

USING THE STORYTELLING TECHNIQUE TO IMPROVE ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to find out whether the use of Storytelling Technique (STT) could improve the English speaking skills of primary school students. This Classroom Action Research (CAR) project was done in two (2) cycles, where the procedures consisted of planning the action, implementing the action, observing and reflections. The instruments used for collecting the data were observation sheets for the teacher and students, and a speaking test and questionnaire for the students. The results showed that STT improved the speaking skills of the students' especially in pronunciation fluency, accuracy, and comprehension of produced sentences. The data from the speaking tests showed that the mean score from the students after the first cycle was 5, and increased to 7 after the second cycle. It further showed that 58% of the students got scores above average in the first cycle and increased to 80% in the second cycle. From the observation sheet, the students' participation gradually increased, with 55% in the first cycle and 86% after the second cycle. Furthermore, based on the observation sheet from the teacher, the researcher also showed improvement in teaching where after the first cycle, she got a score of 61% which increased to 87% after the second cycle. Moreover, based on the responses to the questionnaire, 80% of the students responded positively to the implementation of the treatment. These results indicate that this classroom action research was a success where STT effectively improved the students' English speaking skills.

Key Words: *Speaking Skills, Storytelling Technique.*

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching speaking skills is a crucial part of the English Second Language (ESL) learning process. It is fundamental to communication in the second language (SL). Many people equate being able to speak a language as knowing the language and therefore view learning the language as learning how to speak the language. Nunan (1991) writes “success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the (target) SL”. Therefore, if students do not learn how to speak or do not get any opportunity to speak in the language classroom they may soon get de-motivated and lose interest in learning. On the other hand, if the right activities are taught in the right way, speaking in class can be a lot of fun, raising general learner motivation and making the English language classroom a fun and dynamic place to be.

Therefore, it is important to teach students speaking as a part of teaching the language. Speaking can motivate students to learn the SL because they realize that the language they are studying is spoken. In addition, Ur (1996:120) states that of all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) speaking seems intuitively the most important. People who know a language are referred to as *a speaker* of that language, as speaking, is assumed to include all four kinds of knowing the SL. These statements show us some reasons why many, if not most, ESL students are primarily interested in learning to speak compared to other skills.

But the fact is teaching speaking at school is not easy. The writer as a teacher at a junior high school in Banda Aceh found some difficulties with teaching her students ESL speaking such as: (1) many times the students had no idea about what to say, so they just kept silent, (2) some were shy and uncomfortable and worried that they would make mistakes, (3) some students were afraid of making errors in class because they feared they would be laughed at by their friends, (4) some students were not used to talking in front of the class (i.e. of public speaking), (5) some worry that their vocabulary was limited and their pronunciation might not be good, and (6) some students did not want to speak until their leaders have spoken even though these leaders were unofficial.

Besides those difficulties from the students, there were also problems with the teacher herself in teaching speaking which include: (1) she still used a traditional teaching technique and had not tried any new techniques for teaching ESL speaking; thus the motivation of her

students to speak was still low, (2) she did not create a situation in which her students were comfortable and were stimulated to try speaking, and (3) she failed to get the students to speak ESL communicatively and effectively either in the classroom or outside of the classroom.

Based on the traditional technique usually used for teaching speaking, most of the students could not reach the minimum criteria score set by her school. The minimum criteria score stated by the school for speaking competency was 7, but 80% of the students got scores lower than that. She could not get her students to reach the goals for the standard competency. Other problems that she found in the teaching of speaking were that whilst these middle school students were able to read and understand various genres in a reading text, they could not yet retell the content of the texts or retell the stories in those genres to their friends.

Storytelling has been discussed and recommended by some experts, such as Abrahamson (1998) who argues that storytelling forms the very foundation of the teaching profession. Moreover, storytelling can be used as a learning strategy for online education to build a more personal learning environment and one that allows learners to make meaningful and genuine reflections as they link old knowledge with new knowledge (Heo, 2004).

Educational theorists and researchers have offered a number of theories that further explain why storytelling has such a positive impact on learning. Erickson and Rossi (1976) offer a theory in support of storytelling as a teaching and learning tool that surrounds the concepts of learner receptivity or hypnotic trance. Other theorists support storytelling as a brain-based learning activity and teaching pedagogy because it fulfills many of the criteria that comprise brain-based learning theory (Caine, et al., 2005).

