



# Short Stories as a Pathway from Reading to Writing: Students' Perceptions of English Language Improvement

Sevaraj Dhanalakshmi Srirevathi, Banumathi Rajamanickam Aravind\*

Centre for ENGAGE, Department of English, Kalasalingam Academy of Research and Education, Tamilnadu, India

\*Correspondence: [aravind.abur@gmail.com](mailto:aravind.abur@gmail.com)

SUBMITTED: 1 February 2026; REVISED: 17 March 2026; ACCEPTED: 24 March 2026

**ABSTRACT:** Short stories were a successful teaching and learning strategy for second languages. This study aimed to find out how students felt about using short stories and how well they read and wrote English. The study intended to determine the advantages that students experienced from using short stories, as well as the difficulties they faced and how they overcame them. The study population consisted of secondary school students in Grade IX at a government tribal school in Tiruchirappalli District, who received instruction in Tamil (the regional language). A total of 40 students were selected using a sampling method. Constructivist theory provided the theoretical support for this investigation. The study employed a descriptive methodology, utilising focus group interviews and a questionnaire to gather data. While the focus group interviews produced qualitative data, the questionnaire generated quantitative data. The findings showed that the two English language skills, reading and writing, were developed among students through the use of short stories. The results also indicated that students' vocabulary improved as a result of reading short stories. However, the findings revealed that students lacked confidence in sharing their experiences in front of their peers and struggled to understand messages due to limited resources, restricted vocabulary, spelling issues, and insufficient understanding of English tenses. Nevertheless, by learning new words and supporting one another's learning, they were able to overcome these challenges. The study concluded that short stories were useful in enhancing language resources and could be proposed as effective materials for facilitating the acquisition of a foreign language.

**KEYWORDS:** Reading and writing; tribal students; language competency; short narratives

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## 1. Introduction

Considering that many tribal populations in India spoke languages and dialects different from the official languages of education, language training was essential for their academic success and overall development. Effective language instruction helped bridge this gap by improving students' comprehension of academic content, thereby enhancing learning outcomes and academic achievement. Proficiency in dominant languages such as English also contributed to social mobility, access to higher education, and broader career opportunities. In addition, language learning fostered social integration, intercultural communication, and collaboration

with other communities, while strengthening cognitive abilities such as critical thinking and problem-solving. It also enabled tribal learners to articulate their ideas clearly, participate in decision-making, and engage more confidently in academic contexts [1].

Within this context, this study explored the use of constructivist theory through the integration of short stories to improve the reading and writing abilities of Grade IX tribal students. The study investigated how student-centred learning experiences, facilitated by short narratives, promoted language proficiency and critical engagement with academic content. The constructivist approach had been widely applied in language education to enhance listening, speaking, reading, and writing (LSRW) skills. It encouraged learners to construct knowledge actively through collaboration, reflection, and interaction. Previous studies reported that constructivist practices improved students' language abilities by fostering strategic thinking and peer interaction, while also enhancing teachers' instructional competencies [2]. Learners in different contexts, such as Ethiopia, demonstrated positive attitudes towards writing when taught through constructivist approaches, which supported language acquisition and comprehension goals [3]. Furthermore, the approach incorporated collaborative learning and feedback mechanisms, allowing both peer and teacher input during the learning process [4]. Since interpersonal interaction influenced language use [5], constructivist learning environments provided opportunities for students to express ideas, negotiate meaning, and develop both spoken and written communication skills. Although constructivism had been recognised as an effective approach in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, especially at the elementary level, earlier studies primarily focused on general educational settings rather than specific marginalised groups such as tribal learners [3, 6].

Reading and writing played a crucial role in language development. Regular reading practice, whether extensive or intensive, significantly improved learners' language skills. Research indicated that meaning-focused reading enhanced vocabulary acquisition among English as a Second Language (ESL) learners [7], while extensive reading improved grammar, vocabulary, and overall reading proficiency [8]. It was also found to promote self-directed learning and comprehension when integrated into classroom instruction [9]. Additionally, extensive reading expanded vocabulary [10], whereas intensive reading strengthened comprehension skills [11]. Studies further showed that vocabulary development through reading contributed to improved speaking abilities [12, 13], and combining both extensive and intensive reading yielded greater language gains [14].

