



## The Effect of Teaching Vocabulary Through Short Stories of Shahnameh on ESP Students' Vocabulary Learning

Bahareh Dashtestani Nejad

Department of English Language, Faculty of Foreign Languages, South Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran; [b.dashtestani.2@gmail.com](mailto:b.dashtestani.2@gmail.com)

Original Research Article

Date of Submission: 12 September 2024

Date of Acceptance: 17 December 2024

### Abstract

This study aimed to examine the impact of teaching vocabulary using short stories from Ferdowsi's Shahnameh on the vocabulary learning of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) students. A sample of 50 ESP students of English literature was randomly divided into an experimental group and a control group, each comprising 25 students. Prior to the intervention, a researcher-designed vocabulary test was administered as a pretest. Over the course of the study, the experimental group was taught ten short stories from Shahnameh, with each session focusing on five vocabulary items related to the story. In contrast, the control group learned the same vocabulary through traditional methods, where the teacher wrote the words on the board and provided definitions and synonyms. Following the intervention, the same vocabulary test was administered as a posttest. Independent samples t-test ( $t = 2.59$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) revealed that teaching vocabulary through Shahnameh's short stories has a significantly positive effect on students' vocabulary learning. These outcomes suggest that incorporating culturally authentic literature into vocabulary instruction can be highly beneficial, providing valuable insights for ESP students, syllabus designers, and instructors.

*Keywords:* ESP, Ferdowsi, short stories, Shahnameh, teaching vocabulary

### 1. Introduction

In academic contexts, literature serves as a crucial tool for extracting meaningful communication in English among learners by actively stimulating their cognitive and emotional faculties (Gomez-Galisteo, 2024). In this regard, Moody (1971) observed that the examination of literature entails an analysis of language in practical application, asserting that literature has the adaptability to integrate seamlessly into nearly any language pedagogy. The language typically employed in literature is commonly ordinary, as it is the ordinary language that transforms into elegantly poetic expressions (Hall, 2001). Balakian (1977) stressed that literary language serves as a conduit between the subjective internal state and the tangible external reality. In the same vein, Collie and Slater (1990) outlined four fundamental rationales: the provision of valuable and genuine content, enhancement of language proficiency, boosting personal engagement, and facilitation of cultural enrichment (as cited in Khan & Alasmari, 2018).

Furthermore, literature holds significant potential for language learning as it acquaints learners with authentic language usage, often described as "language at its finest" (Ghosn, 2002). Povey (1972)



contended that literature serves as a catalyst for enhancing language skills by broadening linguistic proficiency through the demonstration of extensive and nuanced vocabulary usage, as well as intricate and precise syntax. Similarly, Bassnett and Grundy (1993) argued that literature serves as a demonstration of language usage at its most sublime level. Besides, Eagleton (1996) contended that the concept of literature includes a wide spectrum of valuable written works, including history, poetry, philosophy, essays, and letters, among others. At the onset of the 20th century, the rapport between literature and language was deemed "excellent." However, a shift occurred with the notion that "literary language was superior to spoken language," thereby leading to the exclusion of literature from language programs (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, as cited in Khan & Alasmari, 2018).

Iran has a rich and strong literature and has many strong literary works and Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* is one of its strongest literary works. Even many other countries are using Iranian *Shahnameh* and it is translated into many other languages. Thus, it is a good idea to employ such literary text for teaching English to language learners either Iranian EFL learners or EFL learners all around the world. By employing *Shahnameh* instead of some Western text, Iranian EFL learners can be in touch with their pure culture, and in other countries, EFL learners can become familiar with Iranian culture and learn linguistic features at the same time. *Shahnameh* can be regarded as an authentic and rich literary work that contains both linguistic and cultural hints that is effective for many language teachers and learners (Gazanfari Moghaddam et al., 2020).

Undoubtedly, Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* is one of the richest literary works that can be regarded as authentic materials for teaching languages. Some empirical studies done on the employment of literary capacities in teaching Persian and using its translated version for teaching foreign languages such as English approved the literature function in carrying the cultural elements. Moreover, some others believe that employing such literary works can improve language competence, skills, and components. Furthermore, *Shahnameh* is mostly seen to be a literary work instead of a text for teaching, and one of the major elements of such literary work is music (Shafiei Kadkani, 2016). Ferdowsi paid special attention to the function of elements of music in *Shahnameh* and it made this work unique.

