Enhancing Students' Understanding Of English Grammar Through Literary Works And Exploring Students' Voice On Their Use

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ABSTRACT

Grammar is a substantial English element commonly considered as a challenging component. This paradigm appears in all education levels including university. Based on the pre-test in a grammar class, the average score of the grammar test was only 62.76, or it was still in C level. The researchers concurred that action research was required, and the solution chosen was literary works such as a short story, a film script, and a novel. This study aimed to enhance students' understanding of English grammar and investigate students' voices on the usage of literary works. This research was successful if the average score of post-test achieved 70 (minimum grade for B level). Then, the instruments employed to obtain the data were tests and questioner. The results revealed that literary works can boost grammar mastery. The average score of the post-test was 70.53, or there was a 12.38% of improvement. This result surpassed the success indicator of this action study. The student perceptions of the use of literary works also tended to be positive since all the items in the questioner received positive responses. Overall, literary works can enhance students' mastery of English structure, and literary works as the proposed media receive positive responses from the pupils.

Keywords: English Grammar, Literary Works, Students' Mastery, Students' Voice, Action Research

INTRODUCTION

Grammar or structure is one of the elements of English language, and it is commonly considered as significant component (Ameliani, 2019; Aniuranti & Rizkina, 2019; Effendi et al., 2017; Handayani & Johan, 2018; Nawira et al., 2019; Yuliyanto & Fitriyati, 2019). Therefore, every learner has to get a sufficient notion of grammar. Harmer (2003) argues that communication may suffer if the grammar rules are used too carelessly. Utomo & Ahsanah (2020) also mention that mastering grammar assists the learners in constructing better language structure and create meaningful messages. Wang (2010) adds that structure is always essential in teaching and learning process of foreign languages. Thus, grammar is a crucial part of the communication process and language learning itself.

Even though the significance of English structure is undeniable, many students frequently encounter difficulties in understanding grammar includes the students in university level. According to Al-mekhlafi & Nagaratnam (2011), grammar might create uncomfortable atmosphere to the pupils or even terror. Utomo & Ahsanah (2020) argues that the students normally have realized that learning grammar can be effortful. Effendi et al., (2017) even argue that many students who have studied grammar for several years in university level still have problems to construct correct and good sentences. Grammar, in short, has a crucial role in a language, yet mastering English structure requires plenty of effort.

The difficulties in learning grammar are faced by the students in the English Language Teaching Department as well. The researchers frequently hear the students' complaints about grammar. For them, grammar is full of formulas and sometimes too complicated. After doing the pre-test in Intermediate Grammar class, the team also found that the average score of pre-test merely achieved 62.76, and it was still in C level.

Based on this problem, the researchers decided to do action research. It is very crucial since the responsibility of language teachers is to provide an effective learning process. The researchers decided to employ literary works. They were selected due to several factors. Firstly, literary works can be

utilized as teaching media of grammar. Khatib et al., (2011) mention nine different merits of literary works. One of them is for teaching grammar. They mention that literary texts are useful for the students to practice grammatical structure or even complex grammar points. Collie & Slater in Floris (2004) also point out that in literary works many original characteristics of the written language such as "the structure and function of sentences, the variety of possible structures, and the different ways of connecting ideas" are displayed at enormous difficulty level. Secondly, literary works might also be able to make the students feel comfortable so they will be motivated to study more. Khatib et al., (2011) mention that many students are highly motivated if they have a chance to explore the literary text. Thirdly, literature might also have power as teaching media since its authenticity. Floris (2004) states that literary texts so often touch on common themes and values which range from individual concerns to social issues such as death, love, pollution, ethnic conflicts. That's why they are authentic. Khatib et al., (2011) also mention that authenticity is required in language teaching. Thus, literary works are completely possible to be utilized as teaching media.