Furthermore, many studies (e.g. Bloch, 2010; Davies, 2007; Fox, 1993; Tsou, Wang & Tzeng, 2004) show that storytelling can make a significant contribution in the language classroom to build speaking, writing, reading and listening skills. According to Haven (2000), using storytelling in the classroom was a powerful and effective way to improve and develop language skills; moreover, activities where students participate in telling, writing, reading and listening to stories can motivate them to be active learners, developing within them a constructive approach towards ESL language learning.

Based on those reasons and the experiences mentioned above, the researcher as the teacher wanted to implement the Storytelling Technique (STT) with her students at MTsN (or *Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri*; same level as a junior high) Model, Banda Aceh through using work sheets. She hoped that the STT could improve the speaking skills of her students at the same time as her teaching ability because storytelling is a very old technique that has been used ever since and is still relevant up until now. The problems to be studied in this research were:

- 1) Can the teacher successfully use the Storytelling Technique (STT) with worksheets for teaching speaking?
- 2) Can the STT improve the speaking ability of the students?
- 3) What were the students' responses towards the use of the STT in their speaking class?

This study is expected to give meaningful results either for theoretical or for practical concerns. Theoretically, the study should contribute to the teaching of speaking at MTsN Model Banda Aceh. Besides, practically, the findings from this research are expected to be meaningful for the researcher herself as a teacher at MTsN Model to enrich her techniques for teaching speaking. In addition, the results from this research are expected to be an example for other teachers who want to improve the speaking abilities of their students. And lastly, this research is expected to be a model for other researchers to use for further research dealing with the STT for improving teaching for ESL speaking or for other skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Storytelling and its roles in society predates written human history as in ancient times, apart from cave art, oral storytelling was the only tool available to people to preserve and share cultural customs, beliefs and heritage. Stories were the oldest means for humans to remember and store information (Abrahamson, 1998). Thus, storytelling proved to be a highly effective way of coding knowledge in oral cultures because it made them more memorable and easily passed on to others. In fact, Abrahamson (1998) claims that civilizations survived as a result of storytelling because they ensured the continuity of life experiences to subsequent generations.

Storytelling is an oral activity where language and gestures and body language are used in a colorful way to create scenes in a sequence

(Champion, 2003). However, storytelling consists of more than just telling stories. It may include not only creating a story but also the use of pictures, acting, singing, story writing and so forth. The National Council of Teachers of English (1992) defines storytelling as the relating of a tale to one or more listeners through voice and gesture, and they emphasize that it is not congruent with simply acting out a drama or reciting a story from memory or a text, but it is the creation of mental images of the elements of a story through voice and gestures to an audience. And, throughout the telling of a story, the teller and the audience give complete attention and engage and share in a learning experience. Barzaq (2009:7) defines storytelling as a knowledge management technique, a way of distributing information, targeted to audiences with a sense of information. She also noted that stories provide natural connections between events and concepts, and that visual storytelling is a way of telling stories through images.

Moreover, based on Caine, et al. (2005), storytelling, for ages has been the primary way that people and cultures access, express, and retain information and knowledge. Studies have shown that storytelling has made significant contributions to speaking and listening in building language skills. For example Fox (1993), Davies (2007), Bloch (2010) Tsou, Wang and Tzeng, (2004) have demonstrated the confidence with which children can structure narrative orally and experiment with language through storytelling. Based on his study, Haven (2000:75) identifies storytelling to be powerful, motivating and effective, stating that “factual and conceptual information is learnt faster and better, and will be remembered longer, recalled more readily and applied more accurately when that information is delivered as a well-told story”. Woolfolk, Hughes and Walkup (2008) argue that storytelling can incorporate various types of materials, such as musical instruments, costumes, pictures, real objects, ornaments, computers, the Internet, and of course the school book.

Moreover, Barzaq (2009:15) considered storytelling as an educational means because stories are believable, memorable, and entertaining, and because they depend on humans and their experiences that are considered as authentic and credible sources of knowledge. She also added that storytelling offers teachers a chance to explore the background experience of their students. She also mentioned other benefits of the storytelling technique. Firstly, learners may gain verbal skills that can improve their ability to participate in discussions and to develop other skills. Secondly, it provokes the imagination by either

telling or listening that may help learners to think about new ideas and to build self-confidence. Finally, it may help learners to learn how to behave in some such situations from the experiences and wisdom of others.