*Shahnameh* is regarded as a valuable work not only for teaching Persian but also for teaching any foreign languages since it is translated into many different languages. Literary works are regarded as authentic materials for teaching languages and Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* is one of the prominent ones. Ferdowsi employed rich words and phrases in his work. His work has been translated into many languages. With respect to English, Warner and Warner (1923) translated the whole of it into English. Since the focus of this study is vocabulary, the researcher only focused on vocabulary in *Shahnameh*. Many scholars and empirical studies in the field of English language teaching demonstrated that the vocabulary component is essential in foreign language learning. In fact, they came to the conclusion that if students have problems with different language skills either receptive skills (i.e., reading and listening) or productive skills (i.e., speaking and writing), their problems mainly back to their lack of vocabulary knowledge. For instance, in this respect, Rababah (2005) pointed out that many EFL learners have difficulty in having to communicate in English since they do not know enough vocabulary. He also stated that many methods of teaching English are not proper and they are outdated and cause EFL learners to lose their motivation in respect to language learning. The objective of this study was to examine the effect of teaching vocabulary through short stories, as an instance of literary ESP genre, on students' vocabulary learning.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Literature and Language Learning

Many scholars have been mainly trying various ways of strategies for teaching English effectively. Some of them came to the conclusion that employing literature could be seen as an effective way of teaching a second or foreign language since the literature's role in authentic language learning is unavoidable. In this regard, Hişmanoğlu (2005) pointed out that literature is regarded as authentic material. Most works of literature are not made for the aim of language teaching. In fact, many of them have real-life contexts such as city plans, cartoons, newspapers, travels, and many other things.

Given the fact that literary themes are mainly close to the lives of learners, they reflect their emotions and thoughts. Thus, employing literature in a pedagogical setting keeps the learners high-powered during the lessons and the process of learning becomes more effective and meaningful. Keshavarzi (2012) stated that there is a direct relationship between real life and literature. "Literary texts are meaningful, authentic, and relevant to learners' lives. They yield the greatest chance for engagement, reflection, and therefore, learning exists in them" (Kristeva & Kukubajska, 2013, p. 3605). Besides, Hişmanoğlu (2005) stated that literature plays a critical role in learning a foreign or second language. It not only shows linguistic elements, but also it contains cultural elements that are very effective in the process of language learning. He also stated that language teachers can utilize literature for teaching different language skills and components.

Furthermore, literature assists knowledge in many dimensions to help construct intelligence for readers. It gives them knowledge of the meaning and also language used in each era. Learners become familiar with some cultural elements (Tongchuy, 2011). Literature gives different emotional-based values since it is the art of transmission. Emotions and feelings with poetry lead readers toward tasting literature in an aesthetic way. Literature also provides an opportunity for learners to deal with real materials and it enhances their understanding and boosts their learning (Shtepani, 2012). Those who read literary works have a sense of joy and it assists their vocabulary knowledge domain.

Literature provides learners with many lexical and syntactic items. Students become familiar with many characteristics of the written language and they can read the body of contextualized language as well. In fact, they become familiar with the structure of the source language as well as its cultural elements. They also see different probable structures. They see how different ideas are connected to each other and how a rich text can be made. When learners are reading a literary text, they gradually become productive and they try to make use of cultural elements along with structural elements (Povey, 1972). He also pointed out that "literature will enhance all Language skills since literature develops linguistic knowledge" (p. 18). Therefore, literature plays a crucial role in teaching different language skills and components.

Literature is regarded as a promising instrument for L2 learning objectives. Scholars of this field recommended that literature can be regarded as an effective instrument in ESL and EFL pedagogical settings. Literature is naturally authentic and it can provide authentic input for L2 learners (Shrestha, 2008). In this regard, Maley (2001) stated that literature deals mainly with non-trivial things that are naturally related to them. Authenticity is regarded as a criterion that is necessary for the literature in the EFL context that exists in literary texts.

## 2.2. Literature and Culture

Literature also leads to cultural and intercultural awareness, particularly in today's world where the world has become a village with the assistance of the Internet. In the globalization era, there is a growing concern about universally common wants and needs than individual needs. Given the fact that literature deals with universal concepts (Maley, 2001), it can be regarded as cultural input for boosting the language competence of learners. With this regard, issues such as culture and society are very important and should be taken into account in EFL pedagogical settings. According to (Maley, 2001), literature mainly deals with universal concepts like hatred, love, death, nature, and many other concepts that are common to all cultures and languages. The differences and similarities between languages and cultures can boost our understanding and comprehension of the world.

As it was mentioned before, given the authentic nature of literature, it can expand pragmatic and sociolinguistic knowledge as used in communicative-based models (McKay, 1982). Pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence is regarded as two of the major components of communicative components-based models. Thus, particular attention is required to be given to this component. Given the authentic nature of literature, it consists of pragmatic and sociocultural data. These two characteristics are mainly related to appropriateness in language that can be discovered only in contextualized language like literary texts such as poems.

## 2.3. Ferdowsi's Shahnameh

The employment of literary texts and poems can be seen as a useful way to teach various language skills and components. In fact, by employing such texts, teachers can teach the content both explicitly and implicitly. It can be said that literary text such as Ferdowsi's Shahnameh is full of linguistics and cultural features and it can give proper instruments along with content for language learners and teachers. Moreover, teachers can give such authentic text to their learners and this way, language learners can be in touch with such texts and indirectly they can touch the culture of the source text and it can enhance both their interest in literature and motivation with respect to language learning (Khaleghizadeh, 2019).

