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A Study of Perception of Writing Short Strories among Undergraduates

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Abstract

Learning languages using short stories can bear several advantages to learners. The use of short stories can help to connect learners in class. Stories stick in a person's mind long after the session is over. Besides reading short stories, many language instructors are introducing language learners to the world of creative writing. Creative writing is important for college learners as the learners begin to explore a wide knowledge and insight around their surroundings. They also added that the power of the story is in the process of creativity to create the world as an object of intellectual inquiry. This is because most students do not acquire the skills to obtain ideas from different readings. Only a few number of students possess problem-solving skills and thinking strategies. Hence, making language learners write short stories is the main reason for developing thinking skills in learning activities, particularly creative writing competency. This quantitative pilot study is done to explore the perception of learners on their knowledge of short stories. 64 respondents were purposely chosen to participate in this study. The instrument used is survey. This 5 Likert-scale survey contains items on the different types of knowledge of short stories. Findings bear interesting implications for the use of short stories for language learning.
Keywords: Writing, Short Stories, Language, Learning, Creative

Introduction

Many courses in the public and private universities in Malaysia are conducted in English. Students have no other choice but to equip themselves with English. Language is learnt in the classrooms and acquired as the learners interact or communicate in and outside the classrooms. According to Tomlinson (2003) learning language can be done in many ways. One way is through using short stories. It is more appealing to learners as the mode is less challenging and makes them feel more relaxed. The elements in the short stories can sometimes steer the learners from concentrating on fear of making mistakes. Alsaid (2019) adds that short stories can be successfully used to introduce a foreign language to learners. Many language teachers are using short stories to enhance language learning among learners.

Learning languages using short stories can bear several advantages to learners. According to Boris (2017), the use of short stories can help to connect learners in class. Moreover, stories stick in a person's mind long after the session is over. Besides reading short stories, many language instructors are introducing language learners to the world of creative writing. According to Masie et al (2018), creative writing is important for college learners as the learners begin to explore a wide knowledge and insight around their surroundings. They also added that the power of the story is in the process of creativity to create the world as an object of intellectual inquiry. This is because most students do not acquire the skills to obtain ideas from different readings. Only a few number of students possess problem-solving skills and thinking strategies. Hence, making language learners write short stories is the main reason for developing thinking skills in learning activities, particularly creative writing competency. According to Rahmat (2020), writing improves problem solving and critical thinking skills. This is because learners are forced to use their thought processes to write-even more so for creative writing. Rahmat et al (2020) also reported that not many realize that writing and thinking are inter-related in many ways.

So, this pilot study is done to explore the knowledge learners need to write creatively. Specifically, this study is to answer the following questions;

• What is the perception of knowledge of short stories among undergraduates?
• Is there a significant difference of knowledge of short stories for experience in writing?
• Is there a significant difference of knowledge of short stories for needs to learn?

Literature Review
The Plot Structure of Short Stories
According to a German scholar named Gustav Freytag (1863, p. 115), there are five main stages in the process of writing a story. These five important parts of the story's structures are called the Freytag's Pyramid. This pyramid serves as a conceptual framework for writing a story from beginning to end. The five stages of Freytag's Pyramid discussed below are (a) exposition, (b) rising action, (c) climax, (d) falling action, and (e) resolution.
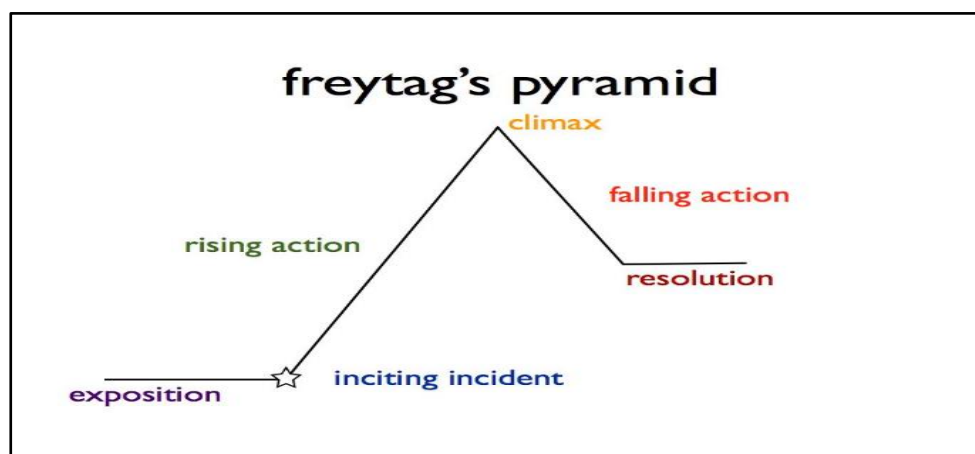
Figure 1: The Short Story's Plot of Freytag's Pyramid.

