scored analytically. To ensure validity, the researcher also carried out a survey which was distributed after the post test at the end of week 8 via Google form.

## **FINDINGS**

### *Students’ scores in pretest and post test*

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26 was used to analyse the data. The sample size was small as it was less than 50 respondents (N=20), so Shapiro Wilk test was conducted to determine the normality of the data. Data are considered as normally distributed if they are higher than  $p = 0.05$  while data that are  $p < 0.05$  are considered as not normally distributed. Normality test based on students’ scores during pretest and post test is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1  
NORMALITY TEST USING SHAPIRO WILK

	<b>Statistic</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Difference	10.55	1.905	.375

Based on Table 1,  $p=0.375$ . Thus, it can be concluded that the results of students’ scores during pretest and post test were normally distributed.

TABLE 2  
PAIRED SAMPLE STATISTICS

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std Deviation</b>	<b>Std Error Mean</b>
Pretest	10.55	1.905	.426
Post test	12.00	1.747	.391

TABLE 3  
PAIRED SAMPLE CORRELATIONS

	<b>N</b>	<b>Correlations</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Pretest and post test scores	20	.759	.000

TABLE 4  
PAIRED SAMPLE TEST

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>95% Confidence Interval of the difference</b>		<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>
			<b>Lower</b>	<b>Upper</b>			
Pretest and post test scores	-1.45	1.276	-2.047	-.853	-5.081	19	.000

Paired sample t-test was the most suitable method to determine the effectiveness of using short stories to help students identify elements of plot and the effectiveness of plot elements in developing plot in a narrative writing. Referring to Table 2, 3 and 4, the mean for pretest score was 10.55 ( $M=10.55$ ,  $SD=1.905$ ) while the mean for post test score was 12.00 ( $M=12.00$ ,  $SD=1.747$ );  $t(19) = -5.081$ ,  $p < 0.05$ .

As shown in Table 4, the significant value was less than 0.05 which indicated a significant difference between pretest and post test scores data. Results for post test were higher than pretest and so therefore, it could be concluded that students' performance increased after they were exposed to plot elements through short stories and their results improved. This answered both objectives of this study.

In order to further validate these findings, a set of questionnaire was given. Based on the items in the questionnaire, descriptive statistics, based on frequency and percentage, was carried out.

## STUDENTS' PERCEPTION IN WRITING STORIES

The first part of the questionnaire asked about students' feelings and perceptions about writing stories in general. From the results shown in Table 5, it was shown that approximately 40% of them were neutral when asked to write stories; they neither liked nor disliked. Only 15% of them disliked writing stories. It was also revealed that 30% of them would choose to write stories during examinations while another 30% responded otherwise. 45% of the students responded that they had a fear in writing because of their limitations in language while a majority of them (65%) was due to a lack of ideas for content.

TABLE 5  
STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS IN WRITING STORIES

Items	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<i>I like to write stories.</i>	0	0	3	15	8	40	7	35	2	10
<i>I usually choose to write stories in the examinations.</i>	1	5	6	30	5	25	6	30	2	10
<i>I have a fear in writing stories.</i>	2	10	5	25	7	35	5	25	1	5
<i>My fear for story writing is due to my limitations in language.</i>	0	0	1	5	6	30	9	45	4	20
<i>My fear for story writing is due to my lack of ideas for content.</i>	0	0	0	0	4	20	13	65	3	15

Students' perceptions in story writing is crucial and results had pointed to the need to examine the use of short stories in assisting students to develop plot for narrative writing in the ESL classroom. Based on the respondents' pre and post test scores and questionnaire, the researcher concluded with four themes.

## STORIES HAVE ELEMENTS OF PLOT

As reported in Table 6, majority of the students were aware that plot elements were important in story writing with 60% of the students agreeing, 25% strongly agreeing, 5% citing neutral while 10% of them disagreeing. 40% of the students chose neutral in answer on their awareness of using the correct structure in story writing. 30% of the students agreed that they were aware and 15% strongly agreed. In other words, students may have some knowledge in the structure of a story but may or may not be able to apply them when they wrote. Only a mere 15% disagreed in knowing the correct structure.

Items 2 and 3 were somewhat related and as a result of their awareness, 30% of the students agreed and 15% strongly agreed that they did use plot element structure in their story writings prior to introduction of short stories. Only 15% disagreed on writing stories using plot element structure.