As you know Iran has a rich and strong literature and it has many strong literary works and Ferdowsi's Shahnameh is one of its strongest literary works. Even many other countries are using Iranian Shahnameh and it is translated to many other languages. Thus, it is a good idea to employ such literary text for teaching English to language learners either Iranian EFL learners or EFL learners all around the world. By employing Shahnameh instead of some Western text, Iranian EFL learners can be in touch with their pure culture, and in other countries, EFL learners can become familiar with Iranian culture as well as learn linguistic features. Shahnameh can be regarded as an authentic and rich literary work that contains both linguistic and cultural hints that is effective for many language teachers and learners (Gazanfari Moghaddam et al., 2020).

Ferdowsi's Shahnameh is one of the prominent and strongest literary works since it was crucial in the flourishing of Persian in the post-Islamic era. It made it the best literary work and the foundation martial of Persian that was ready and strong for the best employment in the fourth century AH. Thus, all eloquent speakers after Ferdowsi employed such materials and made their works based on his work (Gazanfari Moghaddam et al., 2020). The structure and the words of the Shahnameh made some believe that such structure and arrangement is regarded as the main reason for protecting Persia and its influence

on the culture is totally clear. In this respect, some believe that Shahnameh is regarded as the only reason for protecting the proliferation of Persian (Kazazi, 2008).

#### **2.4. Ferdowsi's Shahnameh**

Vocabulary is an important device for communication and lack of it causes them to misunderstand the literal meaning of utterances in communication. Some researchers made an attempt to investigate the effects of different strategies on EFL learners' vocabulary (Nemati, 2013). In this regard, Schmitt (2010) noted that mastering vocabulary is seen as the pre-stage of mastering a foreign language. Indeed, learning and teaching a foreign language needs different kinds of strategies, techniques, and methods (Mizumoto & Takeuchi, 2008). Singleton (1999) noted that it is critical to boost the participation of learners in vocabulary learning in an active way. In many studies, there was a concentration on the pace of repetition and remembering lists of words (Gu, 2003). That is why forgetting happens mostly immediately after the first encounter.

The major purpose of vocabulary learning for language learners consists of remembering and retrieving complex and simple words, especially the ability to employ them automatically in various situational contexts (Gu, 2003). Different methods are introduced for teaching vocabulary. Among these methods, the principle of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was according to the foreign language literature by reading passages and translating them. In this way, the teacher assists children with new vocabulary items. After that with the appearance of structuralists and behaviorists and the audio-lingual method, the literary texts were neglected and the vocabulary was introduced through dialogue (Collie & Slater, 1991). This approach in literature was owing to a lack of experimental studies ascertaining literary texts' values in pedagogical settings (Maley, 2001). Besides, the back of literature for language teaching was reinforced by applied linguistics (Belcher & Hirvela, 2000). Furthermore, the employment of literature is regarded as a technique for teaching cultural and social domains of language by mixing writing, reading, speaking, and listening.

Vocabulary is regarded as a vital component that is essential for both written and spoken communications. Some scholars tried to make the connection between employing authentic materials like literary texts and vocabulary learning (Nemati, 2013). In this respect, Schmitt (2010) pointed out that mastering vocabulary is the essential domain for developing other language skills. For learning and teaching foreign language vocabulary, along with various methods and techniques, there is a need for authentic materials as well (Min, 2013). Besides, Singleton (1999) noted that it is very crucial to boost the participation of language learners in vocabulary learning (VL) actively. In many traditional methods of teaching, learners had to memorize a list of words by repetition (Gu, 2003). Thus, it was natural that after a while they forgot what they read.

#### **2.5. Ferdowsi's Shahnameh**

In this section, the researcher provided related studies at both national and international levels. In one study, Gomez-Galisteo (2024) explored the effect of teaching literature in EFL pedagogical settings. He came to the conclusion that using literature for teaching can be considered an effective way in EFL classrooms. In his study, Bhatti (2022) investigated the possible effects of employing short stories to improve the English vocabulary of Pakistani elementary students. The findings of his study indicated that short stories can be regarded as an innovative way to enhance the English vocabulary of students.

Similarly, Farrah and AL-Bakri (2022) explored the effectiveness of using poetry in developing English vocabulary, pronunciation, and motivation of EFL Palestinian students. The analysis of the post-test proved that the experimental group exhibited significant improvement over the control group in both vocabulary and pronunciation competencies when engaging with poetry. Besides, the outcomes obtained from questionnaires indicated that both teachers and students hold favorable attitudes towards incorporating poetry into the language classroom as a tool for English language instruction. Poetry exerts a positive influence on the expansion of English vocabulary and pronunciation skills, while also boosting student motivation.

