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## Short Story Writing Experiences and Perceptions of Saudi Female University Students

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates how writing short stories can be integrated into the curriculum of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) to consolidate students' knowledge of the language and promote their creative writing skills. It aims to understand students' experiences writing fiction and nonfiction short stories. The participants were 20 Saudi female preparatory-year students enrolled in a science track at the University of Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. Data were obtained from students' short stories written electronically during an English course and their responses to a post-task questionnaire. A mixed-method explanatory sequential research approach was adopted. Qualitative and quantitative data were derived from the themes explored and descriptive statistics of the short stories written by the participants. Qualitative data were obtained from students' perceptions gauged from their post-task questionnaire responses. The findings indicate that writing short stories effectively reinforced students' prior English knowledge and encouraged creative and imaginative writing while breaking the monotony of typical classroom procedures. Based on the results and pedagogical implications, recommendations are proposed to minimize Saudi writers' challenges in EFL educational settings.*

**Keywords:** creative writing, experiences, EFL learners, fictional, nonfictional, perceptions, short story

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## INTRODUCTION

Writing in English is a productive competency and the most complex of the four main language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) (Israfilovna, 2023) because of the language's complex structure and vocabulary (Asri et al., 2022), such as differences between spelling and pronunciation (Israfilovna, 2023). Additionally, writing requires integrated subs-skills (e.g., word choice, sentence construction) to express thoughts and form ideas (Saaty, 2023).

Writing is an essential component of educational competencies, and writing practices are crucial for developing this skill (Applebee, 2000; Perry & VandeKamp, 2000). Students should learn text models to understand writing genres and language functions (Martínez Lirola, 2015). Creative writing allows writers to generate ideas creatively while conveying their thoughts and expressing their feelings (Saaty, 2023), which is an important component of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Al-Jarf, 2007; Jaashan, 2022).

One subgenre of creative writing is narrative text, which can be expressed in oral and written forms (Anderson & Anderson, 1997). Generally, narrative writing is a genre where writers connect a single experience, occurrence, or event to their own life experiences (Jubhari et al., 2022). Narrative writing tells fiction or nonfiction stories sequentially, following chronologically connected events encountered at varying points in time (Rebecca, 2003). Crafting stories can reveal a fictional account of writers and their experiences (Jubhari et al., 2022), or writers can use their imagination to generate fictional stories and events (Kırkgöz, 2012).

Many studies support the introduction of creative writing instruction in language-learning classrooms (Asri et al., 2022; González, 2015; Hanauer & Bauerle, 2012; Jaashan, 2022; Jubhari et al., 2022; Nicholes, 2017, 2022; Pierson, 2014; Rakhmanbergenova, 2022; Saaty, 2015, 2023). Researchers have studied the benefits of incorporating short stories into EFL classrooms (Jubhari et al., 2022; Pardede, 2011; Saka, 2014), but most of these studies have investigated only the effect of reading short stories on students' general rather than English writing skills (Bartan, 2017; Ghasemi, 2011). Some studies have noted that students' positive attitudes toward creative writing demonstrate their commitment to learning and investing effort in completing writing tasks (Graham et al., 2007). No studies have investigated the effects of writing fiction and nonfiction short stories on university-level EFL students or their connection with reinforcing their language knowledge and competency, writing skills, and overall writing experiences.

This study discusses the incorporation of writing creative short stories into a university-level intensive English language teaching curriculum for preparatory year students, highlights the relationship between creative writing and language learning, and examines the relevance of short story writing in EFL settings. It transitions into the research design and methods section to explicate the short story writing process, covering the research questions and instruments for data collection. This section also illustrates the theoretical framework guiding short story writing in the EFL curriculum for female Saudi students at a public university in Saudi Arabia. The subsequent sections present the data analysis

process, findings, and discussion, emphasizing how composing short stories reinforces language knowledge and competency, promotes creative writing skills, and increases enjoyment. Samples of fiction and nonfiction short stories are included to demonstrate the efficacy of this genre in the writing experiences, skills, and creativity of learners.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Creative Writing and English Language Learning**

“Creative” is defined as “possessing the ability to create” (Anis et al., 2020) without mentioning skill level. Creativity is the ability to produce something that is original and imaginative (Zulaicha, 2011). Creative writing is an innovative writing style that accentuates narratives, character development, opinions, and informal language styles (Fitria, 2024)—the art of expressing ideas and imagination in various forms of fiction and nonfiction (Saaty, 2023). Examples of creative writing include short stories, novels, poetry, film scenarios, epics, song lyrics, and fairytales.

