

THE EFFECTS OF STORY RECITATION FOR YOUNG LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Abstract

This article discusses the effects of reciting English story in a way to prepare a storytelling competition in a private elementary school. Initially forced to use the method, the young language learners (YLL) gradually came to appreciate it. The practice enabled them to construct the story comprehensively, to improve pronunciation, to motivate their peers to tell the story confidently, and to develop the habit of attending the details of language in the context of language input. To investigate how beneficial the English story recitation is, I use interview to examine teacher's perceptions and experiences about story recitation and its effect on language development. I will also investigate how story recitation is used and its effects in an EFL (English as a foreign language) context. The paper concludes that such practice enhances YLL's noticing and rehearsal and later it facilitates second language acquisition. Therefore, teachers are suggested to have a positive attitude towards English story recitation for young language learners.

Key Words: *Young Language Learners, Recitation, Language Development*

Abstrak

Artikel ini menjelaskan tentang efek menceritakan cerita berbahasa Inggris sebagai persiapan siswa Sekolah Dasar (SD) mengikuti kompetisi *storytelling* tahunan di sebuah SD swasta. Para siswa SD yang tadinya terbebani dengan metode ini, pada akhirnya bersedia melakukannya dengan senang hati. Proses persiapannya memungkinkan siswa SD merangkai cerita dengan baik, meningkatkan pelafalan kata, memberi semangat kepada teman sekelas untuk menceritakan cerita yang mereka hafalkan, dan memupuk kebiasaan untuk mengerti detail cerita dalam bahasa target. Saya mewawancarai guru Bahasa Inggris pada sekolah tersebut untuk mengetahui seberapa faedah metode menceritakan cerita berbahasa Inggris, persepsi serta pengalaman menjalankan metode tersebut, serta efek metode tersebut terhadap perkembangan bahasa para siswa SD. Lebih dalam saya juga akan menganalisa penerapan metode menceritakan cerita berbahasa Inggris ini dalam konteks pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa kegiatan ini meningkatkan kemampuan siswa SD memahami dan mengulang dan kemudian kegiatan ini dapat juga meningkatkan penguasaan bahasa kedua para siswa SD. Para guru disarankan untuk mencoba metode menceritakan cerita berbahasa Inggris bagi para siswa SD.

Kata Kunci: *Siswa Sekolah Dasar, Menceritakan, Perkembangan Bahasa*

INTRODUCTION

It has been well-known that Communicative Approach is applied in YLL classrooms. To support YLL's communication skill, a support through language practice is needed. Interest in a topic and purpose for a task, though important, are not enough. A support at discourse level is required to organize their

talk into an extended description (Cameron, 2001: 60). Widowson (1998) suggested that YLL need to be exposed to a small yet frequent direct language practice such as models of language use to listen to, notice and appropriate; plentiful opportunities for repeated listening; plentiful opportunities to say the words

and phrases; and feedback on production to improve fluency and accuracy.

To give frequent exposure of English to YLL and to enhance their speaking skill, English story recitation has been reported as one number of effective methods (Fuyono, 2013). Fuyono further explained that English story recitation is effective for improving learners' pronunciation, intonation, grammar awareness, and other related factors. Therefore, to prepare the grade 3-6 YLLs in Tarakanita Elementary School in Yogyakarta, Indonesia to join the annual storytelling contest, those YLLs are exposed with two different stories to recite in a semester. This article sets to report how Vina, the English teacher of the school, deals with the preparation in the recent years and shares the effects of the annual storytelling competition for YLL's improvements. This study is using an interview to examine the teacher's perceptions and experiences about English stories recitation and its effect on language development in Indonesian private elementary school.

Literature Review

Morrow (1986) stated that retelling story demonstrates improvement in memory and recall. Frequent practice and guidance in story retelling with an emphasis on the structural elements in a story increase learners' comprehension, improve the number of structural elements included in their own retelling of stories, enhance the complexity of their oral language, and improve learners' ability to recite an original story. Heroman & Aghayan (n.d.) suggest two major steps dealing with story retelling; sharing the story and retelling the story. Sharing the story, a teacher will select appropriate stories and then engage the learners in an interactive storytime repeatedly. Combs and Beach (1994) argues that the power of a story is all around us and is essential in helping the students to understand the reality. Further, when the teacher helps the learners retell the stories, she needs to introduce the props for retelling, to model

how to do retelling and to guide the learners to memorize the stories by providing prompts. Next, a teacher invites the learners to retell, offering support and prompts when needed, make the book and props available for learners' use and encourage independent retelling.

