

Improving EFL Learners' Speaking Ability through Storytelling Using Puppets

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Abstract

This study was intended to describe how story-telling using puppets developed the speaking ability of the seventh graders of SMP Islam Terampil Nurul Mujahidin NW Pancor Kopong in the academic year 2014-2015. This research was a collaborative classroom action research following Kemmis and McTaggart's cyclical process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The data were collected by administering observation checklist, questionnaire, self-assessment, field notes, and recorder. The result of the analysis pointed out that storytelling using puppets was very helpful not only in improving the result but also the process of instructional process. This is proven by that all criteria of success set in this research were achieved. Therefore, English teachers are suggested to implement the technique and use the media in their English class particularly in speaking activities.

Keywords: storytelling, puppets, speaking ability

1. Introduction

English constitutes a means of communication. It is the most widely used language on earth (Huda, 2004), so mastering English is increasingly important today. Recently, English is not only a communication tool but also the main indication of the development of a country. Some linguists have underlined the importance of developing communicative competence –especially speaking skill– in language teaching. Tompkins and Hoskisson (1995:17) and Nunan (1991:39) state the most important general goal in language instruction is to help students learn to communicate effectively with others through oral and written language, and mastering the art of speaking is the single most important aspect of learning a second or foreign language; the success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the language.

Considering the importance of mastering the communicative competence in English, the Indonesian government –through the National Standard Curriculum– focuses the teaching of English at junior high schools and Islamic junior high schools on making students reach the functional literacy level. It means that students are expected to be able to communicate both in oral and in written forms to overcome their daily problems (Depdiknas, 2006)

Albeit the objective of the teaching of English is to develop the students' communicative competence, chances to practice oral competence seem to be pushed aside at most schools; this might be due to the limited time of teaching in one semester and their focus on the National Examination. As a result, There is only—if any—a little time for practicing oral communication. This makes the result of English teaching and learning is less visible in which that the learning outcomes is not shown by the students' ability of speaking.

There are many techniques that can be applied in teaching speaking such as, having dialogue, playing games, singing songs, story-telling, oral reporting, role-playing, small group discussion, debates etc. Listening or reading activity of a story can be matched with speaking by telling or retelling the story with student's own words. Through story-telling technique, students can demonstrate their comprehension of a story. It helps students by emphasizing the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Thus, storytelling is good to be applied to practice speaking (oral competence).

Additionally, Jennings (1992:8) and Brumfit and Johnson (1979 in Mixon and Temu, 2006:14) state that through story-telling, students with various language abilities find a non-threatening medium to participate. Reading or telling stories in class is a natural way to learn a new language. There are no comparisons of an intellectual nature but only a desire to participate in individual or group story-telling session. McEwan and Egan (in Heo, 2004:1) state that narrative inquiry has been considered as an alternative mode of thinking and learning which is a way of understanding, organizing and communicating experience as stories lived and told. Through story-telling individuals can learn to express themselves and make sense of the external world.

Seeing the benefit of using story-telling technique, the researcher is interested in applying it to develop the students' speaking ability of the third grade of Penjaskesrek Program. In implementing this technique, the researcher will use puppets as media. Puppet is one of the instructional media that can be matched with the technique to facilitate and enhance students' learning activity in order to be more interesting.

According to Beare (2000:1) as an ESL guide, puppets are wonderful tools for freeing up students' imagination and language use. Teachers can use puppets to tell stories which are visually more engaging thus involving students on a number of levels. Students who use hand puppets or other kinds of puppets to tell stories free themselves from what they are saying. It becomes "the puppet", and not themselves, who speaks. The playfulness brought into the classroom through the puppets can really liven up the learning experience.

Based on the advantages of using story-telling technique, stories and puppets, the researcher's intention is to use the story-telling technique using puppets with some adjustment in which the students will also use this technique to produce the story that has been learned. She believes that speaking through this technique and media can solve the students' problems. In this case, the technique and media will be very helpful for class activities where student's interest and involvement can be increased. Besides, it is also beneficial to the students who usually hesitate and feel shy to express their ideas, and rarely have a chance to use the target language. The story-telling technique using puppets will help students speak confidently because they use media-puppets-which can cover themselves as the character of the story.

Since more time is needed to practice and enhance students speaking ability, storytelling with the help of puppets as media was a necessary technique to be applied. This is to give more chances for students to practice their oral competence and to improve the learning outcomes. Thus, a question is raised as the problem in this study –“How does story-telling technique using puppets help improve the speaking ability of the seventh graders of SMP Islam Terampil Nurul Mujahidin NW Pancor Kopong in the academic year 2014-2015?”