Therefore, with the introduction of short stories, 50% of the students answered neutral as they were already aware of the correct structure (plot elements) in story writing. 45% of them also agreed with this statement with none disagreeing on this. This showed that some students had some knowledge prior to this.

As for item 5, they were able to see clearly the structure of plot elements in short stories. This constituted to the 55% of them responding agree and strongly agree and only 45% of them answered neutral.

In item 6, it was proven that the introduction of short stories in teaching left quite an impact on the students as a number of them, 50% and 10% expressed agree and strongly agree respectively that they could remember better the correct structure after reading or watching short stories. 35% of the students expressed neutral and only one disagreed with this item.

As perceived by the students, their familiarity in identifying plot elements in short stories boosted their confidence level with 70% of them agreeing with the statement. Only 10% of them disagreed that being able to identify plot elements did not make them more confident in writing better stories.

In item 8, 55% of the students agreed that through short stories, they were able to understand, identify and master the plot elements ideas. Only 40% of them were on the fence about item 8.

TABLE 6  
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING SHORT STORIES IN IDENTIFYING PLOT ELEMENTS

Items	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
	No	%	No	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<i>I am aware that plot elements are important in story writing.</i>	0	0	2	10	1	5	12	60	5	25
<i>Before my teacher introduces short stories to me, I am aware of the correct structure (having the proper plot elements; exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution) in story writing.</i>	0	0	3	15	8	40	6	30	3	15
<i>Before my teacher introduces plot elements through short stories to me, I write stories using plot element's structure.</i>	0	0	3	15	8	40	6	30	3	15
<i>Short stories make me aware of the correct structure (plot elements) in story writing.</i>	0	0	0	0	10	50	9	45	1	5
<i>I can see the structure of plot elements clearer in short stories.</i>	0	0	0	0	9	45	10	50	1	5
<i>I can remember the correct structure (plot elements) better after reading/ watching short stories.</i>	0	0	1	5	7	35	10	50	2	10
<i>Being able to identify plot elements in short stories give me the confidence to write better stories.</i>	0	0	2	10	2	10	14	70	2	10



*I can understand, identify and master the plot elements ideas I learn through the short stories.*

0	0	1	5	8	40	10	50	1	5
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### MULTIMODAL REPRESENTATIONS OF SHORT STORIES

Based on Table 7, the percentage of students liking how the teacher incorporated the different modals of short stories (texts, videos, audios, songs) in her teaching was quite high with a total of 65 % agreeing and strongly agreeing.

Hence, their understanding on plot elements had been easy because of multimodality (texts, videos, audios, songs) presentation with 55% of the respondents answering agree and strongly agree.

TABLE 7  
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING SHORT STORIES IN IDENTIFYING PLOT ELEMENTS

Items	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<i>I like the multimodality (videos, audio, songs) short stories can be presented in.</i>	0	0	0	0	7	35	6	30	7	35
<i>The multimodality (videos, audio, songs) short stories can be presented in make me understand plot elements easier.</i>	0	0	1	5	8	40	8	40	3	15

### PLOT ELEMENTS AS A POINT OF REFERENCE

From the students' feedback of the questionnaire, it was proven that plot elements in short stories acted as a guide or point of reference and were highly important when writing stories. Not only were they able to structure the organisation well, students could also create more interesting ideas. The fact that the responses received through the questionnaire were mostly "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" demonstrated this notion.

As revealed in Table 8, majority of the students which made up 75% of them agreed and strongly agreed that by being able to identify plot elements in short stories, it assisted them in developing their own plot for story writing. None of them disagreed. While 70% of them both agreed and strongly agreed that with the exposure to plot elements, they were indeed able to structure their story writing.

TABLE 8  
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PLOT ELEMENTS IN SHORT STORIES IN DEVELOPING PLOT

Items	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<i>Being able to identify plot elements in short stories lead me to my own plot development in my story writing.</i>	0	0	0	0	5	25	14	70	1	5
<i>I know how to structure my story writing after being exposed to plot elements through short stories.</i>	0	0	0	0	6	30	10	50	4	20

### PLOT ELEMENTS ASSIST IN BETTER WRITING

According to Table 9, it was found that the students thought that by having the correct concept of plot elements made them write better stories with 55% of them answered agreed.

As for item 2, the students seemed to be very clear on the correct structure and concept of plot elements after the exposure of plot elements in short stories. While 45% of them were neutral about it, about 55% of them agreed that they knew exactly what to write in their plot development.