Sharing the Story

Asking young learners to retell a story in a foreign language is a very demanding task, even more demanding than in the first language. Cameron (2001) however responded that getting them retell stories in a foreign language gives an opportunity for communicative activities and works on discourse skills. Teacher firstly is required to set the chosen story in a slightly-beyond-the learners'-receptive level as it can be demotivating if they are unlikely to comprehend the story. If the YLLs are to reproduce the whole story in some way, then the language demands will need to be reduced. Secondly, to engage the YLLs in an interactive storytelling, the teacher invites his learners to be aware of the thinking process through questioning, pausing, sharing of ideas. It is recommended that the teacher build a good interaction such as asking them to visualize and imagine the setting or events, predict what might happen, and relate characters or events to their own lives and to comprehend the cultural aspects involved under the treated story as well as figure out what the moral value of the story is (Delett, 2001).

Retelling the Story

Retelling the story is post reading or post listening recalls in which readers or listeners tell what they remember (Morrow, 1986). This activity is the peak of the overall task. Therefore, teacher needs to provides some strategies to help the learners retell the story. The props for retelling as well as how to do retelling and then followed by guidance how to memorize the story are crucial. Heroman & Aghayan (n.d.) recommend some props worked in their retelling class such as hand

puppets, paper crafts, jumbled phrases or sentences, and skid costumes. Ghosn (2002) states that Young EFL learners can be motivated to experience oral language through retelling story. At the end of this activity, the YLLs are able to scaffold a comprehensive story and they are ready to be guided to memorize the story to be recited in the upcoming meeting.

RESEARCH METHOD

Barkhuizen et. al. (2014) remark that narrative inquiry brings storytelling and research together by using storytelling as a tool for presentation of findings. This biographical reaserach can help readers to understand how language teachers organize their experiences and represent them to themselves and to others. Collecting some data, I decided to gather my data through interview. I conducted a semi-structured interview meaning that I left the questions open since I wanted to collect a broader view from the teacher. The questions I asked were about the teacher's experience and her views on effectiveness of English story recitation for YLL language development.

I recorded everything she said in the interview and it was then transcribed and reported. The interview was conducted in both English and Indonesian since the interviewee found it more subtle if she could freely express herself in her mother tongue.

The only participant I interviewed on October 24 was Theresia Vina. She is 30 years old and has been a young learner teacher for 10 years. She is competent from the first grade up to the third grade. She was the one who began a retelling story preparation as well as the initiator of a classroom discourse application in Tarakanita Elementary School Yogyakarta.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Anaying and interpreting the results from the interview, I compiled all responses and then categorized the results into three different thematic groupings:

language development, confidence, and motivation.

Language Development

Vina emphasised that the activity of English story recitation started when she needed to prepare her YLL for annual Tarakanita Talent Competition which requires the elementary contestants to retell a story. Then she decided to prepare 3-6 graders to join the competitions as she was thinking that the 3rd graders are able to write and read well. At the same time, she found that her learners' English proficiency has a good potential to be challenged and develop. Despite the learners' good English proficiency, she however concerned about their speaking ability. Her learners had problems with fluency, intonation, and pronunciation – which are the important aspects of telling stories in a foreign language. She therefore set some steps to improve them as well as give the YLL opportunity to construct the material.

I will show a set of pictures about the text. I will let them write whatever words come to their mind on the board for the class to see and later to discuss about. Children compete enthusiastically to contribute ideas when I ask them to build a story using the words written on the board.

Children then are shown the video and they start to construct the story more wildly. They even come up with well-sequenced story to tell – although their mother tongue still dominates.

Guessing and arranging pictures trigger YLLs to produce words as Cameron (2001) found that once YLLs have something they want to say, they will speak meaningfully in foreign language classroom. This activity surely develops YLLs' foreign language acquisition.

Confidence

Cameron (2001) also added that YLLs will use their existing language resources to construct understanding in a foreign language. Therefore, after searching for famous tales, Vina tried to simplify the story for her YLLs by inserting some direct sentences as follows.

The Two Goats

Once upon a time, there was a small village near the town. The village was filled with loads of people and animals. There were two silly goats who lived in the same village. A beautiful river flowed through this village. There was a narrow bridge across the river. Whosoever wanted to pass the river, he had to go through the that narrow bridge.