In their study, Hamane and Guetalia (2022) explored the effect of utilizing literature on enhancing language skills for EFL learners. They concluded that the efficacy of expanding language skills through literature hinges upon the techniques and strategies employed by teachers in the classroom. In their study, they advocated for the formulation of a novel curriculum that prioritizes learners, placing them at the focal point of the learning process.

In his study, Mohammed (2022) examined the possible impact of short stories on the Sudanese vocabulary of EFL learners. He concluded that the participants of the experimental group who received new vocabulary items through short stories performed significantly better than participants of the other group. In her study, Rezaei Gashti (2021) investigated the possible effects of storytelling and cooperative learning on vocabulary learning of EFL learners. She came to the conclusion that employing a short story for teaching vocabulary to L2 learners can be regarded as an effective strategy for developing the vocabulary knowledge of EFL learners.

In his study, AL-Bakri (2019) investigated the possible effects of employing poetry on EFL learners' vocabulary learning and motivation for EFL. He concluded that teaching through poetry not only can enhance the motivation of language learners but also has positive effects on their vocabulary learning. Similarly, in another study, Arvieta (2020) investigated the probable effects of teaching vocabulary through poetry on EFL learners' vocabulary learning. She concluded that teaching vocabulary through poetry can improve EFL learners' vocabulary learning.

### **3. Research Questions**

Given the purpose of this study, the following research question is addressed:

RQ. Does teaching vocabulary through short stories of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh have any significant effect on students' vocabulary learning?

### **4. Method**

#### **4.1. Design of the Study**

The present study adopted a quantitative approach as it involved the administration of tests and dealt extensively with numerical data and scoring metrics. Additionally, it adhered to a quasi-experimental design, signified by the absence of true randomization, wherein participants were assigned randomly to distinct groups.

## 4.2. Participants

To fulfill the aim of this study, the researcher selected 50 undergraduate six-semester English literature students, learning English for literary purposes. They were studying at Islamic Azad university. The participants encompassed both male and female students who had been studying English as a foreign language for at least three to four years. They were between the ages of 20 and 24. Their mother tongue was Persian. The researcher utilized a convenience sampling method to choose the participants. Subsequently, the participants were randomly assigned to either the experimental group or the control group with equal number of the participants; each with 25 EFL learners.

## 4.3. Materials and Instruments

The researcher selected 40 vocabulary items from short stories in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh to serve as the instructional materials for the study. These words were selected concerning their relevance, frequency, and appropriateness for the participants. To evaluate the learners' knowledge of these words, the researcher designed a comprehensive 40-item test (see Appendix). This test included two formats: multiple-choice questions and fill-in-the-blank items, providing a varied assessment approach to measure both recognition and production of vocabulary.

For ease of data collection, the researcher planned for the test to be administered online. This ensured that data collection could proceed without interruption. The flexibility in administration mode was crucial for maintaining the study's continuity and integrity. The test was administered twice: initially as a pretest prior to the instructional treatment to set a baseline measure of the learners' vocabulary knowledge, and subsequently as a posttest after the instructional period to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching intervention. To reduce the potential influence of practice effects, where participants might remember and recognize test items from the pretest, the order of the test items was rearranged for the posttest.

Since the vocabulary test was a researcher-made instrument, it was essential to ensure its reliability. The reliability of the test was calculated employing the Kuder-Richardson Formula 21 (KR-21), and it turned to be 0.91.

## 4.4. Data Collection Procedure

As it was mentioned above, the researcher selected 50 ESP students, learning English for literary purposes. The researcher assigned the participants into two groups of the experimental and control randomly. The researcher employed convenience sampling method for selecting the participants. The design of this study was quasi-experimental since the participants were assigned randomly into two groups. She selected five instructive short stories of Shahnameh as authentic material. She selected 40 words within these stories to teach to students of both groups. She designed a test based on these words. This test was administered as the pretest before the treatment to ensure that the participants were at the same level in respect to vocabulary knowledge.

Then, the researcher in each session used Persian and English versions of each short story to teach the intended words to participants of the experimental group. Both Persian and English versions of each story were given to participants of the experimental group and they had to match together and briefly say what they understand. The intended words were bold and the students could use the Persian version of the story and guess the meaning of each word.

The same words were taught to participants of the control group. In this group, in each session the teacher introduced new words and their related synonyms and then the students were required to memorize the new words since next session the teacher asked them their meanings. Also they had matching practice. Finally, after eight sessions and teaching the intended words, the researcher administered the vocabulary test to see the effect of the treatment on students' vocabulary.

It is worthy to mention here, the researcher used the epic pictures of the characters of Shahname in order for students become familiar with their ancient culture, which is a rich culture.