In relation to the problem of the study, this study was intended to describe how story-telling technique using puppets help students improve their speaking ability. This study was focused on the teaching of speaking coping with narrative genre at the seventh graders of SMP Islam Terampil Nurul Mujahidin NW Pancor Kopong in the academic year 2014-2015. The researcher emphasized speaking because speaking is the most visible proof of mastering a foreign language.

2. Method

The study utilized classroom action research since it focused on a particular problem and a particular group of students in a certain classroom. It was employed since it was very important for the researcher to develop a suitable technique to help students to practice and develop their speaking ability. The classroom action research design employed in this study was collaborative classroom action research. The researcher was assisted by one of her colleagues who was involved from the beginning up to the end of the process of the research activities. The researcher acted as the practitioner who taught speaking through story-telling by using puppets, whereas, the collaborator acted as the observer who observed the implementation of the action in the classroom.

The design of classroom action research utilized in this study followed Kemmis and McTaggart's cyclical process. Kemmis and McTaggart (in Koshy, 2007: 4) state that action research involves self-reflective spirals of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting.

2.1 Setting and Subject of the Study

This study was conducted at SMP Islam Terampil Nurul Mujahidin NW Pancor Kopong. The subject was the seventh graders in the academic year 2014-2015. This class was a noisy class and indeed did need activities to give them chances to express their habits of talking in class. Speaking activities can provide them with chances to share their ideas orally.

2.2 Research Procedure

This research was preceded by a preliminary study, which was followed by cycles comprising a number of steps. Those were planning, implementing, observing and reflecting which were adapted from a model proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (in Koshy, 2007: 4). The planning comprised some activities: determining the technique; designing lesson plans, media and materials, and setting some criteria of success; and preparing the instruments. Based on the planning, the implementation of the technique was done by the researcher. The activities were simultaneously observed by the collaborator using observation checklists and field notes.

Reflecting was done by analyzing the data collected during the implementation. The applied technique could be determined successful or not after the data were analyzed.

2.3 Technique of Data Collection

There were three types of data in this study. The researcher obtained data from 1) the observation, field notes, and self-assessment about any activities of the students which show the criteria of success, 2) Task (performance in telling story). The aspects that were assessed from the students' performance are from the content of the story, use of space, accuracy, and voice mechanics, and 3) questionnaire about the students' responses to the implementation of the story-telling technique using puppets.

Each type of data required different procedures of data collection. Data on the students' activities in every meeting of the story-telling technique were collected by doing direct observations during the teaching-learning process. Through such observations, the collaborator knew the students' participation in the teaching-learning activities (reading and speaking both in groups and individually). At the same time, the collaborator also took notes about all of the events happens in the teaching-learning process which could not be covered in the observation checklist.

The data from the self-assessment sheets were taken into account to give additional information of the students' achievement in the lesson and their involvement in the instructional process. Furthermore, the researcher and the collaborator collected and analyzed the data from the students' activities or progress at every meeting after the implementation of the technique finished. Finally, the researcher administered the questionnaire to the students to take the students' responses to the implementation of the technique. All instruments apparently were necessary to be used in order to reduce the information bias.

2.4 Technique of Data Analysis

The result of data analysis is the basis for reflection. In doing the data analysis, the researcher analyzed the collected data based on the classification. The data on the students' participation at each stage of the teaching-learning process which were obtained through the observation checklist were calculated in percentage using frequency.

Meanwhile, the data obtained from the task (performance) were analyzed by using analytical scoring rubric. The final score of the student's performance was obtained from the computation of each aspect scored. The scoring rubric is shown in Table 01.

Table 1. Analytical Scoring Rubric for Students' Acting Out the Story

No.	Aspects	Criteria	Score
1	Voice Mechanics	Very clear volume with very clear pronunciation, non-monotonous voice	4
		Clear volume with quite clear pronunciation, non-monotonous voice	3
		Quite clear volume with slightly clear pronunciation, quite non-monotonous voice	2
		Unclear volume and pronunciation with monotonous voice	1
2	Content	Able to act out the content of the story using puppets expressively supported by movement of the body	4
		Able to act out the content of the story using puppets quite expressively supported by movement of the body	3
		Able to act out the content of the story using puppets slightly expressive and slight movement of the body	2
		Inexpressively act out the content of the story with no movement of the body	1
3	Accuracy	Wide vocabulary appropriately used, native like or slight foreign accent	4
		Good range of vocabulary, slight foreign accent	3
		Adequate but not rich vocabulary, slight foreign accent	2
		Poor vocabulary, may have very strong foreign accent	1
4	Use of Space	Speaks comfortably, relaxed and confidently in front of the audiences	4
		Speaks quite comfortably, quite relaxed but less confidently in front of the audiences	3
		Speaks less comfortably, show some signs of nervousness	2
		Nervous and unable to speak coherently	1

Adapted from Cohen (1994), Forest (2000), and Ur (1996)

The data on the students' response to the implementation of the story-telling technique using puppets are obtained from the questionnaire. It is analyzed by calculating it in percentage using frequency.