This study focuses on creative writing as crafting short stories as a form of literary composition involving imagination and originality. “Short story” is defined as a brief work of a prose narrative that can be read in a short time (MacMillan, 1985), usually a single-sitting read that does not require much time to comprehend what the narrative is about. A short story can be fiction or nonfiction.

In nonfiction story writing, students write stories based on personal experiences (Holmes & Marra, 2011). Writing nonfictional stories can encourage language development for expressive purposes and provide students with the experience of meaningful writing in which they write their personal stories and recall real events; they rely on their prior knowledge and experiences. Consequently, writing short nonfictional stories can reposition and recontextualize the language learning experience, as it entails a process where “the language learner’s memory, experiences, feelings, beliefs, history, and social environment are the context of the language use” (Hanauer, 2012, p. 109). It is powerful when language learners can express thoughts and experiences in a second/foreign language (Saaty, 2019).

Creating a fictional short story involves writing a narrative based on imagination and inventing characters and imaginary events. Writing fictional short stories helps students develop creativity in second/foreign language writing (Kurdi & Nizam, 2022). Many educational contexts recognize imagination as a potent learning tool that can facilitate the performance of complex cognitive tasks in language learning (Savova & Azarnoosh, 2024). The ability to imagine is linked with language-learning efforts (Muir & Dörnyei, 2013), which are strengthened by activities that promote vision and self-regulation, allowing for greater learning investments and outcomes (Demir Ayez & Erten, 2021). Since the ability of imagination to complete challenging cognitive tasks aids the language-learning process, it is credited with being a powerful learning tool. In

addition, creative thinking skills play a crucial role in teaching and learning processes (Alsaddi et al., 2015). Engaging language learners in short fictional story writing can be a creative cognitive endeavor to help them fully participate in the learning process. Imagination helps language learners envision themselves as proficient language users (Savova & Azarnoosh, 2024).

In the educational context of language learning, many studies have addressed how writing someone's personal experiences allows learners to occupy the center of instruction and develop students' learning processes (Hanauer, 2012; Nicholes, 2015; Saaty, 2019), whereas others have examined how imagination in writing short stories focuses on learners as the center of instruction and develops their writing experience to make it enjoyable (Fitria, 2024; Nicholes, 2020, 2022; Roberts, 2013). However, none of these studies explored the experiences and perceptions of writing fictional and nonfictional short stories for preparatory-year Saudi female students in the context of learning EFL.

### **Writing Short Stories and English Language Learners**

Writing stories can help learners learn and practice English writing in different ways. Composing short stories enhances writers' memories by identifying patterns, stimulating imagination and emotions, and introducing them to abstract ideas (Kirkgöz, 2012; Rahman & Arju, 2008). The chronological nature of short story writing models reinforces language use. Researchers have reported that writing short stories encourages participation and student-centered learning (Hanauer, 2010; King, 2001) and engages learners in motivated activities (Chamcharatsi, 2013, 2015; Dyer & Friederich, 2002; Garvin, 2013; Iida, 2012; Niemi & Multisilta, 2015). Hence, short story writing may motivate students to consolidate and practice language skills such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Rahman & Arju, 2008). Composing short stories opens up opportunities to solve common learning problems encountered by instructors, such as boredom, lack of interest, negative attitudes toward learning, and an absence of stimulation to actively use English. This enables a nonthreatening learning situation while fostering a low-stakes environment for greater enjoyment and learning (Kirkgöz, 2012; Murdoch, 2002). Writing short stories is a flexible process; authors can write for various genres, audiences, and difficulty levels (King, 2001).

Writing short stories places the language learner at the center of the learning process (Hanauer, 2010; King, 2001). The incorporation of this activity into EFL classes engages learners in creative practices, as they develop their imagination and self-awareness in class (Fitria, 2024; Kurdi & Nizam, 2022). Short story writing can motivate EFL learners to activate their prior knowledge and experiences to draft narratives (Sagita et al., 2019). Language learners craft their own voices through short story writing, using personal experiences to convey ideas and create events (Canagarajah, 2014; Hanauer, 2015; Huang, 2019; Irayanti et al., 2025; Nicholes, 2020, 2022; Saaty, 2015, 2019, 2023). Notably, voice construction in short story writing is enhanced by learners expressing their

thoughts and feelings (Hanauer, 2015; Irayanti et al., 2025; Nicholes, 2022; Saaty, 2015, 2019, 2023).