#### 4.5. Data Analysis

Initially, following the development of a vocabulary test by the researcher, designed to assess the participants' learning of the given vocabulary items, the reliability of this instrument was evaluated employing the Kuder-Richardson Formula 21 (KR-21), a statistical measure commonly employed to assess internal consistency. Subsequently, the raw data collected from the administration of this test was subjected to analysis employing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 26, facilitating comprehensive statistical examination. Furthermore, in the comparative analysis of pretest and posttest outcomes, the researcher utilized the independent sample t-test, a statistical method employed to ascertain significant differences between two distinct groups.

### 5. Results

The researcher selected 50 ESP English literature students through convenience sampling method. He assigned the participants randomly into two groups of the experimental ( $n = 25$ ) and the control ( $n = 25$ ). In this section, descriptive statistics of both groups are provided. For answering the research question, the researcher administered the researcher-made vocabulary test as the pretest. Then, after finishing the treatment, this test was administered as the posttest. The descriptive statistic outcomes are given below.

Before starting the invention (teaching vocabulary through short stories of Shahnameh), the researcher-made vocabulary test was administered as the pretest to both groups. The statistical outcomes of this test are given in Table 1. This table reflects the mean, standard deviation, and the number of students in the experimental group ( $M = 31.54$ ,  $SD = 3.31$ ,  $n = 25$ ) and the control group ( $M = 32.80$ ,  $SD = 4.85$ ,  $n = 25$ ) in the pretest.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics of the Experimental and the Control Groups' Vocabulary Learning Scores on the Pretest*

Group	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	25	31.54	3.31	0.655
Control	25	32.80	4.85	0.765

The statistical results of independent samples t-test for the aim of comparing the vocabulary scores of the participants of both groups on the pretest are provided in Table 2. Table 2 indicates the mean difference between the scores of these two groups is  $-0.89$  and this difference is not significant ( $t = -0.57$ ,  $p = 0.57$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 2***Independent Samples T-Test for Comparing Two Groups' Scores of Vocabulary Learning (Pretest)*

Factor	Levene's Test for Variances		T-test for Means			
	F	Sig.	T	DF	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.
Equal variances assumed	0.329	0.568	-0.573	59	0.575	-1.26
Equal variances not assumed			-0.572	57.318	0.576	-1.26

After covering the treatment, the researcher administered the researcher-made vocabulary test as the posttest to see if teaching vocabulary through Shahnameh had any significant effect on EFL learners' vocabulary learning. The descriptive statistics related to the scores of the students of both groups are provided in Table 3. This table shows the mean, standard deviation, and number of students for the experimental group ( $M = 75.94$ ,  $SD = 5.42$ ,  $n = 25$ ) and the control group ( $M = 61.7$ ,  $SD = 4.32$ ,  $n = 25$ ) in the posttest.

**Table 3***Descriptive Statistics of Experimental and Control Groups' Vocabulary Learning Scores on the Posttest*

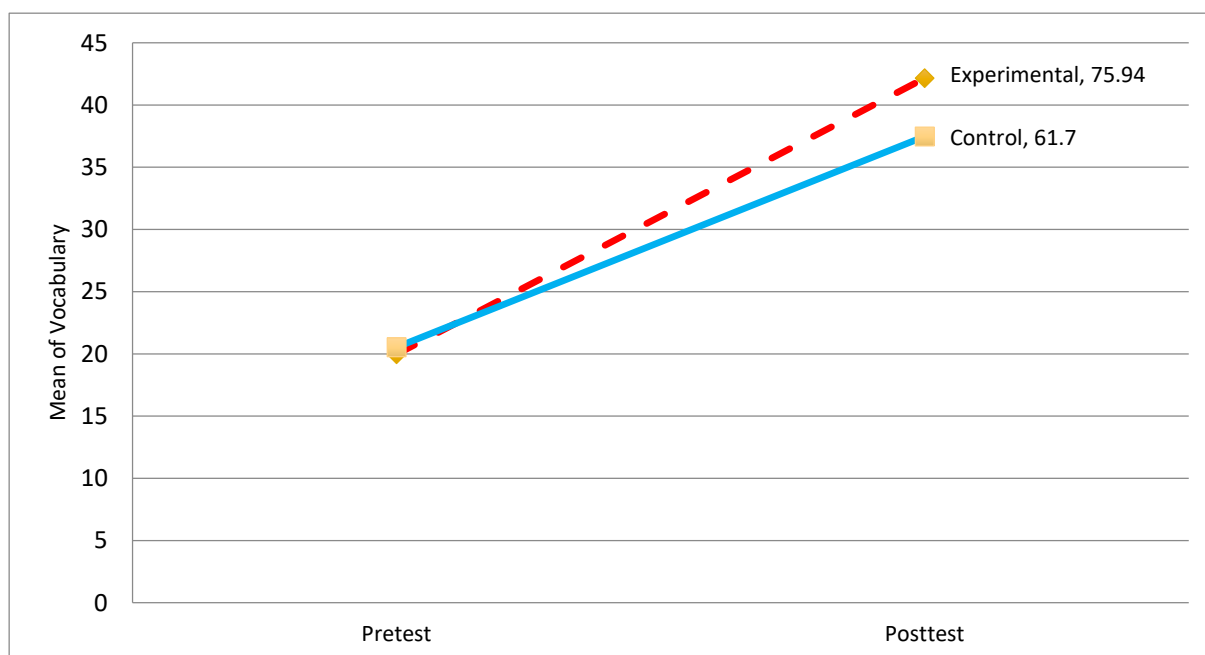
Group	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	25	75.94	5.42	1.32
Control	25	61.7	4.32	1.23

