

TELL US STORIES, PLEASE! STORYTELLING FOR YOUNG LEARNERS OF ENGLISH

***Chairina Nasir, Nurul Inayah**

Department of English Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,
Universitas Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh, Indonesia

*Email: chairina.nasir@unsyiah.ac.id

Abstract

Almost all of us grew up with stories either read or told to us by our mothers or grandmas. There is always something exciting about stories as they open our imagination, evoke our feeling and light up our inspiration. The natural fond of stories can be benefiting particularly for language and communication skills for children that can be used by teachers in the language classroom, especially for young learners of English. This paper attempts to provide a brief discussion on the use of storytelling to teach English for children by presenting opinions and arguments related to teaching English in the early age and the storytelling effect to enrich the language learning activity in young learners' classroom. As the starting point, the paper reveals facts of some previous research studies on young learners classes and the at the end develops some strategies and approaches to maximize the storytelling activity in order to achieve the aim of mastering the language competency as well as developing the children's mental, social and emotional development.

Keywords: Storytelling, Young Learners of English, Teaching Strategies

INTRODUCTION

Children are fond of stories, either read or told to them. It is because stories are magical and create a sense of wonder of the world for these young humans. Mooney (1994) stated that story is powerful to teach tolerance and multiculturalism through similarities and differences, weaknesses and strengths, hopes and dreams that we share with characters in the story. According to Rossiter (2002) story is an effective media for learning as it is inspired by the everyday experience, so it is believable, memorable and entertaining. By the vast benefits that stories have, they are undoubtedly the best media for learning, particularly for children. For language development, stories can benefit children of gaining and maintaining new vocabulary as they love to hear stories over and over again that makes repetition possible to acquire and reinforce language (Ellis, 2000).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Storytelling is a language tool that is well known for transferring moral and values from generation to generation. As a means of communication, nowadays educators and language practitioners attempt to use storytelling as a media to learn a language. Cooper (1993, p. 3) stated that storytelling in the language classroom is aimed to promote an idea of influencing a child to associate listening with pleasure. He affirmed that storytelling could increase a child's attention span and retention capacity, as well as it assists children to broaden their vocabulary. Pedersen (1995) claimed that storytelling serves as a pedagogical method, which means stories help to communicate literary and cultural heritage while helping learners to develop a sense of rhetorical structure which assists in the study of literature and in their own writing in the future.

Pedersen further on explained that stories enable ESL children to have the experience with the real powerful language of personal communication. He claimed that storytelling benefits children in developing their listening skill and being exposed to more natural and complete language input. In line with the ideas, Fitzgibbon and Wilhem (1998, p. 24) stated that storytelling possesses affective benefit as it interests students, lowers affective filters and allows learning to take place more readily and more naturally within meaningful, interactive communication context. Storytelling is beneficial for classroom learning process since it fosters teacher-learner collaboration and supports learner-centeredness in which students feel important as the lesson centers around student interaction, stories, and thoughts.

Storytelling is a good investment to apply especially to teach English to young learners. Teachers are seeking a way to bring the storytelling strategy into the young learners' classes for numbers of reasons. Garvie (1990) as cited in by Miyahara (2005: 24) points out that telling story can be beneficial in language classrooms since it helps to contextualize the isolated linguistic item that is often represented in the course textbooks. Other studies indicate that stories have the power to stimulate children to explore the world of wonder and bring the stories into the real life where they can develop their intelligence and emotional quotient (Stoyle, 2005).

Some previous studies show positive results of storytelling for English language learning as it improves vocabulary, promotes reading comprehension skills, develops listening and concentration skills and other important skills such as listening for general meaning, predicting, guessing meaning and hypothesizing as well as promotes early literacy (Isbell et al., (2004), Mello (2001), Haven and Ducey, (2007). Young learners of English benefited from gaining new words as a "by-product" of listening to a story exceeding their fellows who learn English through a more traditional way (Krashen, 2011). In addition, Haven (2010) found out that storytelling motivates EFL students to be active learners, for they are engaged in a meaningful activity in the class. Language learners can benefit from storytelling because stories help them to develop the ability to understand spoken language and engage in thinking skills. In connection to this, Castro (2002, p. 52) reports on a study carried out in Colombia and stresses that storytelling develops children's listening and concentration skills. Moreover, with stories children develop learning strategies such as listening for general meaning, predicting, guessing the meaning and hypothesizing.

