

Some Benefits of Using Readers Theatre in EFL Classroom

Desti Angraini, S.Pd., M.Pd

Universitas Islam Negeri Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi; Jl. Jambi Ma. Bulian KM. 16, Sei. Duren, Jaluko, Mendalo Darat, Jambi Luar Kota, Mendalo Darat, Jambi Luar Kota, Kota Jambi,

Dosen Program Studi Tadris Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Islam Negeri Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi

e-mail : destiangraini@uinjambi.ac.id

Abstract

Reading plays an important part in developing learners' knowledge. By reading, learners will get many benefits, such as adding their knowledge, knowing information and having pleasure. There are many ways of making them engaged in learning English especially reading skill. One kind of activities is using Readers' theatre. RT was introduced in EFL classroom to enhance the learning of communication skills. Readers' theater offers learners' an opportunity for interpretive oral reading as they use voices, facial expressions, and hand gestures to interpret characters in stories. Readers' theater also builds readers' confidence, brings stories to life through performance, animates content areas, and improves reading ability, comprehension, and oral reading skills.

Keyword- *Reading, Readers theatre, EFL learner*

Introduction

Reading literacy is defined as “understanding, using, and reflecting on written texts, in order to achieve one’s goals, to develop one’s knowledge and potential, and to participate in society” (Therrien, 2004, p. 35). Reading literacy is not only a foundation for basic learning, but also a prerequisite for successful participation in most areas of youth or adult life (Linnakyla, Malin, & Taube, 2004, p. 13).

Issues in reading tend to start at the beginning of reading instruction, persist, and become more difficult as time passes. If reading difficulties are recognized early on in their schooling, learners have a better chance of becoming successful in the areas of reading fluency and comprehension. It is imperative that if learners are deemed low- performing in reading that strategies be implemented that will help them achieve grade-level reading standards.

Others phenomena or issues which happens in English teaching and learning processes are; EFL learners are not interested in reading English or have difficulties to decode the meaning of the context, EFL learners tend to read in a slow and inexpressive voice unenthusiastically as they are reading English stories or dialogues, EFL learners lack the stimulation of English listening input in their living environment.

Learners with reading difficulties do not spontaneously overcome their problems, which makes these young learners’ reading performances get worse as they advance through school (Good, & Kaminski, 2003, p. 98). Besides, for most EFL learners who have poor

academic success, learning English early will make them give up English even much easily. Thus, if teachers can provide efficient instructions to increase students’ interest and motivation, and, more importantly, to develop their reading proficiency for catching up with the level of their age, children will become better learners through their school years in learning English .

Most elementary EFL teachers often design a number of games and activities purposing to increase students’ learning motivations as well as to have them practice vocabulary and sentence patterns repeatedly. The consequence could be that students indeed acquire the vocabulary and sentence patterns, but most of them could neither read aloud in an expressive way as they are reading a paragraph or even a dialogue nor read other English materials. It is because that the instructions and the contents of the texts used are all segments of a language, not a complete and meaningful context.

The purpose of this paper is to examine if Reader’s Theater (RT) is an efficient approach to solve the problems encountered in EFL classroom and whether it can help students reach the goals of learning. Other reasons why I have chosen RT to be the approach in this paper , because RT is one of the approaches recommended by many researchers and educators to fit for the purposes mentioned above (Tyler & Chard, 2000; Keen, Harmon, & Shoho, 2008; Callard, 2008; Chen, 2006; 98).

Reading and its importance

Some Benefits of Using Readers Theatre in EFL Classroom

It is a well-known fact that when there were no televisions or computers, reading was a primary leisure activity. People would spend hours reading books and travel to lands far away-in their minds. Swalm and Kling (1973) as cited in Permadi (2013, p 23) state that "the literate adult today is reading more in one week than their great-grandfather did in a whole year". This fact places pressures on the students to perform at a higher level than the students before.

The only tragedy is that, with time, people have lost their skill and passion to read. There are many other exciting and thrilling options available, aside from books. And that is a shame because reading offers a productive approach to improving vocabulary and word power. It is advisable to indulge in at least half an hour of reading a day to keep abreast of the various styles of writing and new vocabulary.