Exposition
As shown in Figure 1, the first segment of Freytag's Pyramid is classified as 'Exposition'; it is the first stage of your story and acts as an introduction to your book. Originally inspired based on the Latin word 'expositionem', exposition means 'showing forth'. Hence, according to "MasterClass" (2021), this section should introduce the story's essential information, such as

the characters (protagonist, antagonist, victim), setting (environment, place, time), historical background, or other narrative elements. Exposition can be written in a variety of ways, including dialogue, flashbacks, narration, conflict, character thoughts or points of view, and description of the setting (Leonard, 2019).

Rising Action
The rising action is the second stage of Freytag's Pyramid that brings us closer to the climax. According to Bunting (n.d.), in the rising action, writers should begin introducing conflicts and new characters who have not yet appeared in the story. For instance, someone makes a big mistake, the antagonist harms the protagonist, new characters complicate the plot, and so on. As this section builds on the conflict and intensifies the tension, writers should propel the story to a dramatic climax. Furthermore, the readers commonly gain access to key pieces of backstory in rising action (Glatch, 2020).

Climax
The Freytag's pyramid shows that the climax is the highest stage of tension in a storyline, which is why it is among the most significant literary devices in plot structure (MasterClass, 2021). In simpler words, this section clears up the story's main conflict and determines whether or not the protagonist accomplishes their goal. Derived from the Greek word '*klimax*', climax means 'ladder'. In this section, writers should release the tension that has been building up from the rising action. Writers can achieve this by creating a confrontation between the protagonist and antagonist to resolve the main conflict and give answers to readers.

Falling Action
In Freytag's Pyramid, the falling action is the plot that comes after the climax but before the resolution. According to Chase (2022), the main conflict of the story is coming to an end in falling action, and it is time to wind down towards the conclusion. To write an effective falling action, writers should include the character's reaction to the story's climax along with events that build towards the final resolution. For example, once the character overcomes their conflicts, the falling action should show how that character copes with the obstacle they have been through and clarify how they intend to proceed from there.

Resolution
According to Freytag's Pyramid, a resolution is a final stage in the story's plot. In this section, the goal is to tie up loose ends, such as answering lingering questions, providing closure to each character's journey, and informing readers about how everything turned out and the characters' feelings about it (Koehne-Drube, 2022). There are numerous approaches writers can take when writing resolutions, such as surprising them with an unexpected ending that takes a different turn or providing a satisfactory ending that answers all of their questions. Either way, a good resolution should leave your reader with indescribable feelings.

Past Studies
Bartan (2017) conducted a study to look at the effects of reading short stories to improve foreign language writing. This quasi-experimental study took 13 weeks to complete. The purpose of this study was to see if there is a significant difference in the pre-post-test writing achievements. Findings showed that reading short stories has a positive effect on students'

short story writing skills in terms of content, language, organization and also communicative achievement. They were reported to write better introductions. They were more creative writing the climax.

The study by Ceylan (2016) was done to find out the perception first year students towards the use of short stories in their reading activities. The instrument used was survey. Results indicated that incorporating short stories broadened the students' perspectives. They were reported to be able to think about reasons. They were able to make comparisons of the issues in the short stories with their won experiences.