Table 4 shows results of the independent samples t-test performed to compare the vocabulary scores of both groups on the posttest. Table 4 indicates that the mean difference between the scores of the two groups is 14.24, and that the difference is significant ( $t = 2.59$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, it can be said that there is a significant difference between scores of the experimental group and the control group on the posttest. Thus, teaching vocabulary through short stories of Shahnameh can be an effective way for reinforcing ESP students' vocabulary learning.

**Table 4***Independent Samples Test for Comparing Two Groups' Scores of Vocabulary Learning (Posttest)*

Factor	Levene's Test for Variances		T-test for Means			
	F	Sig.	T	DF	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.
Equal variances assumed	0.125	0.000	2.595	59	0.012	14.24
Equal variances not assumed			2.600	58.617	0.012	14.24

In order to depict the results of both pretest and posttest for both groups in terms of vocabulary, a Line Chart (Figure 1) was made. As it's observable from the Line Chart, the means of vocabulary in both experimental and control groups are almost at the same level on the pretest, still, on the posttest, the mean for the experimental group is considerably higher than the control counterpart. In fact, vocabulary Knowledge of both groups has grown but the improvement in the experimental group is more noticeable than the control one.

**Figure 1***Two Groups' Means of Vocabulary Learning (Pretest & Posttest)*

## 6. Discussion

The outcomes of the present study showed that teaching vocabulary through short stories from Shahnameh has a significantly positive effect on ESP students' vocabulary learning. These results align with previous research, boosting the notion that culturally authentic materials, such as short stories and poetry, can play a crucial role in enhancing language learning. The findings align with previous research that stresses the effectiveness of employing literature and culturally authentic materials in language teaching. The positive impact observed in this study suggests that integrating Shahnameh's short stories into vocabulary instruction not only facilitates retention and comprehension of new vocabulary but also enriches the educational experience by connecting language learning with cultural context.

The results of this study are in line with the findings of Gomez-Galisteo (2024) that literature serves as a useful pedagogical instrument. This perspective is corroborated by the outcomes of this study, which indicate that using short stories from Shahnameh, a culturally rich and authentic source, can significantly boost vocabulary learning. The historical and cultural context embedded in Shahnameh's stories likely aids learners in better understanding and retaining new vocabulary, making the learning process more engaging and meaningful. Besides, Bhatti's (2022) research further validates this approach by showing that short stories can innovatively boost vocabulary among Pakistani elementary students. The success seen in Bhatti's study suggest that the narrative and contextual elements of short stories provide a memorable and relatable means for students to learn new words. The current study extends this understanding to ESP English literature students, indicating that short stories can be a powerful tool for vocabulary development.

The findings of the study by Farrah and AL-Bakri (2022) on the employment of poetry also parallel these outcomes. Their research showed that poetry not only improves vocabulary and

pronunciation but also increases student motivation. It points to the broader applicability of integrating different forms of literature, encompassing both prose and poetry, into language instruction. The positive attitudes of both teachers and students towards using poetry highlight the potential benefits of incorporating diverse literary forms to foster a more dynamic and effective learning setting. Our results are supported by Hamane and Guetatlia (2022) in that the effectiveness of literature in boosting language skills for EFL learners is largely dependent on the instructional techniques and strategies employed by teachers. They advocated for a learner-centered curriculum, suggesting that learners' active engagement with literary texts can foster deeper understanding and retention. The positive results from using Shahnameh in our study align with this view, underscoring the importance of strategic pedagogical approaches in maximizing the benefits of literary materials.

Our findings align with Mohammed (2022) that proved short stories significantly improved the vocabulary of Sudanese EFL learners. His study proved that the experimental group, which learned new vocabulary through short stories, outperformed the control group. This mirrors the outcomes of our study, suggesting that the narrative and contextual richness of short stories facilitate better vocabulary retention and comprehension.

In the same vein, Rezaei Gashti (2021) further supported the effectiveness of storytelling in vocabulary teaching, concluding that short stories are a potent strategy for vocabulary expansion among EFL learners. This concurs with our study's results, reinforcing the idea that storytelling, by providing context and engaging narratives, enhances vocabulary learning.