Alsofi (2008:22-23) has stated that the Storytelling Technique (STT) is an important and effective technique whereby the listeners may share and have language learning experiences much more collaboratively. In addition, the listeners or the learners can reconstruct the general meaning and ideas from the story incorporating their own feelings and existing knowledge. When the learners listen to a dramatic story, it can expand their imaginative and creative powers, additionally, they may be stimulated to retell, remember, predict, and memorize. As a result, they can develop their own predictive skills.

Valenzuela (1999:5) has stated that stories are important to people and education. Stories are how people make sense of themselves and their world. Young children often make up spontaneous stories that they act out as they play, so one can see that how they play shows how they believe that people relate to one another, who they hope to become, and how they will behave in the future. Malkina (1995) further elaborates that storytelling is both life experience and linguistic experience. It has the power to reach deep within the learners, into those areas that regular teaching may not visit. The story mirrors the surrounding world and constructs a reality of its own, meeting the emotional and the cognitive, psychological (educational) needs of the students (Malkina, 1995).

McDrury and Alterio (2003) summarize that if educators and students practice reflective learning through storytelling, the end result will be learning that is more meaningful, challenging, and stimulating. In addition, reflective learning through storytelling offers the additional benefit of creating transformative self-knowledge and personal growth. By sharing stories and listening to others, students process information on a deeper and more meaningful level thus constructing new knowledge and practice.

Tales are a type of material in which we can find all elements mixed together. Sadness, joy, surprise, curiosity, etc., are such emotional states which people are confronted with and cannot remain indifferent to. Most learners have grown up in a learning context full of narrative stories, both real and fictional. Deacon and Murphey (2001) have explained that stories can have an effect on a person's construction of knowledge and self. They help learners make sense of

the world surrounding them and the life they lead. Storytelling is a material for teaching that can reach into the emotional and affective realms of learners (Deacon & Murphey, 2001).

Listening to and reading stories can no longer be considered as just a recreational activity and an escape from reality to a world full of fantasy and wonders. It is now fully recognized that stories have a very important role to play in teaching especially for teaching language i.e. ESL. Teachers can use that type of material either in SL/FL teaching or in first language teaching and for different purposes. Stories are generally used as a comprehensible input in teaching a language. Garvie (1990) presents the view that storytelling can be a major component in an acquisition-based teaching approach. The best way to realize this is to introduce storytelling as a reading input, especially the type of pleasure reading which is not yet exploited well in teaching ESL.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was designed as a Classroom Action Research (CAR) project which was aimed at studying the effects of a technique to improve the speaking skills of students. The writer wanted to try to solve the problems that her students had in speaking through using stories and a worksheet for the students. Furthermore, she herself, wanted to see if she could improve her ability in teaching especially in teaching speaking skills.

This research was conducted in two cycles. Each cycle consisted of three meetings. In implementing the plan, the concern was on carrying out the teaching and learning process as designed in the planning phase. Later on, in the observation stage, the focus was on the teacher's performance and the activities of the students which were done based on a checklist on the observation sheets used during the implementation of the program. While on reflection, the concentration was on making a judgment whether or not the action should be stopped or continued to a following cycle when the criteria set before had not yet been achieved.

The process of implementing this research uses a model from Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) which consists of four steps: (1) plan the action, (2) implement the plan, (3) observe the action, (4) analyze the data obtained during the actions and finally make reflections. The activities started from conducting a preliminary study which was intended to find out the real conditions of the students and to find out

the problems faced by the teacher in the speaking class. Then, the researcher finally chose and planned to implement the STT.

This study was conducted at MTsN Model Banda Aceh. The population for this study was the third year students, in which the school had 11 classes in the third year. The sample for this study was class XI 11 with 36 students. The reason for choosing this class as the sample was that while teaching the third year students the researcher had found that most of the students in this class had the most difficulties in mastering English especially in speaking. The instruments used in collecting the data were observation sheets for the teacher and the students, a speaking test, and a questionnaire for the students.

The teacher primarily used worksheets which she gave to the students which had instructions about what they had to do for learning about narrative texts by using the STT. The steps followed in conducting the STT were adapted and modified from Sulistianingsih, Raja and Huzairin (2014):

- a) The researcher gave the students instructions about what they were going to do.
- b) She modeled the story that had to be retold by the students.
- c) She asked the students to sit in groups of six.
- d) Each group was given a worksheet which set out the tasks that had to be done by the group.
- e) Student had to practice storytelling in front of their friend in their group. They had to do it until the entire group member did storytelling.
- f) Then each member of group took turn retelling parts of the story in front of the class.