The study by Pratiwi et al (2020) explored the use of short story as media to motivate students to improve their reading. The instrument used is a survey. Results revealed there was an improvement in students' motivation in reading. The mean score of the pre-test was 67,64. And the mean score of the post-test is 94,11. There was an improvement in students' scores between pre-test and post-test, it is improved 39,13%.

Another study was done by Feeney & Gajaseni (2020) to investigate the effectiveness of reading short stories to develop communicative competence particularly interpreting and identifying; comparing and relating; and attitude and openness. The participants were ten secondary school students. Participant went through a 12-week session. During the session, they performed activities related to the short stories. Findings showed that reading and discussing short stories helped develop communicative competence.

El-Mahdy Qoura, & Hadidy (2018) carried out a study to investigate the impact of a program based on short stories to develop English as a Foreign language creative writing skill, particularly fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration. The instruments used were a questionnaire and a pre-post creative writing test. The participants were 60 students and they are divided into experimental and control group. Findings showed that the use of short stories enhanced creative writing skills. Students were found to be more creative in their content. This is also discovered by Masie et.al (2018) who also conducted a study to look at the effects of using short stories as learning material. Findings revealed that the quality of short story writing requires learners' creativity.

Conceptual Framework of the Study
Figure 2 presents the conceptual framework of the study. This study is done to explore how the knowledge of short stories (Bartan, 2017) among learners influence their needs to learn and also their writing experience. In the context of this study, knowledge of short stories involves understanding the exposition in the story. It also includes knowledge about the conflict of ten study, or even endings. It also involves knowledge about understanding the falling action, or even the rising action.
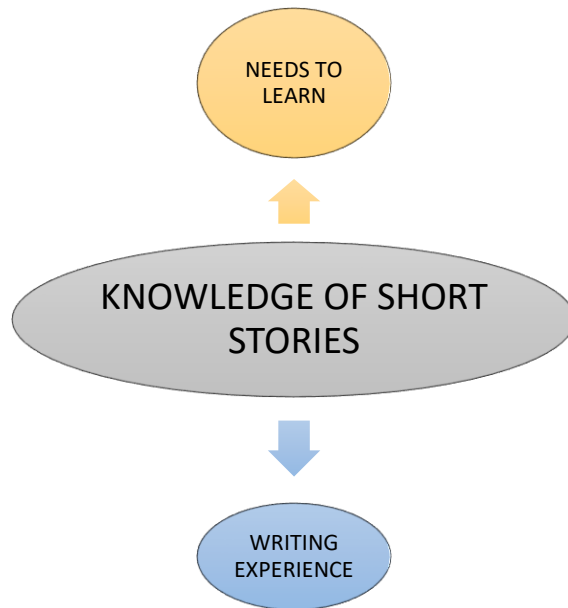
Figure 2- Conceptual Framework of the Study- Knowledge of Short Stories across gender and writing experience

Methodology

This quantitative pilot study is done to explore the perception of learners on their knowledge of short stories. 64 respondents were purposely chosen to participate in this study. The instrument used is s survey. This 5 Likert-scale survey contains items on the different types of knowledge of short stories (Bartan, 2017). SPSS analysis revealed the frequency of the responses. Findings are presented in the form of mean scores and correlation analysis to answer the research questions.