Similar to the outcomes of this study, AL-Bakri (2019) and Arvieta (2020) highlighted the positive impact of poetry on vocabulary learning and motivation among EFL learners. These studies indicate that poetic texts not only enrich vocabulary but also stimulate learners' interest and motivation. The success of employing Shahnameh's short stories in our study aligns with these outcomes, suggesting that various forms of literature, encompassing poetry and prose, can effectively enhance vocabulary learning. Besides, Khan and Alasmari (2018) and Chnara et al. (2016) stressed the broader educational benefits of incorporating literary texts into EFL classrooms. They pointed out that literature assists learners obtain native-like competence, articulate thoughts proficiently, and understand the nuances of modern English. Our study's outcomes support this view, indicating that using culturally rich materials like Shahnameh can provide similar benefits by exposing students to authentic language use and cultural contexts.

In conclusion, the current study's outcomes, combined with evidence from previous research, strongly support the integration of culturally authentic literary materials, such as Shahnameh, into vocabulary teaching for ESP students. The narrative and cultural depth of these materials not only boost vocabulary learning but also enrich the overall educational experience by connecting language learning with cultural understanding. Educators should regard incorporating such materials into their curricula, employing effective pedagogical strategies to maximize their benefits. Future research could explore the long-term effects of using culturally authentic literature in various educational contexts and with diverse student populations.

## 7. Conclusion and Implications

The study into the effect of teaching vocabulary through the short stories of Shahnameh on ESP students' vocabulary acquisition manifests significant pedagogical benefits. Shahnameh, with its rich linguistic and cultural heritage, gives an engaging and contextually rich medium that boosts students'

vocabulary learning. This method not only makes the acquisition of new words easy but also deepens learners' understanding and retention through narrative context, reinforcing both cognitive and emotional connections to the materials. Besides, utilizing literature that resonates with students' cultural background enhances motivation and engagement, thereby improving learning outcomes. Finally, incorporating Shahnameh into ESP vocabulary instruction is a holistic approach that integrates linguistic expansion with cultural enrichment, preparing students more effectively for their specific academic and professional domains. This study underscores the value of combining culturally relevant literature in language education and recommends further exploration into other literary works that could similarly benefit language learners.

Educators and curriculum designers should regard incorporating culturally authentic materials, such as Shahnameh, into ESP programs. By doing so, they can provide students with engaging and contextually rich content that promotes deeper understanding and retention of vocabulary. Effective pedagogical strategies are critical for maximizing the benefits of literary materials. Besides, integrating literary texts from different cultures into language instruction can provide students with a broader cultural perspective, boosting greater cultural awareness and appreciation. This approach can make language learning more meaningful and relevant to learners.

The employment of engaging narratives and culturally rich content can reinforce student motivation and interest in language learning. Educators should leverage the intrinsic appeal of stories and poetry to maintain high levels of student engagement. In addition, teachers should receive training on how to effectively combine literature into their teaching practices. Professional expansion programs can equip educators with the necessary skills and strategies to employ literary texts effectively in the classroom. To maximize the effect of literature in the classroom, teachers should be trained in techniques that combine these texts meaningfully into their curricula. Professional development programs play a critical role in this regard, equipping educators with innovative strategies to make literary texts both accessible and relevant. Such training can cover diverse dimensions, from choosing age-appropriate, culturally sensitive texts to making easy discussions that deepen comprehension and critical thinking skills.

When educators feel ease and equipped to utilize literature as a teaching instrument, they are better positioned to inspire their learners. Literature-based lessons not only improve language proficiency but also reinforce empathy, cultural awareness, and emotional intelligence. This holistic approach to language learning makes sure that learners are not just learning words and grammar, but are also engaging with the values, emotions, and perspectives that language embodies. As a result, literature becomes a bridge that connects learners to new ideas and cultures, boosting an enduring appreciation for the language and the richness of its expression.

Further studies should explore the long-term effects of using culturally authentic literature in language teaching across different educational contexts and student populations. Additionally, research could investigate the effectiveness of other forms of literature, such as plays and novels, in enhancing language skills. Plays, as an example, might be particularly useful in boosting oral communication skills, as they let students to practice dialogue, intonation, and emotion in real-world contexts. Novels, with their extended narratives and complicated character arcs, could support deeper reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and the ability to follow intricate plot structures. Furthermore, they provide chances for learners to explore cultural and historical contexts. Such research could provide insights into

how culturally specific narratives affect language acquisition, comprehension, and retention over time. Finally, by investigating different educational settings—such as urban, rural, and international classrooms—researchers can better find out how cultural relevance in literature affects students with varying linguistic backgrounds and life experiences.

### Acknowledgment

We are grateful to the authors of the research articles and textbooks used in this study.

### Authors' Contributions

All authors have conducted the study, collected data, analyzed and interpreted the data, and written up the manuscript.