The main goal of introductory language-learning courses is to provide students with interesting, engaging, and comprehensible language input in low-anxiety settings. For example, the narrative writing genre focuses on simple yet effective media that provide interesting and comprehensible input rather than grammatical structures and organized vocabulary (Krashen, 1982). Many studies (Jubhari et al., 2022; Loukia, 2006; Maibodi, 2008; Saka, 2014) have shown that second language acquisition is most successful in conditions similar to those in first language acquisition and when the instructional focus is on meaning rather than form.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD**

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods. Qualitative data was collected to augment the quantitative findings (Creswell, 2013). Two tools were employed to collect data: the task, consisting of students' written short stories, and a post-task questionnaire. The students' short stories were posted on a Blackboard discussion board, dissected, and subjected to quantitative and qualitative analyses. Following task completion, students' electronically submitted responses to the post-task questionnaire were used to understand their perceptions of short story writing.

The purpose of this study was to provide successful prompts to improve the writing skills and experiences of female Saudi university students in the preparatory year. It focused on the impact of drafting short stories on students' writing experiences, creative writing skills, and overall writing enjoyment. The students were assessed according to their English proficiency levels and writing experiences to answer the following research questions:

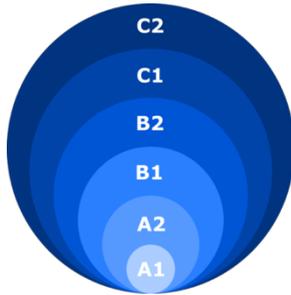
- RQ1: What themes emerged in the fictional and nonfictional short stories written by female Saudi preparatory-year university students?
- RQ2: What were the descriptive statistical data on fictional and nonfictional short stories written by these students?
- RQ3: What were these students' perceptions of writing fiction and nonfiction short stories?

## **Participants**

The participants in this study were 20 preparatory-year female Saudi students, ranging from 19–25 years in age, from the science track of a public university in Saudi Arabia. They were studying the National Geographic Book, Life, an intermediate-level edition created for the university. To meet the requirements of the Saudi context, intermediate level 102 is equivalent to B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which organizes language proficiency levels (Figure 1) (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 36).

The CEFR describes language proficiency on a 6-point scale, starting at A1 for beginners and increasing to C2 for advanced learners who have mastered a language. This study’s participants were B2-level learners, with scores of 5 and 45, respectively, on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the Academic and internet-based Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL iBT).

Three tables were used to introduce the CEFR levels: 1) a global scale, 2) a self-assessment grid, and 3) qualitative aspects of spoken language. Since the study investigated a writing task, the researcher focused on the global scale and self-assessment grid.



**Figure 1: Common CEFR reference levels**

The global scale for each CEFR level holistically summarizes the set of proposed common reference levels. Global-scale representation facilitates the communication of the system to nonspecialist users and provides teachers and curriculum planners with orientation points. Table 1 presents the global scale for the CEFR B2 level, indicated as “independent user” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 175).

**Table 1: Global Scale “Independent User”**

Global scale	B2
<b>Independent user</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in their field of specialization.</li><li>• Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party.</li><li>• Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue, stating the advantages and disadvantages of various options.</li></ul>

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**Self-Assessment Grid “Writing” (CEFR B2 Level):**

The self-assessment grid clarifies proficiency levels outlined in the CEFR. It comprises 34 scales for listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, and writing. To meet the purpose of this study, Table 2 illustrates only the CEFR B2 level self-assessment grid for writing, which is intended to help instructors and learners assess their writing proficiency levels themselves.

**Table 2: Self-Assessment Grid “Writing”**

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<b>Skill</b>	<b>B2</b>
<b>Writing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests.</li><li>• I can write an essay or report, conveying information or providing reasons in support of or against a particular point of view.</li><li>• I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.</li></ul>

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**Data Collection Instruments**

The researcher first conducted a pilot study to assess the data collection instruments. The validity of the instruments was measured through expert review (virtual validity) by presenting the instruments to a group of TESOL specialists at the English Language Institute at the University of Jeddah. The specialists evaluated the task and the post-task questionnaire and then provided feedback on their formulation and appropriateness for the study population. The task procedure and some items of the post-task questionnaire items were consequently amended. Later, the specialists reported the precision of the instruments and the reliability of the results of the study and confirmed that they can be reproduced under the same conditions.