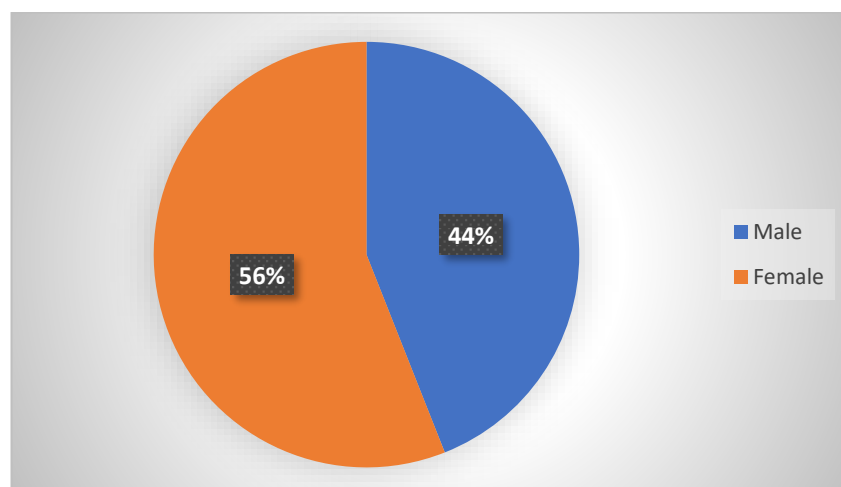**Findings**
Findings for Demographic profile
Q1-Gender

Figure 2- Percentage for Gender

Figure 2 above shows the percentage for gender in the study. 44% are male and 56% are female respondents.

Q2-Age Group

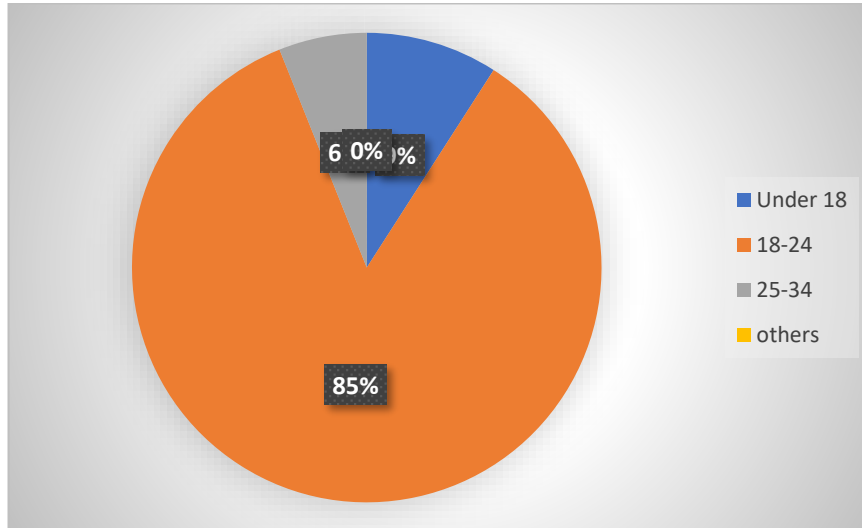Figure 3- Percentage for Age Group

Figure 3 shows the percentage for age group of respondents. 9% are under 18 years old. 84% are aged between 18-24 and 6% are aged between 25-34.
Q3-Are you interested to write?

Figure 4- Percentage for Interest to write

Figure 4 shows the percentage for interest to write. 72% are interested to write. Next, 9% are not interested to write while 19% are not sure.