Despite these benefits, writing remained a challenging skill for many learners. Students often avoided writing tasks due to time constraints and the perception that writing resembled examination conditions. Writing required the integration of multiple linguistic competencies, making it one of the most demanding skills for both native and non-native learners [15, 16]. Constructivist approaches were therefore considered effective in addressing these challenges, as they emphasised active learning, collaboration, and reflection. Drawing on Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, previous research demonstrated that tools such as collaborative writing platforms enabled more proficient students to support their peers through shared tasks, idea generation, and self-regulation strategies [17, 18]. This collaborative process increased student engagement and improved confidence in writing.

Short stories had been widely recognised as effective pedagogical tools in ESL and EFL classrooms. They enhanced vocabulary, motivation, and overall language proficiency [19]. Studies showed that short narratives improved comprehension, critical thinking, and

vocabulary retention, particularly when supported by pre-reading strategies [20]. Moreover, reading and writing were found to be interconnected processes, where reading supported writing development and vice versa [21, 22]. Short stories, typically concise narratives ranging from 1,000 to 20,000 words [23–26], provided authentic linguistic and cultural contexts that helped learners understand language use in real-life situations [27, 28]. Their use in classrooms improved students' vocabulary, grammar, and motivation to read [29–31], while also enhancing speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills [11, 15]. In addition, short stories encouraged critical thinking and active interpretation, especially when combined with interactive activities such as role-play and discussion [13]. From a constructivist perspective, short stories served as meaningful learning materials that connected new knowledge with learners' prior experiences and sociocultural backgrounds [32–35]. This was particularly relevant for tribal students, as narrative-based learning could bridge linguistic and cultural gaps while improving both language proficiency and cultural awareness [1, 36].

However, despite the recognised benefits of constructivism and short stories, limited research had examined their combined application as an integrated approach to developing both reading and writing skills. Existing studies often treated these skills separately or focused on general student populations. Moreover, there was a lack of research on English language development among tribal secondary school students, particularly at the Grade IX level. Students' perceptions of their own language development within a constructivist framework had also received limited scholarly attention. In many tribal contexts, students faced challenges such as limited exposure to English, insufficient learning resources, and a lack of reading culture, which hindered their ability to develop reading and writing skills effectively. Teachers also rarely engaged students in activities such as reading or composing short stories, despite the potential of these materials to enhance engagement and learning.

In response to these gaps, this study aimed to examine how constructivist-based short story instruction influenced tribal students' reading and writing abilities and their perceptions of language learning. Specifically, it sought to determine how students perceived the use of short stories in improving their English skills, how constructivist approaches facilitated the transition from reading to writing, and how such instruction impacted key aspects of reading (such as fluency and comprehension) and writing (including vocabulary use, sentence construction, and mechanics). The study also explored the challenges students encountered and the strategies they used to overcome them through collaborative learning.

This study was significant because it proposed a learner-centred and contextually relevant approach to English language teaching for tribal students. By integrating short stories within a constructivist framework, it demonstrated how reading and writing could be taught as interconnected skills rather than isolated competencies. The approach encouraged active participation, collaboration, and meaningful engagement, which contributed to improved confidence, comprehension, and written expression among learners. Furthermore, the findings provided practical insights for educators working in tribal and under-resourced settings, highlighting the potential of short stories as effective instructional tools to promote language development and learner autonomy.