Two data collection instruments were employed in this study: a task (short stories written by the students) and a post-task questionnaire. The students’ short stories were collected from a private discussion board on Blackboard that was only used for this class and was accessible only to the researcher and participants. The short stories were quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed, and students’ perceptions of their short story writing experiences were collected electronically from the completed post-task questionnaires.

***Task***

The task of writing a short story was inspired by Unit 6 of the National Geographic Book, Life, Intermediate Level. The instruction to the students was to write interesting short stories—fictional or nonfictional. No word limit was imposed, students could write the story in sentences or paragraphs, and they could decide whether to type or write. All the students chose typing, using the “Notes”

application on their phones. The students were allowed 15 minutes to complete the task. The instructions were simple:

- Work on your own.
- Write an interesting short story, fictional or nonfictional.
- There is no word limit.

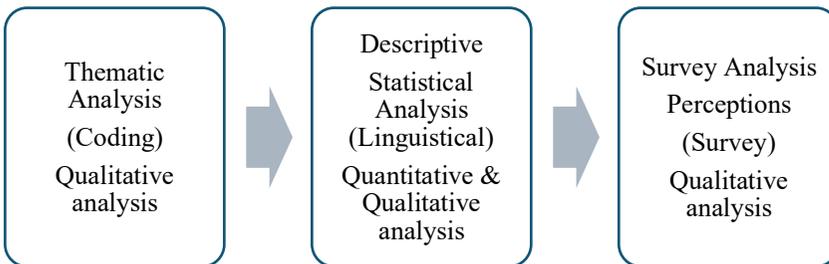
After completing the task, all the students had to read their stories aloud and then post them on the Blackboard discussion board.

### ***Post-Task Questionnaire***

The questionnaire was created electronically via Google Forms to collect qualitative data about participants' perceptions of their short story writing experiences. It contains four multiple-choice questions and one optional open-ended question. The first question asked whether the story was fictional or nonfictional. The other three multiple-choice questions used 5-point Likert scale statements to measure students' experiences with their short story writing. The optional open-ended question probed further information on students' perceptions.

### **Data Analysis Process**

A mixed-method approach was used to analyze the data. The data analysis process comprised several stages (Figure 2). First, for qualitative data, thematic analysis was conducted by coding themes that appeared in both fictional and nonfictional stories. Second, descriptive statistical analysis was applied to both quantitative and qualitative data to illustrate the linguistic analysis representing the writing and reading complexities of participants' stories. Third, a qualitative analysis was conducted to examine participants' perceptions of their writing experience.



**Figure 2: Research Design Flow**

***Thematic Data Analysis***

Thematic data analysis is a circular practice of attentive reading and tagging to closely examine the data and identify repeated common themes, topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning. It emphasizes the identification and interpretation of patterns of meaning within qualitative data, beginning with generating categories and codes by reading short stories and then tagging and compiling categories.

Twenty short stories written by students to answer RQ1 were analyzed using thematic and qualitative data analyses. The themes illustrate students' short story topics. Ten main themes were generated from all the stories. The four primary themes from the nonfictional short stories were family, helping an animal, the beach, and the university. Their respective frequencies are listed in Table 3. The fictional themes and their respective frequencies are presented in Table 4.

**Table 3: Nonfictional Short Story Themes**

<b>Nonfictional short story themes</b>	<b>Frequency/quantity</b>
Family	3
Helping an animal	1
Beach	2
University/school	4

**Table 4: Fictional short story themes**

<b>Fictional short story themes</b>	<b>Frequency/quantity</b>
Family	1
Friends	1
Flying objects	2
University/school	1
Meeting a celebrity	1
Drawing	1
Beach	1
Driving	1
Eid night	1

The 10 primary themes coded for both fictional and nonfictional stories are listed in Table 5, reflecting their respective frequencies.