There are some advantages of using story-telling as language learning material; it helps children to empower themselves in language mastery and proficiency where they can communicate their thoughts and feeling through the story. At the same time, they also lift up their confidence and personal motivation. Another positive impact of learning language through storytelling is increasing the intercultural understanding of the students towards different ideas, cultures and other different backgrounds (Ozcalli, 2002, p. 9). Furthermore, Morgan and Rinvolucris (1993, p. 1) asserted that listening skill is enhanced through story-telling. The quality of listening when a teacher delivers a story is totally different from listening comprehension from tape. Listening to a story told by a live storyteller can influence the listeners directly.

What is important to bear in mind is that the key concept of using a story in the language classroom is to tell the story not to read it. The two do not only differ from

each other in both content and language, but also in pace, the mood of the teller when he or she began telling the story, the mood while telling, the background experiences and the relationship between the teller and the audience. All those differences are reflected in the language, in which story-telling sometimes involves fluent, hesitant and uncertain, broken by irregular pauses that characterize a spoken language; the language of personal communication (Morgan & Rinvoluceri, 1993, p. 8).

Speaking the truth, delivering a story in English in the very young learners' classes can be such a challenging activity for teachers since children are still working on the effort to master Indonesian language as the formal language in school, they are also bearing difficulties in understanding other languages which are less familiar for them.

DISCUSSION

In answering the challenges of teaching English through storytelling in young learners' classes, there are some strategies that help teachers to maximize storytelling in the classroom. They are explained as the following.

Strategies in Choosing a Story

Being aware of what kind of story that suits young learners is important. A teacher should understand the purpose of telling a story in the class. It is to make the students get the genuine form of language usage not to make them sleep during the session. Therefore the qualification of the story to be performed should contain a moral lesson, and the preference can be a fiction or non-fiction passage as long as it meets the proficiency level of the students.

Morgan and Rinvoluceri (1993, p. 9) put on two considerations in finding and choosing stories used in the classroom. First, the stories that the teacher would enjoy telling and second whether or not the stories can draw students' interests and provoke their thinking. Aligns with the ideas; Suyanto (2007, p. 127) suggested that stories for children should focus on things that draw their interests, for examples stories about animals and fairy tales. Also, the story should not be too complicated for them to understand and should not be too long. Above all, the overall idea is related to the teachers themselves. Teachers should be well prepared to perform the story, and they like the story itself since it is impossible to expect the children to love it and get the benefit if the teacher has little attention to it.

Before Telling the Story

In preparing to tell a story, Morgan and Rinvoluceri (1993, p. 9) suggested providing a brief written outline called "skeleton." A skeleton should give; minimally, a plot outline, background information when necessary (cultural context, for example) and a certain amount of character detail. The aim of making a skeleton is not to produce a continuous text which could hinder improvisation, but to record all the elements that are essential to the story.

Furthermore, the teacher to introduce students to the key vocabulary that are the most often words occurs in the story so that the students understand the plot. In this term, the teacher can also provide a picture as media to introduce new words for the students. Making sure that students feel comfortable during storytelling is important.

A teacher can arrange or rearrange the seating to have eye contact with children when they are listening to the story. Scott and Ytreberg (1993, p. 28) believed that if children are relaxed and comfortable, then they are more open to what they are about to hear, and then they will benefit more from story-telling.

Strategies in Telling the Story

In order to make an enjoyable and interesting story time, the teacher should master some crucial storytelling skills. They have to be able to use and vary the intonation and the voice tempo. Body gestures, mimicry and keeping the eye contact with the listeners are also things that need to cover in delivering the story. Furthermore, the teacher should encourage the students to get involved actively in the process. However, it is the teacher responsibility to convince them not to worry about the meaning of every word or the language structure since the important thing is to understand the story as a whole (Ozcalli, 2002, p. 6). Beside that there is another thing that interested to apply for the storytelling activity is using a method that Yuhua (1998, p. 8) called 'Sandwich method' which implied having mother tongue or second language mixes with English in telling. Yuhua (1998, p. 9) stated that sandwiched story powerful to draw children attention as well enabling them to use the knowledge of their mother tongue and to experience the new language in a fun way. Above all, teachers should come out with the new ideas and creativity to support the effectiveness of storytelling in young learners' classroom so that the purpose of language learning is fulfilled.