Another purpose of this study is exploring students' voices on the use of literature. The students' perspective is regarded as an essential matter. After applying the literary works chosen, the team asked the students to fill in a closed questionnaire. Thus, this research aimed to improve the student understanding of English grammar and exploring the students' perspective. This study might be useful for other teachers who have the problem on student grammar mastery, and literary works can be used as solution to increase it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Structure is understood as the rules of constructing words into larger components like phrases or sentences. Every language has its own grammatical rules includes English. Grammar is the description of ways in which words are combined into a larger component named sentences (Debata, 2013; Harmer, 2003; Wang, 2010). Grammar knowledge itself is substantial for every language learner. Wang (2010) states that grammar is always crucial in teaching and learning process of foreign languages. Harmer (2003) says that if structure rules are used too carelessly, communication process may suffer. Simply put, English grammar plays an essential role in communication and the teaching and learning process.

Due to the importance of grammar, every EFL teacher has to design an effective teaching process supporting the achievement of the teaching objectives. Furthermore, the teachers have to overcome the problem that occurred during the learning process. They might use teaching approaches, methods, techniques, or media. Agustin (2017) argues that every teacher has to equip themselves with a strong foundation related to the function and nature of the structure and several teaching competencies, and ELT teachers require to select the most suitable and comprehensive teaching approach. In short, every teacher has to master the concepts of grammar and equip themselves with the most effective ways of teaching.

In EFL classes especially grammar, one of the recommended teaching media is literature. Literary works have many merits as teaching media. According to Floris (2004), the use of literature in EFL classes is not without reason. Compared to informative texts widely applied in EFL classes, literary texts have distinctive features. They are enrichment of language and culture, original material, and personal participation (Alemi, 2011; Floris, 2004). Khatib et al., (2011) explain nine benefits of literary works called authenticity, motivation, awareness of culture/intercultural and globalization, intensive/extensive reading practice, sociolinguistic/pragmatic knowledge, grammar/vocabulary knowledge, language skills, emotional intelligence, and critical thinking. Lazar in Khan & Alasmari (2018) also argues five reasons of using literature, and they are enhancing language awareness, encouraging language acquisition, developing students' interpretative skills, motivating the students, and educating the whole person. Duff & Maley in Bobkina & Dominguez (2014) also argue the advantages of using literature classified into three categories called linguistics, methodological, and motivational. As a matter of fact, bringing literature works to EFL class might be the right solution to overcome learning problems in grammar class.

In employing literature in EFL classes, every teacher is suggested to consider several aspects. Alemi (2011) proposes five consideration called language proficiency, time allocation, cultural understanding, length of the text, and personal participation. Floris (2004) also argues that teachers are

still complaining about the difficulties encountered in applying literary works. Therefore, there are some criteria in implementing literary works called language competency, length of the text, cultural understanding and student interest. After considering all of those aspects, the team concurred to use three different types of literature, a short story, a novel, and a film, and the genre chosen was fantasy and humour.

Besides solving the learning problems appearing in the teaching process, every teacher might want to explore their students' voices related to the learning process itself. Perception is the way someone views something. Budiman & Apriani (2019) point out two types of perception called positive and negative perceptions. The positive perception appears when someone views that an object is likely to match his suit. Meanwhile, negative perception is when someone considers that something is not likely to match his suit. The perception explored in this study is related to the influence of literary works to the learning and teaching process, the impact of literature for the pupils, and the use of teaching tools.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study was a classroom action research (CAR) since this research aimed to overcome a classroom problem called student mastery of English grammar. The solution chosen was literary works such as a short story, a novel, and a film script. The research design employed was Kemmis & McTaggart's model in Kusuma & Dwitagama (2010). This model consists of four stages called planning, observing, acting, and reflecting. The phases of observation and action are regarded as one process. This action research was conducted in one cycle consisted of three meeting. The participants of this study were Class A of the 2018 batch, English Language Teaching Department of Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Purwokerto. This class consisted of 19 students.

There were two different types of instruments employed in this research. The first instrument was a test. Ary et al., (2010) explain that a test is a set of stimuli presented to an individual in order to list responses on the basis of which a numerical mark can be assigned. Suwartono (2014) point outs that a test is a way to collecting data related to ability measurement, skill, mastery, or competency. In short, the test is the most suitable instrument used to measure the development of grammar mastery. In this study, the test used was multiple-choice items.