***Descriptive Statistical Analysis***

The descriptive method's rationale was to provide straightforward descriptions of participants' perceptions and experiences (Doyle et al., 2020; Sandelowski, 2010, as cited in Mo & Ko, 2024). This study's descriptive statistical data analysis focused on illustrating a linguistic analysis representing

the writing and reading complexities of participants’ short stories to answer RQ2. To understand the writing complexity of the participants’ short stories, their word counts, number of sentences, and words per sentence were quantified. The Flesch–Kincaid readability tests were used to understand reading complexity, including Flesch Reading Ease and the Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level (they use the same units but weigh them differently, providing varying readability scores). The stories were analyzed individually and holistically.

**Table 5: Short story themes (nonfictional & fictional)**

Short story themes (nonfiction & fiction)	Frequency/quantity
Family	4
Friends	1
Helping an animal	1
Flying objects	2
University/school	5
Meeting a celebrity	1
Drawing	1
Beach	3
Driving	1
Eid night	1

Notably, eight of the stories included animals, but they were characters rather than themes—only one used the animal as a theme.

Generally, the Flesch Reading Ease score ranges from 0–100, indicating the comprehensibility of a text (Figure 3) (Sareen, 2019). Higher scores indicate that the text is easy to read, and lower scores indicate high complexity. The scores equate to educational levels; for example, a score of 60–70 correlates to the text being appropriate for school grades 8–9, meaning it is reasonably simple to read.



**Figure 3: Flesch Reading Ease Score**

The Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level reflects the educational level required for a person to understand a particular text. A range of 0–18 indicates the comprehensibility of a text (Figure 4) (Readable, n.d.). This level is assessed by examining the number of words, sentences, and syllables constituting a text. The participants’ scores on this level generally corresponded to the U.S. grade levels of education; if the text had a Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level of nine, readers would have to be in ninth grade to read the text easily. If the text level was between 15–18, a skilled reader was used. The results of the two tests correlated approximately inversely; text with a high reading ease score should have a lower score at the grade level. To achieve strong reliability, this study used both readability measurements.

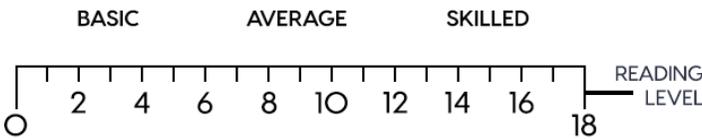


Figure 4: Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Linguistic Analysis: Nonfictional Short Story Results (Writing and Reading Complexity)*

Considering the nonfictional short stories, the descriptive statistics revealed the mean, median, and standard deviation values, as recorded in Table 6.

Table 6: Nonfictional short-story descriptive statistics

Nonfiction short story	<i>M</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>SD</i>
Word count	53	47	18.379
Sentences	2.2	2	1.3984
Word per sentence	30.55	32.5	2.5768
Flesch reading ease	68.32	67.95	18.7656
Flesch–Kincaid grade level	11.21	12.2	6.16323

For the Flesch Reading Ease score, the results show that nonfictional short stories fall between school grades 8–9, projected from the average number of words per sentence. This means that the average adult should find short nonfictional stories easy to read.

The Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level results indicate that the nonfictional short stories fell within the average level of 6–12, implying that an average Grade 8-level reader would understand it.

Linguistic analysis scores (word count, number of sentences, words per sentence) and the Flesch reading ease score and Flesch–Kincaid grade revealed that the writing and reading complexity levels of nonfictional story writers were average.

***Linguistic Analysis: Fictional Short Story Results (Writing and Reading Complexity)***

With respect to fictional short stories, the descriptive statistics yielded the results presented in Table 7.

**Table 7: Fictional Short Stories Descriptive Statistics**

<i>Fiction short story</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>SD</i>
Word count	54	54	25.578
Sentences	1.7	1	1.6364
Words per sentence	43.44	38	26.895
Flesch reading ease score	60.15	60.85	20.5171
Flesch–Kincaid grade level	16.19	14.65	10.6571

The Flesch Reading Ease score shows that fictional short stories were on Grade 8–9, projected from the average number of words per sentence, indicating that the average adult should find them easy to read.

The results of the Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level reveal that fictional short stories fell within the 10–16 level, suggesting that average skilled readers (higher than the Grade 8 level) would understand them.

Linguistic analysis scores (including word count, number of sentences, words per sentence), the Flesch reading ease score and the Flesch–Kincaid grade level indicate the comprehensibility of the text. Linguistic analysis revealed that the writing and reading complexity levels of fiction short story writers ranged from average to skilled.