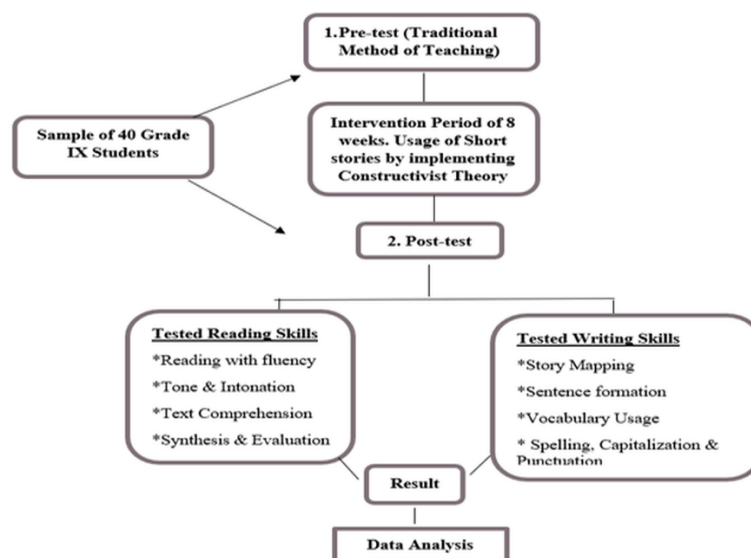
## 2. Method

### 2.1. Sample and sample size.

Regarding the sample and sample size, 40 students enrolled in Grade IX at a Government Tribal School in Trichy served as respondents for this study. The aim of selecting this group of students was to help them understand the steps involved in reading short stories and to support the development of their verbal and cognitive abilities by improving their writing skills through creative problem-solving and self-achievement. They were encouraged to participate actively in the lessons and to be aware of their responsibilities during the instructional process.

### 2.2. Research Design and Procedure.

Figure 1 presents the research framework, which examined how short stories affected students' reading and writing abilities in Grade IX. To determine their initial level of language competence, a pre-test using the conventional mode of instruction was first administered to the sample of forty Grade IX students. At the beginning of the eight-week research training session, the researcher briefly explained the purpose of the study to the participants. Convenience sampling was employed in this mixed-methods research design, as the participants were readily accessible and met the inclusion criteria. Based on their availability and willingness to participate, a single group of participants was selected. The same sample was used for both the control and experimental conditions. To establish baseline data, the participants were first assessed under the control condition. Subsequently, the experimental intervention was administered to the same participants, and post-intervention data were collected. By maintaining consistent participant characteristics, this within-subject design allowed for direct comparison of results before and after the intervention. Convenience sampling also facilitated efficient data collection.



**Figure 1.** Research design describes the constructivist theory for teaching short stories.

The same group of forty Grade IX students was used for both the control and experimental phases. Following the pre-test, short stories were utilised as a teaching technique based on the constructivist approach over an eight-week intervention period to enhance students' language learning. After the intervention, a post-test was administered to measure the

extent of improvement in students' performance. The effectiveness of the intervention was evaluated using a mixed-methods approach that included both quantitative and qualitative data [37]. The quantitative component employed a pre-test and post-test design to measure improvements in reading comprehension and writing skills [28, 38], while the qualitative component examined learners' perceptions and engagement with the narrative content through Focus Group Interviews (FGI). Before the intervention period, the 40 students were taught using a standard textbook under the control condition, and the pre-test was administered using this traditional instructional approach. After this phase, the researcher implemented the experimental treatment using the same group of participants. During the intervention, students engaged with short stories that were carefully selected to align with their cultural backgrounds, thereby creating an environment in which they could actively construct meaning and develop critical thinking skills [37].

Two main skill domains—reading and writing—were assessed in this study. Reading skills were evaluated in terms of fluency, tone and intonation, text comprehension, synthesis, and evaluation. Writing skills were assessed based on story mapping, sentence construction, vocabulary usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. Data analysis was conducted on the results of these assessments to determine whether the intervention effectively improved students' reading and writing abilities. This approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of the role of narrative engagement in skill development, particularly within the constructivist framework, which emphasises active knowledge construction [38]. The teaching strategy aimed to move beyond rote memorisation and to promote deeper engagement with learning materials by encouraging students to read and analyse literary texts [37]. In contrast, the control condition followed a conventional curriculum, which served as a benchmark for evaluating the effectiveness of the constructivist-based short story intervention [33]. The effectiveness of the intervention was further examined by analysing grammatical structures, sentence complexity, and narrative elements in students' written outputs [34, 36]. In addition, qualitative data obtained from focus group interviews revealed students' experiences, their understanding of the short stories, and the perceived relevance of the narratives to their lives.