The second instrument used was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was employed to explore the students' voices after implementing literary works. The type of questionnaire used was a closed questionnaire. According to Arikunto (2007), a questionnaire is some written questions utilized to gather information regarding respondents' personalities or other things they know. The items in the questionnaire was used to know the students' perception about the usage of literature as teaching media. The items can be divided into three categories namely the impact of literature to the learning process, the influence of literature to the students, and the students' voice about the teaching tools employed such as power-point, speaker, and LCD.

The test and the closed questionnaire were arranged by adapting the relevant instruments from the previous studies. The researchers also considered the guideline in constructing the multiple choice, and closed questionnaire. Besides, the use of the questionnaire was intended to support the validity of the data from the test. So, the result would not only focus on the grammar understanding but also students' voice on the usage of literary works as teaching media.

After collecting the data, the data obtained from the test were analysed through several stages. First, the results were analysed by calculating the average score. Second, the improvement from pre-test to post-test would be measured. Meanwhile, the data gathered from the questionnaire were analysed through several steps. First, the data were summed up through tally. Second, the percentage of each item would be calculated.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Before the implementation of literary works as proposed media, the teaching and learning process looked monotone. The students seemed unenthusiastic in joining the class. Some students even talked to their classmates about something that was unrelated to the topic given. The average score of the pre-test was only achieved 62.76, or it was still on C level. Besides, the lecturers often hear the complaints from the students regarding the difficulties of learning grammar.

Based on the results above, the researches concurred to do action research to overcome the problem in grammar mastery. The first phase carried out was planning activity. In this stage, the team discussed the best solution to overcome the problem. After reading the relevant resources like journal articles, the team agreed to employ literary works such as a short story, a novel, and a film. In every planning stage, the team discussed the best literature might be employed to teach a certain topic in grammar, and of course we considered the criteria in implementing the literature such as students' language abilities, time allotment, the length or the text, and students' interest, and the most essential matter was the relevance of literature with the teaching topics or materials.

The next stages were acting and observing. The teacher used the literary works chosen to teach a certain topic in structure class. After applying literary works as teaching media, the class atmosphere was better than the previous conventional teaching process. In the first action, the team used a short story to teach passive voice of past simple. The students seemed enthusiastic joining the class especially during the discussion of the text used. The next action, the team employed a piece of film script. The topic was passive of present perfect. The students watched a scene of a film while filling some blank parts. The teaching atmosphere was getting better compere to the first meeting. In the last meeting of the cycle, the researchers applied a piece of novel to teach passive voice of past perfect.

After the use of literary works as teaching media in those three meetings, the team decided to do the post-test, and the average score was 70.53. There was 12.38% of improvement. This result has surpassed the success indicator so the team decided to finish the action research. In the last meeting, some students even asked questions and seems so eager to answer the questions from the lecturer. Besides, those three stages, the team also did a reflection process in every meeting. This phase was used to discuss the teaching and learning process conducted. The team mainly focussed on the general atmosphere arose and whether the teacher had done the teaching stages planed or not.

After the whole process of implementation of literature, the researchers asked the students to fill in a closed questionnaire. Generally, the items in the questionnaire might be divided into three parts. They are the effect of literary works to the teaching process, the effects of literary works to students, and the students' perception on the technical matters.

Table 1. The Effects of Literary Works to the Teaching Process

Item	Result
Learning grammar through English literary works is a joyful activity.	47.4% of the students strongly agreed that learning grammar through literary works was a fun activity.
Generally, learning grammar through English literary works is a good activity.	52.6% of the students strongly agreed that learning grammar was a good activity.

Table 2. The Effects of Literary Works to Students

Item	Result
Learning grammar through English literary works makes the material become easier to understand.	47.4% of the students agreed that literature helped them to understand the materials easily.
Learning grammar through English literary works gives a new experience and knowledge.	47.3% of the students agreed that the use of literature gave them new experience and knowledge in learning grammar.
Learning grammar through English literary works brings a positive effect for me.	47.4% of the students agreed that literature bring positive effect for them.
Learning grammar through English literary works makes me want to learn the material by myself.	47.4% of the students agreed that the learning grammar through literary works influenced them to learn the materials by themselves. It means that the literature might also encourage the students to be autonomous learners.