The descriptive statistics of word count, number of words per sentence, and Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level were greater for short fiction stories, but the number of sentences and Flesch-Reading Ease score were almost the same. Therefore, short fictional stories are better suited to skilled readers than nonfictional stories are, which is appropriate for average readers.

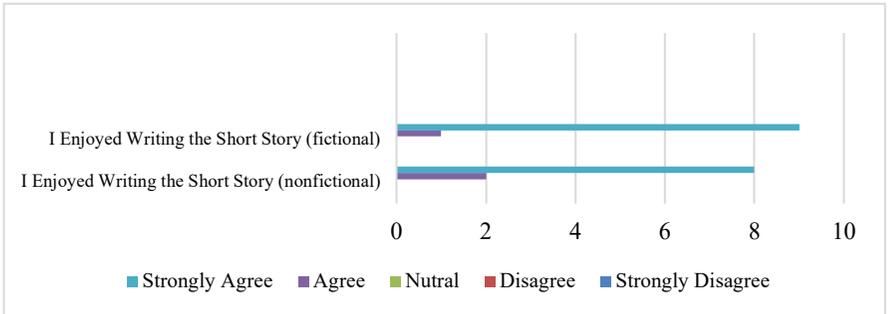
The short story writing task results reflect students’ global scale level (CEFR B2). Ten main themes emerged from the stories: four nonfictional and nine fictional. A descriptive statistical analysis of the short stories confirmed that their writing aligned with their English proficiency levels. The linguistic analysis findings recorded the writing and reading complexity levels of the nonfiction stories. Linguistic analysis scores were higher for fiction short stories, but the number of sentences and the Flesch-Reading Ease scores were almost identical. Therefore, short fictional stories are more appropriate for skilled readers than

nonfictional stories are, which are more suitable for average readers. Following CEFR B2 “independent users,” the thematic and statistical analyses indicate that participants could produce detailed text on many subjects, explain viewpoints, and create events. As average and skilled readers, students could understand the main ideas of complex texts on concrete and abstract topics, implying that the students were in English course levels that suited their English proficiency levels. The writing task met students’ English writing proficiency levels.

### Post-Task Questionnaire Data Analysis

The post-task questionnaire clarified the data, demonstrating participants’ perceptions of writing short fictional and nonfictional stories to answer RQ3. The data focused on three main findings: 1) enjoyment of writing a short story, 2) ease of writing short story events, and 3) ease of organizing short story events. The questionnaire data were analyzed as nonfictional and fictional short story writing experiences and then discussed as a complete writing experience, corresponding with previous studies.

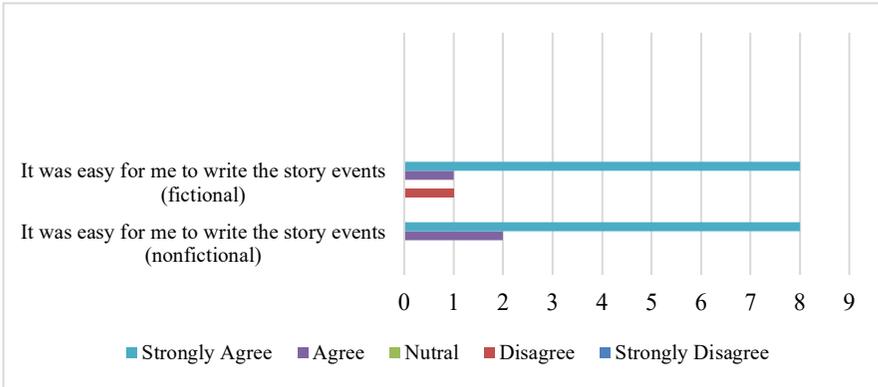
To understand language learners’ enjoyment of writing short stories, the first point on the questionnaire stated, “I enjoy writing a short story.” Nine students chose “Strongly agree” and one chose “Agree.” When rating their enjoyment of nonfictional story writing, eight students selected “Strongly agree” and two chose “Agree” (Figure 5).