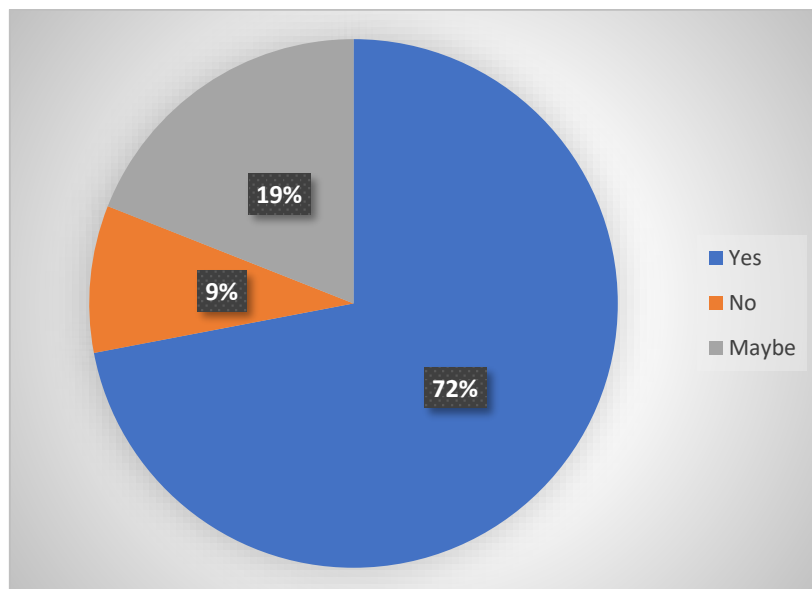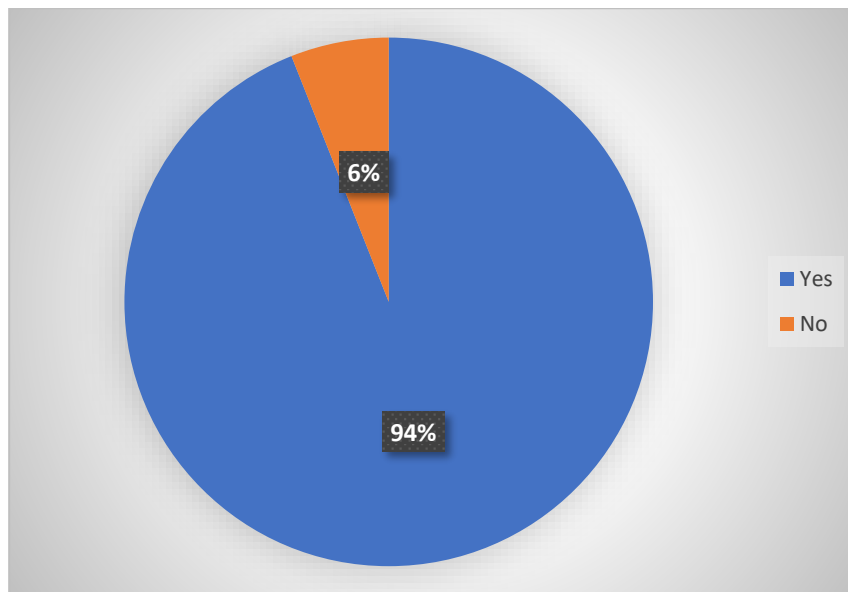Q4-Are you interested to learn to write?

Figure 5- Percentage for Interest to Learn
Figure 5 shows the percentage for interest to learn to write. 94% are interested while 6% are not interested.
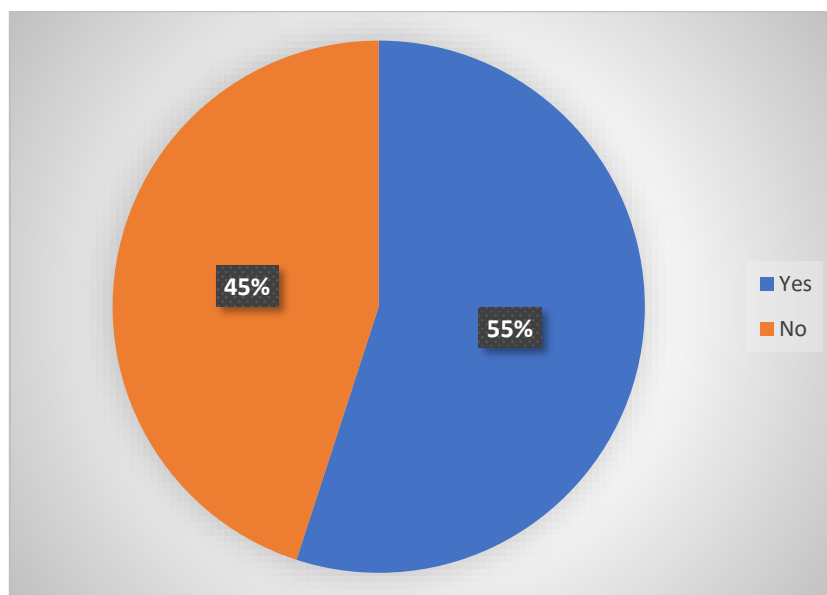
Q5-Have you ever written a story?