The better understanding had enabled students to be more focused when they wrote stories based on the generic structures of the five plot elements (introduction, rising actions, climax, falling actions and resolution) of story writing. This was reflected in the high percentage of 90 which was equivalent to 18 out of 20 students agreeing to the statement.

TABLE 9  
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PLOT ELEMENTS IN SHORT STORIES IN DEVELOPING PLOT

Items	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<i>Having the correct concept of plot elements makes me write better stories.</i>	0	0	2	10	7	35	10	50	1	5
<i>I am clear of what to include in my plot development when I write stories.</i>	0	0	0	0	9	45	8	40	3	15
<i>My writing is more focused when I follow the five plot elements when I write.</i>	0	0	0	0	2	10	11	55	7	35

## DISCUSSION

**RQ1:** *How effective is the use of short stories in helping students to identify elements of a plot?*

*Short stories have elements of plot*

From the findings, the mean for pretest score was 10.55 (M=10.55, SD=1.905) while the mean for post test score was 12.00 (M=12.00, SD=1.747);  $t(19) = -5.081$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . The significant value was less than 0.05 which indicated a significant difference between pretest and post test scores data.

Prior to the intervention, only 45% indicated they were aware and were writing their stories following this structure. 40% of the students indicated neutral and this could mean they may or may not have knowledge in the said structure or that they did know something about it but did not apply them when they wrote. After students were introduced to plot elements through short stories, 50% of the students awareness level increased and they also admitted that they could see the structure clearly. 55% of the students also expressed better understanding of plot elements as they had the short stories as samples. This was because most short stories have elements of plot.

This is supported by three different researchers who had done studies in the past to determine the structures of short stories (Butt et al., 2003; McCabe & Bliss, 2003; Nunan, 1999) and all three suggested a similar fundamental framework of orientation, complication and resolution. This corresponds with the generic structure of a narrative recommended by Hardy and Klarwein (1990, p. 20), Wardiman (2008, p. 34) and Freytag's Pyramid as notioned by Gustav Freytag (Mou et al., 2003). With the obvious parallelism, students could see the presence of plot elements in the short stories they read and make the connections to their own narrative writing.

Therefore, this indicated introducing plot elements through short stories was effective because as the level of understanding soared, it reflected in their writing and hence the improved achievement in the post test.

*Multimodal representations of short stories*

Multimodality characteristic of short stories is also another reason why short stories are effective. Students liked the fact that stories could come in different forms which cater to their different learning styles.

As mentioned by Eisenmann and Summer (2020), multimodal literature combines audio, visual and other representations where it is usually in the form of digital, it can also be presented in printed versions with pictures or graphics. Students in this new era are more inclined to reading texts in the digital forms. This is in line with Prensky (2001) who argued that the way current Generation Z or digital natives process information is somewhat dissimilar than their predecessors. Therefore, with short stories being presented in other forms other than texts, students are more interested as expressed by 65% of the respondents who agreed that they enjoyed the different modals short stories could be presented in. They were less bored and even those who did not like reading would be more motivated to do so. When students are interested in the reading text, they would be able to remember story lines or plot from the stories and subsequently use them in their own writing. 55% of the students agreed that they could understand plot elements better through videos, audio, songs and other forms of short stories. The increased understanding in plot elements also reflected in the post test scores whereby a significant difference could be seen.

As what mentioned by Radan (2017), the incorporation of text and visual elements in graphic novels assist students to remember information better as well as allow the teacher to facilitate a better understanding of the way narratives are built' ( p. 148). To sum up, short stories are proven to be effective and help in identifying plot elements.

**RQ2:** *How effective is the plot element in short stories in helping students develop plot in their narrative writing skills?*

#### *Plot elements as a point of reference*

Findings from the questionnaire revealed that about 75% of the respondents agreed that if they were able to identify plot elements well, they would be able to develop their own plot for story writing better. On top of that, about 70% of them felt that with the exposure to plot elements, they could structure their story more efficiently.

This showed that plot elements acted as a point of reference for the students. When students were writing their narratives, they had a solid structure which guided them and hence helped them to be more focused when planning what to write. At anytime when they felt at a loss for ideas or development of the story, they could always fall back on Freytag's Pyramid of orientation, rising actions, climax, falling actions and resolution (Mou et al., 2003).

Paired sample t- test which was chosen to compute the differences of the pre and post test scores also showed that there was a significant difference before and after students were exposed to plot elements.