### 3. Result and Discussion

#### 3.1. Reading skills.

The effectiveness of the constructivist-based short story intervention on students' reading skills was analysed using descriptive statistics. The results, presented in Table 1, compared students' performance in the pre-test and post-test across four reading skill components: reading fluency, tone and intonation, text comprehension, and synthesis and evaluation. The findings indicated a substantial improvement in all reading skill areas following the intervention. The mean scores increased consistently across all variables, suggesting that the instructional approach enhanced students' reading abilities. In addition, the increase in minimum scores demonstrated that lower-performing students also benefited from the intervention, while the slight rise in standard deviation reflected variability in individual learning progress. Specifically, reading fluency showed a notable improvement, with the mean score increasing from 10.28 in the pre-test to 20.18 in the post-test. The minimum score also rose from 3 to 10, indicating significant progress among weaker students. Similarly, tone and intonation improved considerably, as reflected by the increase in mean scores from 8.20 to 16.95, along with an increase in the minimum score

from 1 to 6. Text comprehension also showed marked improvement, with the mean score rising from 8.03 to 15.45 and the minimum score increasing from 1 to 7. Furthermore, higher-order reading skills such as synthesis and evaluation improved, with the mean score increasing from 9.18 to 16.05 and the minimum score rising from 2 to 6.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistical analysis of pre-test and post-test in reading skills.

S.No	Variable	Test	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
1	Reading with Fluency	Pre-test	10.28	4.67	3	20
		Post-test	20.18	5.02	10	29
2	Tone and Intonation	Pre-test	8.20	3.84	1	16
		Post-test	16.95	5.70	6	29
3	Text Comprehension	Pre-test	8.03	4.53	1	18
		Post-test	15.45	5.96	7	27
4	Synthesis and Evaluation	Pre-test	9.18	4.43	2	18
		Post-test	16.05	5.66	6	27

These findings were consistent with previous studies, which reported that short stories enhanced students' comprehension and engagement in language learning [39]. Moreover, the results aligned with constructivist theory, which emphasised active learning, student engagement, and cognitive development through meaningful experiences [40]. Overall, the comparison between pre-test and post-test results clearly demonstrated that the intervention significantly improved students' reading skills. The consistent increase in mean scores and minimum scores indicated overall academic progress, particularly among lower-achieving students. This suggested that constructivist, learner-centred strategies using short stories were effective in enhancing students' reading performance and engagement.

### 3.2. Writing skills.

The impact of the intervention on students' writing skills was also examined using descriptive statistical analysis. The results, presented in Table 2, compared pre-test and post-test performance across four components: story mapping, sentence construction, vocabulary usage, and spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. The findings revealed significant improvements in all writing skill components following the intervention. The increase in mean scores across all variables indicated enhanced writing performance, while the rise in minimum scores suggested that weaker students made notable progress. The moderate increase in standard deviation reflected differences in the extent of individual improvement. In detail, story mapping showed substantial improvement, with the mean score increasing from 7.40 to 14.33. The minimum score rose from 2 to 6, indicating that lower-performing students benefited from the intervention. Sentence construction also improved, with the mean score increasing from 8.30 to 14.08 and the minimum score rising from 3 to 8, suggesting consistent progress among students. Vocabulary usage demonstrated a significant increase, with the mean score improving from 9.43 to 15.83, accompanied by an increase in the minimum score from 3 to 8 and the maximum score from 16 to 26. Similarly, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation improved, with the mean score rising from 10.03 to 15.38 and the minimum score increasing from 3 to 8.