Permadi (2013, p. 11) stated that, "Reading is a process of interpreting written symbols. Reading is an active skill that involves the reader, the text, and the interaction between the two (Grabe, 2009, p. 56). It is observed that children and teenagers who love reading have comparatively higher IQs. They are more creative and do better in school and college. Reading is said to significantly help in developing vocabulary, and reading aloud helps to build a strong emotional bond between parents and children. The children who start reading from an early age are observed to have good language skills, and they grasp the variances in phonics much better.

Reading is an activity that involves greater levels of concentration and adds to the conversational skills of the reader. It is an indulgence that enhances the knowledge acquired, consistently. The habit of reading also

helps readers to decipher new words and phrases that they come across in everyday conversations. The habit can become a healthy addiction and adds to the information available on various topics. It helps us to stay in-touch with contemporary writers as well as those from the days of yore and makes us sensitive to global issues.

Reader Theatre

Repeated readings, such as those used in Readers Theater, are beneficial when establishing fluency and comprehension instruction. Through repeated readings of the text, students increase sight word vocabulary and the ability to decode words quickly and accurately (Carrick, 2006). The repeated readings allow the students to phrase sentences appropriately, read punctuation markers, and read with greater ease. This fluent reading enables students to spend less time on decoding and increase comprehension

Readers Theatre is an oral presentation of drama, or poetry by two or more readers. (Cornwell, 2012, p. 23) states that Readers Theater: An "integrated approach for involving students in reading, writing, listening, and speaking activities." It involves children's in the following activities: (a) sharing literature, (b) reading aloud, (c) writing scripts, (d) performing with a purpose, and (e) working collaboratively. Reading fluency and comprehension are essential skills needed to succeed in school and in life. Through repeated readings of the text, students increase sight word vocabulary and the ability to decode words quickly and accurately (Carrick, 2006) as cited in Patrick (2010, p. 15). Of the various reading programs

Some Benefits of Using Readers Theatre in EFL Classroom

available, one of program is Readers Theatre.

Readers Theater is becoming a popular instructional strategy that has been shown to increase reading fluency, comprehension, and motivation among students in reading. Worthy and Prater (2002, p. 112) found readers theater to be motivating to reluctant readers and stated that “teachers have reported that it is the single most motivating effective reading activity they have used” (p. 295). The goal of Readers Theater is aimed at improving prosody and meaning. Six characteristics of reading with prosody are: correct pauses, length of phrases, appropriateness of phrases, final phrase lengthening, intonation changes, and stress (Dowhower, 1991) as cited in Owen (2012, p. 5).

According to Wilcutt (2007) as cited in Jackson, et.al (2010, p.5), “readers theatre is a style of theatre in which the actors do not learn lines, but uses narrative scripts and vocal expression to tell and understand a story”. Patrick (2008, p. 1), “readers theatre is a form of group story telling in which performers read aloud a story using script”.

In addition, Patrick (2008, p. 2) says that readers theatre is a form presentation of drama, prose, or poetry which can be played by two or more readers. O’Neill (2011) as cited in Buzzeo (2011, p. 1) states that “reader’s theatre is dramatic oral expression that focuses on reading aloud rather than memorization”.

Additionally, McAndrews (2004) as cited in Buzzeo (2011, p.1) states that the objective of RT is students can read the script using

intonation, inflection, infuency which contains story theme and characters.

There are four basic steps in Readers Theatre which can used by English teacher; learners read a story, learners make selective and analytical choices in transforming the story into a script through social negotiation, readers formulate, practice, refine their interpretations, readers perform to audience, and read aloud from hand-held scripts

Some Benefits of Reader theatre in EFL Classroom

Readers Theater has many benefits in the classroom. According to O’Donnell and O’Kelly (1994) as cited in Owen (2012, p. 5), “use of Readers Theater in the classroom can: foster a deeper understanding of character, setting, and plot through the reading, interpretation, and experience of dramatic performance, create a deeper understanding of content and a sense of identity and personal validation by making students responsible for their own learning; and encourage better interpersonal interaction through the body, language, voice control, and empathy inherent in the group acting experience. In Readers Theater, students receive a script which they are to read aloud; no memorization is necessary. This program allows them to realize reading success and truly understand the power and importance of reading in their lives.

Hill (1990) as cited in Patrick (2008, p.2) states that “in creating RT scripts, students increase their knowledge of language structure (vocabulary, syntax, and meaning), language use (forms and function of language use) and metalinguistics

Some Benefits of Using Readers Theatre in EFL Classroom

awareness (the ability to talk about language)".