#### *Plot elements assist in better writing*

Another main emerging theme was that having plot elements assisted in enhancing students' writing. By following the framework, students knew the direction their narratives were going without having a loss of ideas of what to include in their introduction, what complications or events to follow after the introduction right up to climax and thereafter the falling actions and finally the resolution. A majority of the respondents (90%) agreed that when they wrote stories based on the five elements of plot, they could be more focused and could write more proficient essays. They admitted that having the correct concept of the generic structure enabled them to produce better essays. They also found that their essay flowed better and more coherent and were not messy with unorganised ideas.

As Boyd et al. (2020) put it, a narrative is a series of connected events with a beginning, middle, and end that could be imaginary or factual. Therefore, the story line must be presented in a logical manner and in sequence. This finding is parallel to Yao et al.'s study (2019) which found that the better the story lines, the easier it is to generate more relevant and coherent stories.

Another past study which supported this notion was conducted by Fitzgerald et al. in 1987. They did a study on the benefits of instruction in story structure and results proved that it had a strong positive effect in organisation and general quality of the writing. In short, this is to say that by following the plot elements, students could come up with more coherent ideas which were logical and in sequence. Again, this showed good congruence with the post test scores. Students were able to include cohesive ideas starting from orientation right up to resolution and could obtain a better mark. There was a distinct improvement in the conflicts part of the story whereby students were able to organize events in a clearer more logical order. Description and pacing of story which led to the climax of the story were also adequately sufficient as compared to pre test.

Therefore, this successfully answered the second research question that is to examine the effectiveness of plot elements in helping students develop plot in their narratives.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

Teachers are constantly challenged to diversify their teaching methodologies and so materials used need to branch out to attract students nowadays who like to be kept on their toes doing interesting activities in the classrooms. This paper explored the use of short stories in the teaching of writing narratives focusing in particular in plot development. Based on the findings, this study could help teachers use short stories in a different light. Teachers should be more open-minded to delve into the endless possibilities this tool could extend. The focus of reading short stories should not be restricted to only answering comprehension questions or to teach literary devices, but as a tool to teach an important and heavy skill like writing. With the injection of something fun like short stories, the teaching of writing can be viewed as not too intimidating for students.

The fact that short stories are highly adaptable, teachers are not pressured to use the whole story in one go. Depending on what the focus of the lesson is, teachers could use stories in sections to deliver what is necessary. In this way, students only need to read part of the stories and this would not create any unnecessary apprehension in weak students especially when asked to read so many words. Also, since there are countless of short stories available, the right one could be chosen for the students to cater to the different reading abilities. Story books with more graphics or bigger fonts, story videos with songs and animations, PowerPoint with moving characters are some examples in the drop of the ocean.

As for the students, they are exposed to learning how to write narratives through an external medium which are short stories. Many students have problems in their writing and they need to take the extra initiative in discovering the various writing skills techniques available that best help them to write well. Short stories, not a novelty but rarely used, is hoped to be appealing to them. They need to be receptive of all techniques introduced to find one that fits their learning style the most.

Besides writing skills, short stories can also improve students' reading skills. By exposing students to short stories, reading habits could be develop if the teacher uses them regularly in the classroom. They can then continue this good habit on their own. What they need is for someone to start the ball rolling and pave the way to short stories and reading and the joy they bring.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

First recommendation is to extend the sample size of the study. This study was conducted with a small sample size of only 20 students and only limited to one particular class of Form Four. A bigger sample size from different classes and levels would be able to provide more reliable findings which will reflect a more comprehensive picture and accurate trend. Moreover, researchers are able to find out if using short stories in teaching narratives are more effective for lower secondary or upper secondary students.

Secondly, this study only focused on the use of short stories in teaching narrative writing which tapped on a specific feature of stories that was generic structure. It would be interesting to conduct studies on the different features of short stories in other skills such as reading, listening and speaking. For instance, the feature of dialogues in short stories to teach speaking.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research which employed the mixed- method research study was conducted on 20 Form Four students. The study focused on the effectiveness of short stories in helping the students to identify plot elements important for their narrative writing. Results showed that short stories could assist students in identifying plot elements easier as they bear a similar resemblance to narratives in terms of generic structure. The parallelism between short stories and narrative essay enable students to understand that to write a good story, they need to have the generic structure of a short story. Other than that, it was also found that the fact that short stories could be presented in ways more than one, students' multiple intelligence could be addressed in the way they learn.

As a whole, it can be concluded that short stories in teaching narrative writing is indeed effective and when the students are familiar with plot elements, it would also assist them in their own plot development of their narratives.

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