**Figure 5: Enjoyment of the Experience of Writing Short Stories**

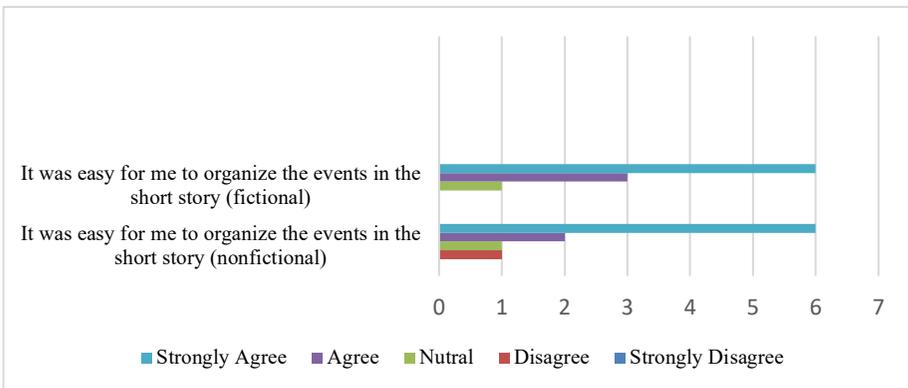
On the basis of the students’ responses to the first question, it is clear that most enjoyed writing short stories, regardless of whether they were fictional or nonfictional. This finding aligns with previous studies (Chamcharatsri, 2015; Saka, 2014) that highlight the importance of incorporating creative writing activities, such as short story writing tasks, to create a pleasurable classroom atmosphere. Therefore, writing short stories offers solutions to common learning problems, including boredom, lack of interest, negative attitudes toward learning, and the absence of stimulation to actively use English (Kırkgöz, 2012; Murdoch, 2002).

To understand the ease of writing short story events, the second questionnaire response stated, “It was easy for me to write the story events.” Eight participants chose “Strongly agree,” one selected “Agree,” and one opted for “Disagree.” For nonfictional stories, eight selected “Strongly agree” and two preferred “Agree” (Figure 6).



**Figure 6: Ease of the Experience of Writing Short Story Events**

Students’ responses to the second statement reflected that most students found it easy to write events for short stories, whether nonfiction or fiction. This finding reinforces earlier research (Chamcharatsri, 2015; Jubhari et al., 2022; Saka, 2014) that emphasized the role of creative writing activities such as short story writing tasks that enable language learners to compose narrative events. For the experience of writing short stories, the focus was on meaning rather than on form (Krashen, 1982), and the participants reported the ease of writing short story events.



**Figure 7: Ease of the Experience of Organizing Short Story Events**

To understand the ease of organizing short story events for language learners, the third questionnaire response stated, “It was easy for me to organize events in the short story.” For fictional stories, six students selected “Strongly agree,” three students chose “Agree,” and one preferred “Neutral.” For nonfictional story organization, six students selected “Strongly agree,” two chose “Agree,” one picked “Neutral,” and one chose “Disagree” (Figure 7).

It is evident from the participants’ responses to the third question that most participants found it easy to organize their short stories, whether fictional or nonfictional. Three students found it difficult to decide whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement, and one indicated having difficulty organizing short story events. This finding supports studies (Chamcharatsri, 2015; Jubhari et al., 2022) that emphasize the role of incorporating creative writing activities such as short story writing tasks to simplify the organization of narrative events. As narrative writing does not focus on grammatical structures or thematically organized vocabulary, it is a simple yet effective medium that yields interesting and comprehensible output (Krashen, 1982) – organizing events focuses on meaning rather than form. As participants wrote their stories, they followed logical, chronologically organized sequences and connected events that were caused or experienced by certain variables (Rebecca, 2003), which simplified the organization aspect of the writing experience.

The optional open-ended question, “How was the experience of writing a short story? Why?” helped the researcher understand participants’ perceptions of writing fiction and nonfiction short stories. Only four participants who wrote nonfictional short stories responded to the open-ended question. They stated that it had been fun and easy for them to write and recall the events of the nonfictional short story. Two participants explained why it was easy to write nonfictional short stories: “It was easy because I remember the experience,” and “It was easy to write because I know all these words and it just happened.” Another participant summarized it as “It was a new and fun and easy experience.” Only one of the fiction short story writers responded, stating “It was fun to write” and “It felt interesting to write an unreal story because I used my mind to imagine new things.”

The participants’ experiences of writing short stories were positive—all were impressed by the novelty of the experience. The most prominent outcome of writing short stories for participants was that the experience was fun and easy, breaking the monotony of typical classroom procedures. Thus, participants’ perceptions shed light on designing short story writing tasks in the future.