According to Shepard (1996) as cited in Patrick (2008, p2), the benefits of RT are no full costume is needed during learning processes, no full stage sets, no full memorization of speech is involved as the scripts are held during performance and narration provides the framework for dramatic action.

Patrick (2008) states that " RT allows students to engage in creative writing through adding and recreating lines in a story scripts, and by providing introductory and transitional details as they adapt a piece of literature into dramatic form" (p. 2). Wu and Yang (2010, p. 3), the benefits of RT are easy to memorize scripts, easy to performance, and easy to prepare and practice for English teachers and students.

Prescott (2003) as cited in Wu and Yang (2010, p. 6) pointed out that "the benefits on RT could not only develop students' reading ability but also confidence and transform reluctant readers into book lovers under the instruction of RT in reading class".

Readers' theater offers students an opportunity for interpretive oral reading as they use voices, facial expressions, and hand gestures to interpret characters in stories. Readers' theater also builds readers' confidence, brings stories to life through performance, animates content areas, and improves reading ability, comprehension, and oral reading skills. Whether they are in the cast or in the audience, children often enjoy being part of readers' theater.

Conclusion

In conclusion, RT enhances the oral communication skill of EFL learners as they learn to experiment with their voices big varying their pitch and volume to portray the character during rehearsals. RT enables to concentrate on the elements of voice which carry meaning –foe example, accelerating and raising the pitch to suggest excitement. Student also pays more attention to their articulation of words, especially when they rehearse their scripts, and ever more so when they know that they have to act out the scripts to an audience. Students also learn to deliver smoother speech, with few pauses as repetitive rehearsals of the scripts increase comprehension as well as fluency. As students rehearse their scripts, they also learn the tone to portray the attitude of the character. In Readers Theater, the readings are carried out in such a way that students do not feel isolated and alone while reading. Repeated readings in multilevel small groups with high, medium, and low readers together also provide the practice of Repeated Guided Oral Reading, is the only research-based supported method of building reading fluency,

However, there can be limitation to using RT in class, particularly if students are not familiar with theatre as a genre, or they may not have the linguistically ability to produce their own scripts. In the case of the EFL learners who have just been immersed in a totally English- speaking environment, getting them to write scripts will be a rather tedious task. The teacher has to proofread and edit their scripts several times before they are ready to perform.

Some Benefits of Using Readers Theatre in EFL Classroom

Reference

- Callard, K. (2008). *Using Reader's Theater to increase third graders' reading fluency, comprehension, and motivation*. Unpublished doctor's thesis, Nova South Eastern University, America.
- Cornwell, L. (2012). *What is Readers Theater?* Retrieved from <http://www.scholastic.com/librarians/programs/whatsrt.htm>
- Grabe, W. (2009). *Reading in a second language: Moving theory to practice*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Good, R. H., & Kaminski, R. A. (2003). *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills: administration and scoring guide (6 ed.)*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West Educational Services.
- Linnakyla, P., Malin, A., & Taube, K. (2004). Factors behind low reading literacy achievement. *Scandinavian Journal of Education Research*, 48, 231-248.
- Owens, C. (2012). *Using Readers Theatre to Improve Second*
- Graders' Reading Fluency, Comprehension, and Motivation*. Unpublished thesis of Sierra Nevada College .
- Patrick, N. (2008). The impact of readers' theatre (RT) in the EFL classroom. *Polygenesis*, 14.
- Patrick, N. (2010). Improving oral skills through readers theatre: A study of views of Japanese EFL. *JISD*, (1), 37-49.
- Swalm, J. & Kling, M. (1973). Speed reading in the elementary school. *Elementary School Journal*. 74 (3). 158-164.
- Rasinski, T. V. (2006). Reading fluency instruction: Moving beyond accuracy, automaticity, and prosody. *The Reading Teacher*, 59(7), 704-706.
- Therrien, W. J. (2004). Fluency and comprehension gains as a result of remedial reading. *Remedial and Special Education*, 25, 252-261.
- Wu, C. Y., & Yang, H. (2010). Applying Reader's Theatre to Develop EFL children oral reading fluency and promotes their learning motivation. *Asian EFL Journal International*, 59 – 77
- Young, C., & Rasinski, T. (2009). Implementing

Some Benefits of Using Readers Theatre in EFL Classroom

readers theater as an
approach to classroom
fluency instruction.

*Reading Teacher, 63(1),
4-13.*