The analysis on the data obtained from field notes were in form of description, and were crosschecked to the data from the other instruments. The other instruments such as self-assessment sheets were analyzed in percentage using frequency base descriptively. The result was used to see the students' understanding of the content of the story.

Having gained the result of the data analysis, reflection on the action was done. The result of the data analysis was checked against to the criteria of success predetermined to draw a conclusion to see whether the cycle succeed or not.

To know whether the implementation of the action is successful or not, setting the criteria of success is needed bad. There are some criteria in measuring the success of the implementation of storytelling using puppets here. Those are the students' participation in the instructional process, the students' response toward the storytelling using puppets, and the students' speaking ability. Table 2 shows the description of the criteria of success.

Table 2. The Description of the Criteria of Success

No	Criteria of Success	Data	Source of Data	Instruments	Procedure of Data Collection
1	At least 70% of the students are actively involved in the teaching-learning process.	The students' involvement in the teaching and learning process	The students	Observation checklist, Field notes, Students self-assessment on their participation	Direct observation Taking notes Administering the self-assessment sheets
2	At least 70% of the students give positive response toward the technique	The students' response on the implementation of the technique	The students	Questionnaires, Field notes	Administering the questionnaire to the students and field notes
3	65% or more students achieve scores higher than 60	The students' recorded speaking performance	The students' performance in acting out the story	Oral test, Self-assessment on their speaking ability	Recording the students' speaking performance Administering the self-assessment sheets and field notes

Table 02 shows that the students' involvement is measured through the observation on how they involve in the instructional activities. If 70% of the students are actively involved in the discussion, it is considered be successful. The students are observed during the instructional activities. As additional information about the students' involvement, self-assessment on their participation and field notes are also administered. Meanwhile, the students' response toward storytelling using puppets estimated by administering questionnaire and field notes. This action is considered successful if at least 70% of the students give positive response. It means that the students choose the preferred option (a or b) for the answer of each item in the questionnaire.

In the other hand, the students' ability in acting out the story is measured by using analytical scoring adapted from Cohen (1994), Forest (2000), and Ur (1996). In relation to this criterion, 65% of the students should gain score higher than 60.

3. Result

The result of the analysis shows that the students were actively involved in the instructional process. Table 03 shows the students' participation in the instructional process through storytelling using puppets.

In meeting 1, six (33%) out of 18 (100%) students were very active, and nine students were active in the instructional process. This shows that the criteria set has been achieved in this first meeting. However, there was one student categorized not active and two were active enough.

In meeting two, there was a slight improvement in the students' participation. The not active student in meeting 1 becomes more active because he witnessed his friends' curiosity in the instructional process. Here, six (33%) out of 18 (100%) students were very active, and 10 (55%) students were active. There was none not active, yet two of them were still in the active enough category.

Table 3. The Students' Participation in the Instructional Process

No	Meeting	Number and Percentage of Student in Category				Total active and very active
		Very active	Active	Active enough	Not active	
1	1 st	6	9	2	1	15
		33%	50%	11%	5.5%	83%
2	2 nd	6	10	2	-	16
		33%	56%	11%	-	88%
3	3 rd	7	11	-	-	18
		39%	61%	-	-	100%
4	4 th	8	10	-	-	18
		44%	56%	-	-	100%
5	5 th	11	7	-	-	18
		61%	39%	-	-	100%
6	6 th	12	6	-	-	18
		67%	33%	-	-	100%

In meeting 3, the improvement was obvious in which there was no student categorized not active or active enough. Seven students were very active, and 11 students were active. It means all of the students were actively involved in the instructional process. The students' participation also improved gradually in meeting 4, 5, and 6. The very active students improved in each meeting. The participation reached 100%. This indicates the first criteria of success set has been achieved.