These findings supported the view that constructivist approaches enhanced writing skills by promoting active participation, collaboration, and knowledge construction [15, 41]. The shift from teacher-centred instruction to student-centred learning enabled students to develop writing skills through interaction, reflection, and meaningful engagement with tasks. Overall,

the results indicated that the constructivist-based short story intervention was effective in improving students' writing performance. Compared to conventional teaching methods, this approach fostered greater engagement and contributed to significant improvements in students' writing abilities.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistical analysis of pre-test and post-test in writing skills.

S.No	Variable	Test	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
1	Story Mapping	Pre-test	7.40	3.66	2	16
		Post-test	14.33	4.83	6	28
2	Sentence Construction	Pre-test	8.30	3.54	3	16
		Post-test	14.08	3.79	8	23
3	Vocabulary Usage	Pre-test	9.43	3.62	3	16
		Post-test	15.83	4.65	8	26
4	Spelling, Capitalization, and Punctuation	Pre-test	10.03	3.89	3	19
		Post-test	15.38	4.29	8	24

### 3.3. Students' perceptions of reading and writing development.

Following the intervention phase, qualitative data were collected through focus group interviews and analysed using content and feedback analysis. The findings revealed that students held positive perceptions regarding the use of short stories in improving their reading and writing abilities. The responses indicated increased confidence, improved fluency, enhanced vocabulary, and greater engagement in language learning. When asked how reading short stories affected their English reading confidence and skills, several students reported noticeable improvements. For instance, Student 3 stated that although reading had initially been challenging due to unfamiliar vocabulary and comprehension difficulties, repeated exposure to short stories enabled easier understanding over time. Similarly, Student 17 reported improvements in fluency, tone, and intonation, along with a reduction in hesitation and anxiety. The student also noted increased curiosity and motivation to read after the intervention. Student 32 highlighted that reading aloud improved pronunciation and speaking confidence, transforming initial shyness into active participation.

These responses suggested that students gradually transitioned from difficulty and reluctance to improved comprehension and engagement. The findings aligned with previous studies indicating that constructivist approaches promoted active participation and critical thinking [42], while short stories enhanced vocabulary, motivation, and comprehension [19]. Regular reading practice also contributed to improved procedural reading skills, including fluency, tone, and expression.

In addition, students reported that short stories were more engaging and easier to understand compared to traditional textbook materials. They demonstrated improved reading fluency, better pronunciation, and increased confidence in reading aloud. These findings supported earlier research, which showed that short stories enhanced reading comprehension and encouraged critical thinking among learners [43, 44]. Furthermore, the results confirmed that meaningful learning experiences contributed to vocabulary development and improved overall language proficiency [45].

Students also reflected positively on the impact of short stories on their writing abilities. When asked how the intervention influenced their writing, vocabulary, and confidence, participants reported significant improvements. For example, Student 10 explained that writing

had previously been difficult due to limited vocabulary and lack of sentence construction skills, but became easier and more enjoyable after exposure to short stories. Student 37 emphasised improvements in organising ideas, particularly through story mapping, which helped structure writing into a clear beginning, middle, and end.

Similarly, Student 6 reported that reading aloud enhanced speaking confidence and reduced shyness. Student 22 highlighted improvements in vocabulary, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation, attributing this progress to repeated exposure to new words, teacher feedback, and self-correction strategies. These findings were consistent with previous research, which demonstrated that short story-based instruction improved writing skills, confidence, and creativity [20, 46, 47].

Moreover, students demonstrated increased creativity and confidence in composing their own short stories. They were able to organise ideas, construct meaningful sentences, and express their thoughts more effectively. This supported earlier findings that short stories enhanced imagination, critical thinking, and language proficiency [18]. Improvements were also observed in sentence structure and grammar, as students became more familiar with subject–verb–object patterns and sentence formation through collaborative learning activities. For instance, Student 25 noted that group-based sentence formation activities helped in understanding correct sentence structure. This finding was consistent with studies showing that short stories improved grammatical competence and writing performance [48, 49].