Figure 6- Percentage for Writing Experience

Figure shows the percentage for writing experience. 55% had experience writing a story while 45% do not have experience.

Findings for Knowledge of Short Stories

This section presents data to answer research question 1: What is the perception of knowledge of short stories among undergraduates?
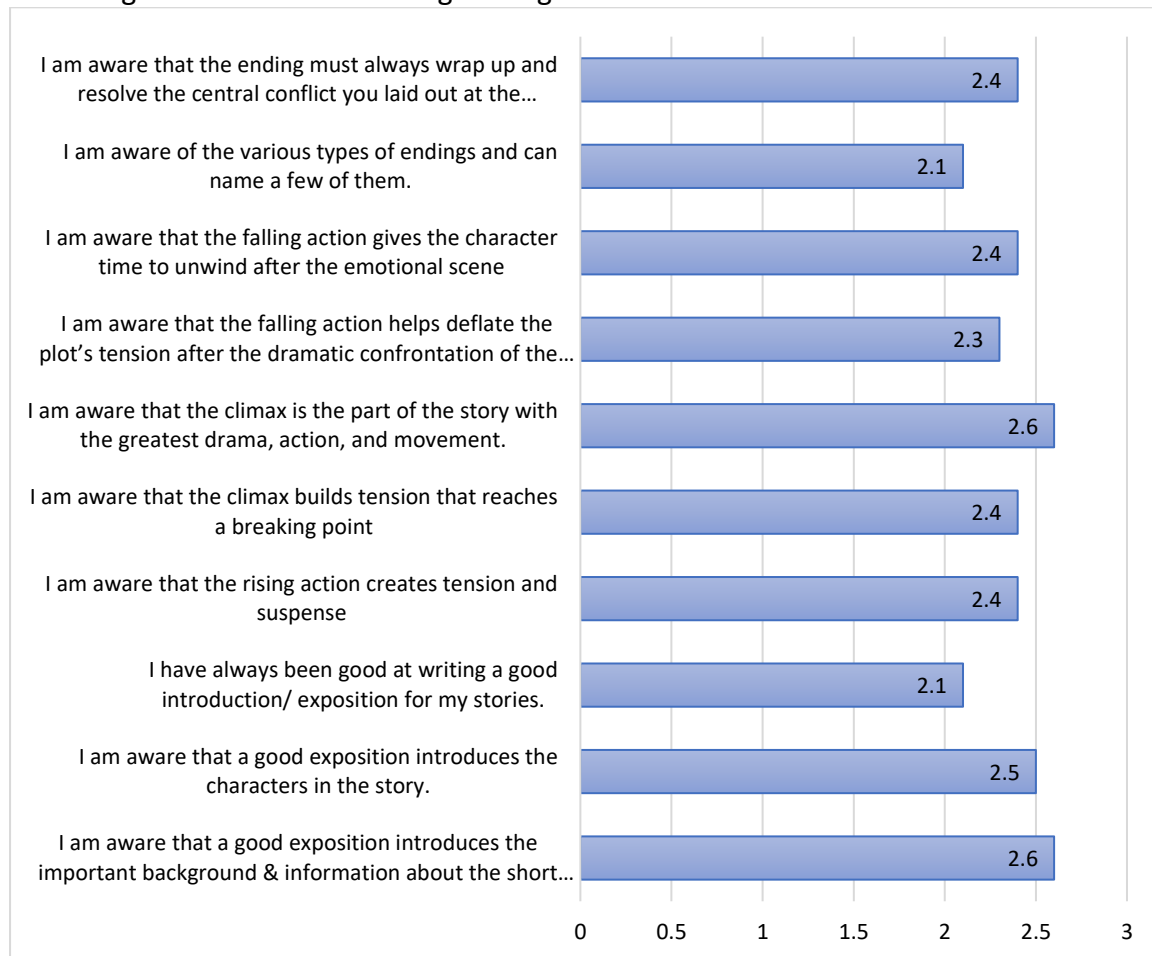