Additionally, the finding in the students' self-assessment is in line with the result of the observation. Seven items in the self-assessment show that 94% students were involved very well

in the instructional process. The 7 items (number 5 to 11) show activities done by the students showing their involvement. Furthermore, the field notes also reveal that almost all students were actively involved in the instructional process. It was shown by that most of the students explained some kinds of stories that they've ever heard or read, the students were motivated to answer the teacher's questions, all students involved and enjoyed making group even though the class was more noisy because they had to find their teammates, some active students tried to lead the activity; they took a part in their groups, and the students involved in pronouncing some sentences or difficult words. In short, the criteria set dealing with the students' participation has satisfactorily been achieved.

Dealing with the students' responses, based on the result of the analysis on the questionnaires, it is generally found that the students responded positively toward story telling using puppets. As a whole, the questionnaire showed that 94.5% students responded positively toward the technique and media. Table 04 shows the result of the questionnaire. It is summarized in Table 04.

It is obvious that generally most—if not all—of the students had positive feeling about the implementation of the technique and media. 93% students stated that they were happy with the implementation of storytelling using puppets. 100% students agreed that storytelling using puppets is useful and can improve their self-confidence in speaking. Furthermore, 93% students admitted that storytelling using puppets could improve their motivation and ability in speaking English. Besides, 88% students said that speaking English becomes easier in storytelling using puppets.

Table 4. The Students' Response toward Storytelling using Puppets

No	Items	Answer					Percentage of a dan b
		a	b	c	d	e	
		Sangat setuju	Setuju	Biasa saja	Tidak setuju	Sangat tidak setuju	
1	Saya merasa senang dengan penggunaan <i>story-telling using puppets</i> di kelas speaking	5	12	1	-	-	17
		27%	66%	7%	-	-	93%
2	Menurut saya, <i>story-telling using puppets</i> bermanfaat dalam kegiatan berbicara bahasa Inggris	5	13	-	-	-	18
		27%	73%	-	-	-	100%
3	<i>Story-telling using puppets</i> dapat meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara saya dalam bahasa Inggris.	5	12	1	-	-	17
		27%	66%	7%	-	-	93%
4	Dengan <i>Story-telling using puppets</i> , berbicara dalam bahasa Inggris menjadi lebih mudah.	5	11	2	-	-	16
		27%	61%	12%	-	-	88%
5	<i>Story-telling using puppets</i> dapat meningkatkan kepercayaan diri saya dalam berbicara	5	13	-	-	-	18
		27%	73%	-	-	-	100%
6	<i>Story-telling using puppets</i> dapat meningkatkan motivasi saya dalam	5	12	1	-	-	17
		27%	66%	7%	-	-	93%

berbicara bahasa Inggris.

In a nutshell, more than 70% –which was 94% in average—students showed positive response. This means the second criterion set previously has been achieved because more than 70% students responded positively toward storytelling using puppets. In addition, the field notes showed that almost all students seemed happy and curious in the instructional process. It meant that they showed positive response toward the activities through storytelling using puppets.

Denoting the analysis result on the students' speaking product when they acted out the story, it gradually improved. This means storytelling using puppets could help students improve their result of learning particularly speaking. Table 5 shows the improvement of the students' speaking in acting out the story.

Table 5. The Improvement of the Students' Speaking

No.	Student	Preliminary test		Cycle		Improvement	
		Gained point	Score	Gained point	Score	Point	Score
1	CM	7.1	47.3	14.3	71.5	7.2	24.2
2	AZ	6.6	44	12	60	5.4	16
3	MZ	6.9	46	12	60	5.1	14
4	LM	6.7	44.6	13	65	6.3	20.4
5	JK	6.8	45.3	12	60	5.2	14.7
6	SM	7	46.6	14	70	7	23.4
7	Ra	7.5	50	14.5	72.5	7	22.5
8	RiF	6.7	44.6	12.8	64	6.1	19.4
9	RoF	6.7	44.6	12.8	64	6.1	19.4
10	MT	7	46.6	13.6	68	6.6	21.4
11	LDPP	7.5	50	14	70	6.5	20
12	Kh	7.3	48.6	14.3	71.5	7	22.9
13	Hu	7.2	48	13.6	68	6.4	20
14	EA	8.2	54.6	14.5	72.5	6.3	17.9
15	JAM	8	53.3	13.8	69	5.8	15.7
16	Ha	9	60	14.5	72.5	5.5	12.5
17	MNS	9	60	14.5	72.5	5.5	12.5
18	LS	6.7	44.6	12	60	5.3	15.4
Mean	7.3	48.8	13.5	67.3	6.2	18.5	

Table 5 shows that the mean score improved from 48.8 in the preliminary test into 67.3 in the Cycle. In the preliminary test, only 6 out of 18 students gained score higher than 50. However, after going through some meetings with reinforcement and rehearsal of acting out the stories using puppets in the cycle, the minimum score of the students was 60. Referring to the criteria of success, it was 83% students gained score higher than 60 which means the success criteria set dealing with the speaking ability had been achieved.