One day, the two goats were at the two ends of the bridge. But, only a goat could cross the bridge at the same time. Unfortunately, those two selfish goats were very stupid as well as proud. Each of the wanted to cross the bridge first. They started to cross the bridge from the two ends at the same time. The two goats met in the middle of the narrow bridge. There was no place for them to cross each other.

The silly goats started to push and fight with each other. The bridge was very narrow and there was less space for the two goats. As a result, they fell into the river and drowned.

(bedtimestories.com)

The Two Goats

Over a river there was a very narrow bridge. One day a goat was crossing this bridge. Just at the middle of the bridge he met another goat. There was no room for them to pass.

"Go back," said one goat to the other.

"You must go back", said the second goat, "because I am stronger than you."

"No!", said the first goat.

"Let's see!", said the second goat, and he put down his horns to fight.

The two foolish goats fought and fell into the water.

(simplified version)

Having got the simplified text, YLLs are provided with a list of new words right below the text. Vina remarks that her inviting YLLs to have repeat-after session and a comprehensive discussion for each paragraph help the YLLs digest the tale fast enough. To build a better understanding, YLLs are facilitated to memorize the simplified text to be recited in the upcoming week. Vina herself notices that not only YLLs' pedagogical ability is increased but also their empathy. When some students are doing their weekly recitation, other YLLs are ready to give clues as well as positive feedback for their mates' performances. Peers pay attention on the speaker's both language competence and public speaking manners. Vina says:

I noticed that my students are even more confident each day as they experience reciting the simplified story in front of the class. They start to be more expressive in delivering the recitation. Some of them visualize the words in their hand movements and funny expressions. It's hilarious!

Dornyei (2001) stated that YLLs may discover that as they acquire greater skill, their confidence will grow and, as they become more confident in their ability to speak, they will take advantage of new opportunities to speak, which will enable them to gain greater skill.

Motivation

By experiencing weekly recitation, their intrinsic motivation which deals

with behaviour performs for its own sake in order to experience pleasure and satisfaction, such as the joy of doing a particular activity (Dornyei, 2001). Vina remarks:

I heard from mothers whom I met at school. They shared what the children arrange for self-initiated practice with their parents. During the recitation performances, some good performances give a good sample for the others to perform better. Another good thing is peer motivational feedback does exist in the classroom and the good ambiance arises the motivation of the ones who have not mastered the recitation.

Searfoss and Readence (1994) state that story retelling is an appropriate assessment tool for use with ESL students. YLLs who are ready with their recitation are developing their performance with certain mimic and body movement. This kind of performance reflects YLLs' success of exploring both their story reconstruction and creativity. Vina further explains:

The ultimate goal of this activity is to get the children to retell the story that they really understand. I appreciate their ideas of exploring the story they memorized by adding appropriate facial expressions and body movements on the stage of the annual storytelling competition. I notice that those who are successful doing the performance are those who can recite the story well during the preparation in the classrooms.

As Piagetian theory once said that as an active learner and thinker, children construct their own knowledge from working with ideas. When children have found a meaningful learning, they are developing it well. The set of repeated recitation activity has given YLLs' enough

exposure to a foreign language. Brunner (1983) supported that routine offers a way to add variation that can involve more complex language.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the interview that I conducted and the literature that I found, I come to a conclusion that English story recitation is a beneficial method for promoting language development of 3 grader YLLs. In the interview, I noticed that the teacher not only looked at language development during recitation activity in the classrooms but also on the competition day when the YLLs showed their creativity in delivering the story.

Further in the interview, the teacher's explanation helped me conclude that the activity of English story recitation allows more positive affects for YLLs such as enjoyment, confidence, and motivation. The process of the story scaffolding brings some fun to the classrooms. YLLs enjoy the pictures and the videos the teacher brings to the class, they are willing to try to speak up their predictions, they put respect to others' ideas during the story discussion, they learn the moral value of the story, and the most interesting part is that those YLLs build their interpersonal skill by giving motivational feedback to each other.

Writing this paper, I noticed that this conventional method of learning language is suitable for Indonesian YLLs who do not have enough exposure of English. By memorizing the sentence structure, the vocabulary, and the pronunciation at the same time, YLL will at some point feel their success of speaking English. In the other hand, teachers are demanded to find interesting tales, simplify them, study the pronunciation, as well as prepare the supporting activities that help the YLL scaffold the story unintentionally.

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