Overall, the findings indicated that the use of short stories within a constructivist framework significantly enhanced students' motivation, engagement, and confidence. The learning process became more interactive, enjoyable, and less stressful compared to traditional approaches. Students benefited from collaborative learning, peer support, and guided activities such as story mapping and group discussions, which helped bridge the gap between reading and writing skills.

#### *3.4. Challenges encountered in using short stories.*

Despite the positive outcomes, several challenges were identified during the implementation of short story-based instruction. Many students experienced anxiety when reading aloud or writing in English due to fear of peer judgment and limited support at home. As first-generation learners, they often lacked exposure to English outside the classroom, which affected their confidence and language development.

Linguistic barriers also posed significant challenges. Differences between students' native languages and English, particularly in terms of phonology, syntax, and grammar, made comprehension and sentence construction difficult. Students frequently struggled with vocabulary, tense usage, and subject–verb–object structures. For example, Student 28 reported difficulty in expressing ideas in English due to limited vocabulary and challenges with tenses, while Student 13 noted that a lack of grammar knowledge hindered writing despite having ideas. This observation supported the argument that vocabulary and grammar were essential for effective communication [50].

In addition, limited resources and infrastructure affected learning outcomes. Many students came from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, with limited access to reading materials, digital tools, and supportive learning environments. Cultural mismatches between textbook content and students' lived experiences further reduced engagement, as some stories were difficult to relate to. Traditional teaching approaches, which emphasised

memorisation rather than interaction, also limited opportunities for active learning and skill development.

### *3.5. Strategies and solutions.*

Students reported several strategies that helped them overcome these challenges. One key approach was repeated practice, which improved confidence in reading and speaking. For example, Student 6 indicated that the need to present stories encouraged better understanding and preparation. Peer support also played a crucial role in facilitating learning. Students with stronger language skills assisted their peers by explaining difficult vocabulary and concepts. For instance, Students 25 and 37 noted that collaborative learning helped them understand complex language more effectively. Additionally, students reported using dictionaries and revising grammatical rules, particularly tenses, to improve their writing skills.

The findings suggested that while short stories were effective tools for enhancing language skills, their success depended on appropriate instructional support. Strategies such as using culturally relevant materials, providing scaffolding, incorporating mother-tongue support, and promoting collaborative learning were essential in addressing learners' needs. Furthermore, integrating digital tools and visual aids could enhance comprehension and engagement, particularly in under-resourced settings. Overall, the study demonstrated that the challenges faced by tribal learners could be mitigated through well-designed constructivist approaches. By combining short stories with interactive and learner-centred strategies, educators could significantly improve students' reading and writing abilities while fostering confidence and motivation.

## **4. Conclusion**

The goal of this study was to examine how tribal students perceived the impact of short narratives on improving their comprehension of English. The results showed that students reported that short stories enhanced both their reading and writing abilities. They also indicated improvements in vocabulary, fluency, accent and intonation, as well as confidence in public speaking. The findings of this study were consistent with constructivist theory, which emphasises that learners actively construct knowledge within a social context. Students perceived short stories as an effective medium not only for reading but also for composing their own narratives, presenting in front of others, and listening to their peers. Constructivist theory posits that knowledge is developed through active engagement, where new information is integrated with prior knowledge. In this study, students acquired new knowledge through individual reading and reinforced it through social interaction during group activities involving short stories. Through both oral and written tasks, students analysed story elements, explored interpretations, and expressed ideas, which contributed to improvements in reading comprehension and writing skills. Furthermore, short stories provided a less intimidating and culturally relevant medium for tribal learners, helping to reduce language anxiety and increase confidence in using English. Inquiry-based activities such as group discussions, story mapping, role-playing, and reflective writing fostered collaboration, communication, and social interaction, while simultaneously promoting linguistic and cognitive development.

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