For the first task, the researcher asked the students to make up a story based on a title given in the worksheet. Then, for the second task, they were given a set of cut-up pieces of paper; each set had a complete story. The task for them was to put the pieces of paper together to form the complete story. Next, the third task, they were asked to make up a story based on some pictures. To help them in making up a story, she gave the students a key sentence for each picture. Finally, having finished their preparatory tasks, they were asked to tell their stories, in front of the class, as set out on the worksheets.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Implementation of Storytelling Techniques for Teaching Speaking

In this part, the researcher discusses two major themes: (1) the application of the STT for teaching speaking, and (2) the improvement in performance by the teacher, and the improvement in the speaking skills of the students in the teaching-learning process.

The Application of Storytelling Technique

At the first meeting of the first cycle, the researcher used the lecture and discussion method. Since this was the first meeting, she introduced the topic of the lesson completely. She explained not only what a narrative text was but also, the purposes of using narrative, generic structures, language features and gave them examples of a narrative text. After the explanations and giving the students examples of a narrative text, she asked them if they knew any folktales.

At the second meeting in the first cycle, the researcher modeled the way of telling a story and showed the students a video about storytelling to teach them how to tell a story before asking them to perform in class. Unfortunately, she still did not clearly explain how to tell a story, so the students could still not perform well.

At the last meeting of the first cycle, the researcher used worksheets to stimulate the motivation of the students to tell a story. At the start of this meeting, she divided them into groups of six. Then, they were all given '*Bawang Merah, Bawang Putih*' as the title for a story and every group was tasked to make up a story based on the given title. They were not given any plot, so the students were free to create a story based on their own imagination. As a result, the students made up different stories. The result of the students' performances showed that they still lacked the ability in creating and telling a story well, and they made many mistakes in their grammar. They also appeared shy and hesitant whilst telling their stories.

Based on the results above, the researcher together with the collaborator teacher decided to try again to improve the teaching strategy by conducting a second cycle. The aim of the teaching was still the same i.e. to improve the ability of their students in speaking by applying the STT, but they changed the learning activities to try to get more improvement in the ability of the students to speak English and to improve the performance of the teacher.

In the first meeting of the second cycle, the researcher first modeled how to tell a story twice. She told the students a short folktale and this time, she clearly explained how to use body language, hands and movements to tell a story. She also wrote, on the board, sentences with good grammar that were often used in telling stories. Then, having modeled and explained the theory, she asked some students to perform the same story in front of the class.

Furthermore, at the second meeting, the researcher used a different teaching strategy. The students were asked to sit in new groups, so that they got new discussion partners. This was done to create fresh student groups for learning using the STT. Each group of students was then given a worksheet with the tasks that must be done. Later on, she gave each group some pieces of paper on which there were parts of a story. They were tasked with arranging the pieces of cut paper to form a story. Then, the rest of them who had not yet performed at the previous meeting were each asked to tell a story in this meeting.

At the last meeting of the second cycle, the researcher improved the tasks in the worksheets. At this meeting, the students were asked to sit in the same groups as at the previous meeting. Then, each group had to make up a story based on a sequence of pictures. The whole set of pictures contained a story. To help them create the story, she put some key sentences below each of the pictures. Next, she asked the students to perform the results of their discussions in front of the class, using their own words.

Improvements in the Abilities of Students and the Performance of Teacher

Based on the observation sheets from the performances of the teacher, there was improvement in her teaching technique from the first to the second cycle or from the first to the sixth meeting. The improvement could be seen in the increase in her percentage score from 61% for the first cycle to 86%, for her teaching performances for the second cycle. The scores for the performances by the teacher in the first and the second cycle are shown in Figure 1 that follows overleaf.

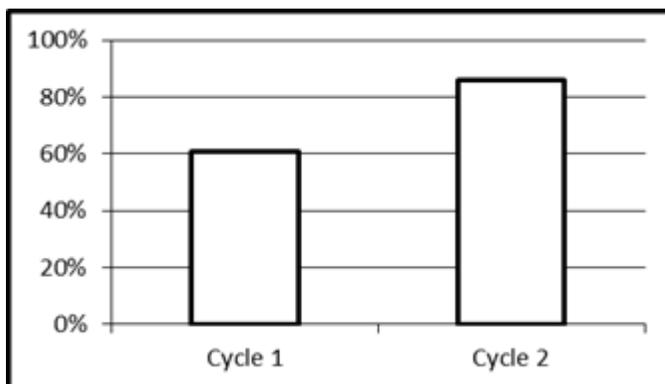


Figure 1. Evaluation of the Teacher’s Performances in the 1st and 2nd Cycles.