In the first statement of the post-task questionnaire, the students were asked to identify and rate the level of enjoyment they had experienced in writing short stories. In statements two and three, they were requested to indicate their writing proficiency levels according to their ability to create and organize events in a meaningful short story. These statements reflect students’ self-assessment of their own writing, as provided in the self-assessment grid at the CEFR B2 level for writing skills. Following the self-assessment grid, statements two and three also focused on participants’ ability to write clear texts, reasons to support their point of view, and detailed events and experiences. Students’ perceptions collected via

the post-task questionnaire were aligned with their English proficiency levels. This means that the students were placed at a course level that met their English proficiency level, and the assigned task of writing short stories met the students' English writing proficiency levels.

## **CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS**

Promoting critical and creative thinking in writing tasks in EFL environments is challenging. Teachers can assist language learners in becoming better writers not only by telling them what or how to write but also by demonstrating how writing is done in different genres. This study can assist educators by providing engaging EFL materials that are effective in working with students with varying English proficiency levels. It promotes the inclusion of short stories as writing tasks for preparatory year students, and the findings encourage educators to consider incorporating short story writing, be it electronically or by hand. The findings of this study resonate with the conclusions of other researchers exploring the benefits of short story writing for language learners.

By equipping students with these materials, educators can focus on meaningful language use. Students should be exposed to writing tasks that focus on meaningful writing rather than on grammar and spelling (Cummins, 2008; Jubhari et al., 2021; Loukia, 2006; Saka, 2014). Experiencing short story writing can make writing more enjoyable for language learners and can be a solution for avoiding boredom and repetition in classrooms (Kırkgöz, 2012; Murdoch, 2002). To enhance language learners' creative writing ability, this study recommends spending more time on interactive rather than independent and solitary writing. Students' short stories can be posted on online learning platforms such as Blackboard so that students can interact with each other's stories and post feedback.

While the current study contributes to discussions on integrating creative writing into EFL curricula, future research should employ larger, more diverse samples, standardized assessments of language skills and creativity, and comparative studies to provide more conclusive evidence on the effectiveness of short story writing in EFL education.

## **PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study elucidates pedagogical implications for educators and teachers. Exposing language students to different writing genres is vital, especially at the university level, as it includes short story writing. Short story writing motivates students to become involved in the learning process (King, 2001). Educators should pay explicit attention to creative writing skills as an instructional goal, as creative writing tasks can contribute to alleviating the central challenges of language learning. Pedagogues are encouraged to implement short story writing in the curriculum and focus more on meaning than on form to enhance language learners' writing skills (Krashen, 1982). Writing short stories without word limits helps students write as much as they want provided that the meaning of the story

is complete. Reducing the focus on word count can free students from routine procedures that occur in academic writing; focusing less on grammar and spelling helps students redirect their focus to meaning (Cummins, 2008; Jubhari et al., 2021; Loukia, 2006; Saka, 2014). However, it is important that educators and teachers consider students' English proficiency levels when implementing such activities in EFL classrooms.

Short story writing offers opportunities beyond a single writing experience. To enhance students' creative writing skills, teachers can create opportunities for them to read diverse literary works, practice regular writing, explore different language styles, use writing prompts, and provide and accept classmates' and teachers' feedback. Instructors should engage their students in short story writing activities to increase their creativity, train their imagination, and enhance their English skills. Teachers can ask students to post their short stories on an online platform or read them aloud in front of their peers to instill the feeling of writing for an audience other than their teachers. Pedagogues should foster an enjoyable writing culture for students through diligence, patience, and guidance.

In the future, similar studies should be conducted to further our understanding. This may include expanding and adding more participants, encouraging students to write short stories daily or weekly, and implementing an interview method that supports the questionnaire results. The natural progression of this study involves the development of a model of creative writing tasks for Saudi students that cater to their specific needs and goals. As an extension of this research, I will examine short nonfictional stories in one study and fictional stories in another to investigate them linguistically and rhetorically. Additionally, a more critical discussion of implementation barriers would have made the study more practical for educators. Thus, it is important to discuss potential challenges in future research, such as the following:

- Time constraints in the curriculum (especially in science-focused tracks).
- Teacher expertise in creative writing instruction.
- Students' motivation and writing anxiety.

### **Limitations**

This study's limitations include the relatively small sample size, which is restricted to one country, the one-time task of writing stories, and the use of a questionnaire for qualitative data collection.

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