Overall, besides improving the students' speaking ability, storytelling using puppets could make the students better be involved in the instructional process. This technique could also increasingly helped and motivated the students to learn better, especially learn speaking English. Thus, almost all of them gradually gained good scores at the end of the cycle, and since all the criteria of success set had been achieved, another cycle was not necessary to be conducted.

4. Discussion

As speaking is a crucial part of second/foreign language learning and teaching (Richards & Renandya, 2002:41), activities which promote opportunity for students to speak the target language need to be provided by teachers (Kayi, 2006:1). Story-telling is proven to demonstrate a practical tasks learning situation. Through this technique, students with their various language abilities find a non-threatening situation to participate (Vale and Feunteun, 1995: 7; Jennings, 1992:8). Story-telling can also be integrated with some other skills such as reading, listening and even writing. Brumfit and Johnson (1979 in Mixon and Temu, 2006:14, and Wendelin, 1991 in Farris 1993) assert that engaging students in storytelling activities develops their communication skills and encourages shared learning experiences. Telling stories enhances oral language and sharpen listening.

In addition, this technique will be more blissful if it uses any kinds of media such as puppets, pictures, dolls etc. The researcher used puppets –card puppets– as media to apply in the technique. They really helped both the teacher and the students. They facilitated students' learning activity that made the activity more interesting. The researcher could see that the students enjoyed some activities and they were motivated to be involved in the activities during the teaching-learning process. Besides, most of the students said that the media –puppets–used were very interesting. These media increased their self-confidence and facilitated them to speak.

Furthermore, in the implementation of the technique and media, group working was also employed. The use of group work in teaching-learning process, according to Ur (1996: 121), increases the sheer amount of learners' talk and also lowers the inhibitions of learners who are unwilling to speak in front of the class. Dealing with Ur's statement, more chance to speak was provided for the students in the technique since the students worked in groups and they had to be responsible for the stories. Besides, working in groups created a learning community among the students in which they could work together and help one another. They asked their friends the English vocabulary they did not know. They also shared their ideas about the stories without being shy. All students were involved in the same activity within the groups because they sense a self-belonging to their groups. In a nutshell, group work in storytelling using puppets could train students to talk to their friends before they acted out the stories.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

5.1 Conclusion

On the basis of the findings in the data analysis, it can be concluded that story-telling technique using puppets is successful in improving the students' speaking ability of seventh graders of SMP Islam Terampil Nurul Mujahidin NW Pancor Kopong in the academic year 2014-2015. The success was indicated by the achievement of the criteria of success which deal with the students' involvement in the teaching-learning process, the students' scores for their performance, and their responses to the implementation of the technique.

In order to work properly, storytelling using puppets employ some procedures. 1) Teacher triggers the students' prior knowledge by showing them puppets of the characters discussed in the story; 2) Teacher provides them with the copy of narrative text, asks the students to read the story silently first, discuss it with their classmates in group in terms of what the story is about, find the difficult words etc.; 3) Teacher and students identify and analyze the text in terms language features and schematic structure together; 4) Teacher gives a model on how to pronounce the words correctly dealing with intonation and stress; 5) Teacher shows how to tell the story in terms of manner, voice, language, body and face; 6) Students reconstruct and construct the dialogue of the characters in the story in small groups; 7) Students rehearse the story in the groups; 8) Teacher invites students to sing a song related to the topic of the story before the students act out the story; 9) Finally, students act out the story.

5.2 Suggestion

To follow up the findings, some suggestions are addressed to future researchers and English teachers. To the future researchers, particularly those who are interested in applying story-telling technique using puppets, it is suggested that they conduct classroom action research on the use of this technique in teaching other language skills—listening and writing. In addition, the technique can also be used to teach other subjects such as bahasa Indonesia.

In relation to stories and puppets as instructional materials and media, it is advisable that teachers provide their students with good and interesting materials and media which are not only suitable for the students' needs but also can motivate them in learning language. Thus, teachers should be selective in choosing materials and media and creative in making the class activities as interesting as possible that students will be actively engaged in the instructional process.

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