Table 3. The Students' Perception on the Technical Matters

Item	Result
The tools (LCD, speaker and power point) used in learning grammar through English literary works are helpful.	42.1% of the students agreed that the teaching devices such as LCD, speaker and PPT were useful for the teaching and learning process.

Based on the results above, it can be concluded that literary works used such as a short story, a film script and a novel received positive responses from the students. The highest percentage of each item was on agree (scale 4) and strongly agree (scale 5). The students had positive opinion toward the usage of literature in their grammar class. They thought that the teaching and learning process using literature was a fun and good choice, literary works brought positive effects for them, and the teaching aids used were useful.

Discussion

After bringing the literary works such as short story, a film script, and a novel, the student grammar mastery became better. There was 12.38% of improvement. This result proves that literary works might be used to teach grammar. Khatib et al., (2011) point out that one of the benefits of using literary works in language class is being able to teach grammar. Collie & Slater in Floris (2004) also argue that in literary works, many genuine features of the written language such as "the formation and function of sentences, the variety of possible structures, and the different ways of connecting ideas" are displayed at many levels of difficulty. Explore the literary language will encourage the students to familiarize themselves with different language forms, uses, or conventions (Alemi, 2011; Floris, 2004). The improvement of students' grammar mastery might also be influenced by the benefit of literature as motivational tools. If the students have motivation to learn, it will be easier for them to study the topics given by the teachers. Bobkina & Dominguez (2014) explain that literary works can engage the students in the stories, and this motivating engagement creates a positive common effect on the learning process and language acquisition. Khatib et al., (2011) state that experience shows that students are highly motivated when they are exposed to literary texts for language learning purposes. Overall, literary works such as short story, a film script or a novel might be useful to increase the students' ability in understanding language element like grammar. Literary works might contain a lot of grammar elements, and its power as a motivational tool also influence the result of grammar mastery.

Moreover, the students' voice tended to be positive since all the items in the questionnaire received positive responses. The result from the questionnaire reveal several interesting findings. First, learning grammar through literary works was a good and joyful activity. Second, the use of literature made the students understand the material easily and positively affected the students. They got new learning experiences and knowledge and even made them become autonomous learners. Thirdly, the students thought that the teaching devices employed were useful. These findings are in line with the previous studies that mention the benefits of literary works as teaching media. Maley in Khatib et al., (2011) states that literature is related to things which are fascinating in nature and includes little if any uninteresting things. Exploring the literary language will encourage the students to familiarize themselves with different language forms, uses, or conventions (Alemi, 2011; Floris, 2004). Furthermore, Floris (2004) argues that such exposure is crucial for the students especially for their language development. Thus, literary works as teaching sources bring positive influence to the students.

The success of the implementation of literary works is not separable from the consideration taken during the choice of the literature, the execution, and reflection process in every meeting. Besides the suggestion on the usage of literature works proposed by Alemi (2011) and Floris (2004), the crucial aspect in selecting the literary works is the content of the story. Every teacher has to find the literary works that are relevant to the topic, and it is not an easy job. The teachers might search the literature works on *Google* or even watch some *YouTube* videos to get some suggestions. In this research, the team used a short story entitled *Haunted*, a part of a novel entitled *the Deplorable Word*, and a scene of a film entitled *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secret.*

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the final result of the test, this action research was successful in gaining students' understanding of English grammar. The average score of students' post-test achieved 70.53, or there was a 12.38% of enhancement. This result surpassed the success indicator of this action study. Students' perception of the use of literary works also tended to be positive since all the items in the questioner received positive responses. The highest percentage for each item was on a scale of 4 and 5. Overall, literary works can enhance students' mastery of English grammar, and literary works as the proposed media receive positive responses from the pupils.

The researchers also suggest the other EFL teachers who have similar problem in teaching grammar to bring literary works to their classes, and to obtain the maximum result, the cycle might be extended. Furthermore, using literary works as teaching media has to consider some factors such as student level, teaching objective, level of difficulty of the text, the cultural values, etc.

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