Furthermore, the ability of the students also improved. The data for this improvement was obtained from the observation sheets of their activities. The results from the students after the 1st and 2nd cycle are in Figure 2 below.

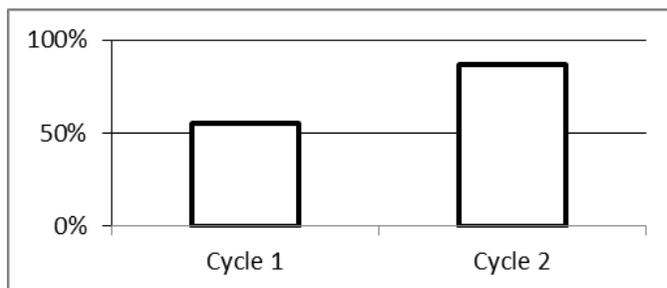


Figure 2. Results from Observation Sheets of Students.

Figure 2 shows that after the first cycle of the STT, the mean score of the students was 55%, this increased to 87% after the second cycle. This showed that the English speaking abilities of the students improved following two cycles of storytelling with the STT.

The Impact of Modeling on the Story Telling Abilities of Students

Based on the observations of the collaborator, it was found that when the first modeling was done, the researcher did not explain nor to use body language and movements nor how to make fluent grammatically correct sentences. As a result, the students did not score well in the first assessment. However, after modeling the story for a

second time, where the researcher explained the way of telling a story better, the students were able to learn and copy what she showed them, so they got much better scores in the last cycle. The results from the students are shown in Figure 3.

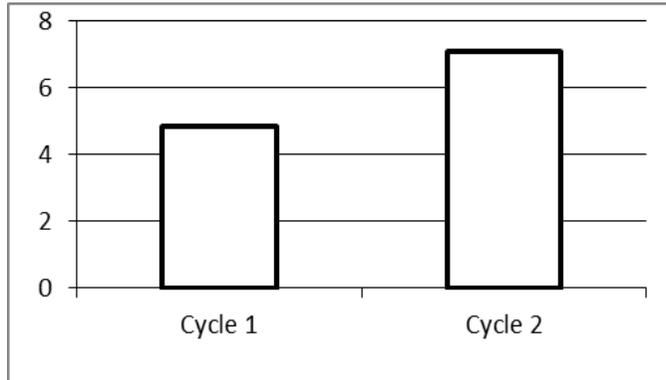


Figure 3. Storytelling Ability of Students in the 1st and 2nd Cycles.

Figure 3 shows that there was an increase from the first cycle to the second cycle.

Responses from the Students to the Use of Storytelling Technique

The researcher used a questionnaire after cycle 2 to find out the problems and the responses of the students to the use of the STT. The questionnaire asked questions about three indicators. Table 1 summarizes the data collected from the answers to the questionnaire about the effects of using the STT.

Table 1. Results from Students’ Answers to the Questionnaire.

No.	Indicators in the Questionnaire	Items Number	Frequencies	%
1	Becoming motivated in studying	8, 9	31	86
2	Studying actively	2, 4, 10	29	80
3	Becoming helpful to improve speaking skills	3, 5, 6, 7	32	89

Based on the results from the questionnaire as shown in Table 1, the researcher concluded that the students had positive responses towards the application of STT for learning speaking through narrative text in their class. This was shown as all aspects asked about in the questionnaire got 80% or above which indicated positive responses from the students. Thus, the effect of STT implementation was good. It

can be said that the response from the students to the use of STT for learning speaking ESL was good and the application of the STT was a success.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The implementation of Storytelling Technique (STT) for teaching speaking with narrative texts was effective not only to improve the speaking ability of the students but also their ability to produce fluent, accurate and comprehensible grammatically correct sentences. The researcher's performances in teaching speaking were also improved by using the STT.

By implementing the STT for teaching and learning of speaking ESL through narrative texts, the involvement and participation of the students gradually increased. The STT helped both the students and also the teacher in the teaching and learning process.

It is suggested that English teachers can use the STT for teaching speaking ESL to primary school students to overcome problems encountered in speaking classes especially in the teaching and learning of narrative texts. Moreover, this strategy will help students explore their own ways of retelling a story.

It is also suggested that other researchers test this technique to see how effective it can be for improving the speaking skills of students in other levels of study in order to produce fluent, accurate and grammatically correct sentences. It is hoped that further researchers will do more research using this or similar techniques to try to get better implementation and overcome any problems with using the STT.

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