Post Storytelling Activity

After the story being told, teachers need to restate and recall the plot in order to tackle the short memory span of the children. Furthermore, teachers can develop questions to stimulate students' creativity as well as evaluate the students' comprehension towards the story. For more interesting activity teacher can stimulate students to draw pictures or cartoon illustrate the characters in the story and let the students deliver their own version of the story and share it with others in the classroom. Morgan and Rinvoluceri (1993, p. 2) suggested some follow-up activities after students listening to a story that aimed to encourage the recycling of a new language. A teacher may give students an opportunity to decide which questions he/she wants to answer and to hear the answer from a classmate. Another follow-up exercise such as role-assignment is also good to explore students' feelings towards the characters in the story.

The Not-To-Do Things for Story-Telling

Morgan and Rinvoluceri (1993, p. 11) stated four things that teacher should not do in telling a story; first, do not tell stories that the teacher does not like or are out of sympathy with, second do not rate the story above the listeners meaning not to tell the story for the importance of the story but for the listeners. Next, do not be too concern about getting the language correct since the deliverance would become flat or rigid. Lastly, Morgan and Rinvoluceri (1993) reminded not to tell a story from notes.

CONCLUSIONS

Storytelling for young learners is an interactive approach to teach the language in the most authentic and natural way. For children, stories are fascinating and full of excitement; therefore language teaching in young learners' classroom should make use of storytelling as a way to develop children language proficiency as well as a way to increase their motivation in learning. In using this approach, however, the level of

proficiency, as well as the individual characteristics of the children's learning behavior, should be taken into account before the teacher decides to apply storytelling in the class. By assuring that every element to support the effectiveness of storytelling covered, it is positive that storytelling will become the most favorite activity in learning English for Indonesian young learners' language classroom.

REFERENCES

- Castro, M. (2002). The magic world of storytelling: Some points for reflection. *PROFILE, Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 3, 52-54.
- Cooper, P. (1993). *When stories come to school: Telling, writing, and performing stories*. New York: Teachers and Writers Collaborative.
- Ellis, G. (2000). *Teaching English to young learners: Reflection on a decade (1990-2000)*. Retrieved from www.britishcouncil.org/english/eyl/article02.htm
- Fitzgibbon, H.B. & Wilhem, K.H. (1998). Storytelling in ESL/EFL Classrooms. *TESL Reporter*, 31(2), 21-31.
- Garvie, E. (1990). *Story as vehicle: Teaching English to young children*. Clevedon: Multicultural Matters, Ltd.
- Isbell, R., Sobol, J., Lindauer, L., & Lowrance, A. (2004). The effects of storytelling and story reading on the oral language complexity and story comprehension of young children. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 3(3), 63-157.
- Haven, K. & Ducey, M. (2007). *Crash course in storytelling*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.
- Haven, K. (2010). The Story of the Story: Research Support for the School Librarian's Role in Teaching Writing. *School Library Monthly*, 26(6), 39-41.
- Krashen, S. (2011). The Goodman-Smith hypothesis, the input hypothesis, the comprehension hypothesis and the (even stronger) case for free voluntary reading. In P. Anders (Ed.), *Defying convention, inventing the future in literacy research and practice: Essays in tribute to Ken and Yetta Goodman* (pp. 56-99). New York: Routledge.
- Mello, R. (2001). Building bridges: How storytelling influences teacher and student relationships. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 17(6), 301-307
- Miyahara, M. (2005). Systematic Storytelling 1. *English teaching Professional*, 26, 23-25.
- Mooney, W. (1994). *Ready-to-tell tales: Surefire stories from America's favorite storytellers*. August House.
- Morgan, J. & Rinvoluceri, M. (1993). *Once upon a time: Using stories in the language classroom*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Ozcalli, S. (2002). Successful storytelling. *English Teaching Professional*, 23, 23-25.
- Pedersen, E.M. (1995). Storytelling and the Art of Teaching. *English Teaching Forum*, 33(1), 2-5.
- Rossiter, M. (2002). *Narrative and stories in adult teaching and learning*. ERIC Digest.
- Scott, W.A. & Ytreberg, L.H. (1990). *Teaching English to Children*. New York: Longman.
- Stoyle, P. (2005). *Storytelling-benefit and tips*. Retrieved from www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/literature/storytelling.html
- Suyanto, K.K.E. (2007). *English for young learners: Melejitkan potensi anak melalui English Class yang fun, asyik dan menarik*. Jakarta: Bumi Aksara.
- Yuhua, J. (1998). Sandwich stories for Chinese children. *IATEFL Newsletter*, 142(98), 9-8.