Figure 7- Mean for Knowledge of Short Stories

Figure 7 shows the mean for knowledge of short stories. The highest mean is 2.6 for the items " am aware that a good exposition introduces the important background & information about the short story" and "I am aware that the climax is the part of the story with the greatest drama, action, movement". This is followed by the mean of 2.5 for the item "am aware that a good exposition introduces the characters in the story.". Next, four items share the same mean of 2. 4 and they are "am aware that the rising action creates tension and suspense", "am aware that the climax builds tension that reaches a breaking point", "am aware that the falling action gives the character time to unwind after the emotional scene" and "am aware that the ending must always wrap up and resolve the central conflict you laid out at the beginning of the story". The least mean is 2.1 for "I have always been good at writing a good introductory /exposition for my stories".

Findings for Difference for Experience in Writing

This section presents data to answer research question 2: Is there a significant difference of knowledge of short stories for experience in writing?

Table 1
T-Test for Knowledge of Short Stories and Experience in Writing

Group Statistics

	Q5WRITTEN	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
TOTALKNOWLEDGE	YES	35	2.8600	1.47313	.24900
	NO	29	1.8069	.92579	.17192

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2–tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
TOTALKNOWLEDGE	Equal variances assumed	21.552	.000	3.339	62	.001	1.05310	.31535	.42273	1.68348
	Equal variances not assumed			3.480	58.107	.001	1.05310	.30259	.44744	1.65877

A two-sample t-test was performed to compare knowledge of short stories between those who have experience and those who do not have experience in writing short stories. There was a significant difference in knowledge of short stories between those who have experience writing short stories (M=2.86, SD= 1.47) and those who do not have experience writing short stories (M=1.81, SD=.028); t(62)=3.33,p=.001.

Findings for Findings for Difference needs to learn
This section presents data to answer research question 3: Is there a significant difference of knowledge of short stories for needs to learn?

Table 2
T-Test for Knowledge of Short Stories Needs to learn

Group Statistics

	Q4LEARN	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
TOTALKNOWLEDGE	YES	60	2.4633	1.35784	.17530
	NO	4	1.1750	.35000	.17500

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2–tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
TOTALKNOWLEDGE	Equal variances assumed	10.610	.002	1.880	62	.065	1.28833	.68516	-.08129	2.65796
	Equal variances not assumed			5.201	11.454	.000	1.28833	.24770	.74578	1.83088

A two-sample t-test was performed to compare knowledge of short stories between those who want to learn and those who do not want to learn. There was no significant difference in knowledge of short stories between those who want to learn and those who do not want to

learn (M=2.46, SD= 1.36) and those who want to learn and those who do not want to learn (M=1.29, SD=.068); t(62)=3.33,p=.69.

Conclusion
Discussions and Implications

A summary of the findings reveal that participants perceived that a good exposition is important to the short story. They also perceived that the climax was also equally crucial. On the other hand, they perceived themselves as not good at writing good exposition. Findings also revealed that there was a significant difference in knowledge of short stories between those who have experience writing short stories. The findings in this study are in accordance with the studies by Bartan (2017) who found that exposure to short stories allowed writers to have better introduction and also write creative climax. This is also justified by (Qoura & Hadidy, 2018; Maise et.al., 2018). who also found that exposure to short stories encouraged writers to be creative with their own story content.

The use of short stories in language classroom can be beneficial to the learners in many ways. Reading short stories can be a good alternative to teach reading comprehension. In addition to that, read-aloud activities help improve reading fluency for the reader. Next, when learners read short stories, they gain more background knowledge about the issues portrayed.

Nex, writing short stories is a good alternative for writing activities in the language class. Writers may not feel as stressed compared to writing academic essays in writing classes. If the goal of the writing lesson is improving writing skills, writing short stories can be a good diversion for the learners. Writing short stories allows leaners to enhance their creativity skills as they improve on their writing skills.

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