### Funding

The study did not receive any funding.

### Competing Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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## Appendix

### Vocabulary Test

#### A. Choose the correct alternative.

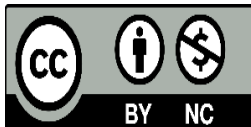
- Which word means "to provide comfort or relief"?
  - a) Demon
  - b) Shepherd
  - c) Comfort
  - d) Stalk
- Which word refers to a loud, deep, prolonged sound?
  - a) Capture
  - b) Roar
  - c) Defeated
  - d) Craftsmanship
- Which word means "to feel or show deep sorrow or regret"?
  - a) Mourning
  - b) Revenge
  - c) Herbs
  - d) Remedy
- Which word means "to cause to fail or be unsuccessful"?
  - a) Accomplish
  - b) Defeated
  - c) Foretold
  - d) Wondrous
- Which word means "to take into custody"?
  - a) Capture
  - b) Worship
  - c) Uproot
  - d) Attack
- Which word means "to explain or make sense of something"?
  - a) Tyrant
  - b) Stalk
  - c) Interpret
  - d) Sojourn

7. Which word refers to a state of tranquility or calm?
  - a) Peace
  - b) Appetizer
  - c) Wrath
  - d) Fought
8. Which word describes a cruel and oppressive ruler?
  - a) Wondrous
  - b) Craftsmanship
  - c) Tyrant
  - d) Mourning
9. Which word means "to engage in a battle or struggle"?
  - a) Fought
  - b) Perish
  - c) Destined
  - d) Blacksmithing
10. Which word means "to temporarily stay or reside"?
  - a) Perish
  - b) Swoon
  - c) Sojourn
  - d) Oath
11. Which word means "a promise or solemn commitment"?
  - a) Oath
  - b) Comfort
  - c) Remedy
  - d) Shepherd
12. Which word means "to provide nourishment or food"?
  - a) Perish
  - b) Nourish
  - c) Swoon
  - d) Revenge
13. Which word refers to a feeling of deep sorrow and grief?
  - a) Mourning
  - b) Wrath
  - c) Comfort
  - d) Enemy
14. Which word means "to predict or foretell"?
  - a) Defeated
  - b) Comfort
  - c) Foretold
  - d) Interpret
15. Which word refers to an intense anger or rage?
  - a) Wrath
  - b) Mourning
  - c) Sojourn
  - d) Swoon
16. Which word means "to track or follow stealthily"?
  - a) Appetizer
  - b) Stalk
  - c) Blacksmithing
  - d) Swoon
17. Which word means "to faint or lose consciousness"?
  - a) Wrath
  - b) Accomplish

- c) Swoon
  - d) Interpret
18. Which word refers to a plant used for medicinal purposes?
- a) Herbs
  - b) Revenge
  - c) Shepherd
  - d) Craftsmanship
19. Which word means "to make something happen successfully"?
- a) Destined
  - b) Fought
  - c) Accomplish
  - d) Serpents
20. Which word means "to engage in religious rites or ceremonies"?
- a) Perish
  - b) Revenge
  - c) Worship
  - d) Defeated
- B. Fill in the blank.**

Demon	mourning	craftsmanship	attack	grief	blacksmith	
revenge	anxiously	oath	interpret	worship	dragon	remedy
nourishment	serpent	perish	wrath	foretold	falter	sojourn

1. The hero vowed to protect his village from the evil \_\_\_\_\_.
2. After the battle, the village was in \_\_\_\_\_ for the fallen warriors.
3. The skilled artisan was known for his exceptional \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The soldiers prepared to \_\_\_\_\_ the enemy at dawn.
5. She felt a deep sense of \_\_\_\_\_ after losing her loved one.
6. The \_\_\_\_\_ was renowned for his ability to craft fine swords.
7. The general promised to take \_\_\_\_\_ on those who wronged his people.
8. The villagers \_\_\_\_\_ awaited the outcome of the battle.
9. The knight swore a(an) \_\_\_\_\_ of loyalty to his king.
10. The wise elder was able to \_\_\_\_\_ the ancient texts.
11. The villagers gathered to \_\_\_\_\_ their gods before the battle.
12. The powerful roar of the \_\_\_\_\_ could be heard across the valley.
13. The herbalist prepared a \_\_\_\_\_ for the wounded soldiers.
14. The shepherd guided his flock to a new pasture for better \_\_\_\_\_.
15. The poisonous \_\_\_\_\_ slithered silently through the grass.
16. The drought caused many crops to \_\_\_\_\_.
17. The tyrant's \_\_\_\_\_ knew no bounds, causing fear among the people.
18. The prophecy \_\_\_\_\_ the rise of a new hero.
19. The brave warrior did not \_\_\_\_\_ even when faced with overwhelming odds.
20. The explorers planned to \_\_\_\_\_ in the remote village for the winter.



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