
TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS THROUGH SHORT STORIES: WHY AND HOW

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ABSTRAK

Mengajar bahasa Inggris untuk anak-anak tidak sama dengan mengajar orang dewasa. Anak-anak sangat aktif dan imajinatif tetapi mereka cenderung memiliki rentang perhatian yang pendek. Guru harus menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang semenarik mungkin agar semangat mereka tetap tinggi selama proses belajar mengajar. Sejalan dengan itu, cerpen dapat menjadi jembatan untuk memfasilitasi mereka dalam belajar bahasa Inggris. Guru dapat mengeksplorasinya untuk membuat pembelajaran bahasa Inggris lebih menarik dan efektif. Media ini membantu siswa untuk berkonsentrasi dan terlibat lebih antusias dalam belajar bahasa Inggris. Makalah ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki nilai penggunaan cerita pendek dan bagaimana penerapannya di kelas anak-anak. Diharapkan penelitian ini bermanfaat bagi guru bahasa Inggris anak-anak. Untuk mendapatkan lebih banyak pengetahuan tentang bagaimana menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang menarik untuk proses pembelajaran yang sukses.

Kata Kunci: **short stories, teaching English, young learners.**

ABSTRACT

Teaching English to young learners is not the same as teaching adults. Children are very active and imaginative but they tend to have short attention span. Teacher should create learning environment as interesting as possible to keep their spirit high during teaching and learning process. In line with this, short stories can be a bridge to facilitate them to learn English. Teacher can explore them to make English learning more interesting and effective. This media helps students to concentrate and engage more enthusiastically in learning English. This paper aims to investigate the value of using short stories and how it is applied in young learners' classroom. It is hoped that this study is helpful for English teachers of young learners to gain more knowledge on how to create interesting learning environment for a successful learning process.

Keywords: short stories, teaching English, young learners.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching a foreign language to young learners at early age is different from teaching adults. It is definitely not easier but it is more

challenging and interesting (Mart, 2012). Children are highly motivated, enthusiastic, and lively learners. Nevertheless, they also lose interest more quickly and are less able to keep themselves

motivated on tasks they find difficult (Cameron, 2001, p. 1). On the other words, the English teacher of young learner should always find the best ways or technique to be applied in their classroom.

Short stories provoke young learner to engage them in learning. As Cameron (2001, p. 163) argues writers and tellers design short stories to entertain, so they use attractive words to keep the audience fascinated. According to Krashen (1982) as cited in Alharassi (2012), stories lower the affective filter and this certainly helps learners to acquire the FL easier. Motivating young learners to learn English through stories at an early age provides them the opportunity to widen their horizons and stimulate their early enthusiasm and enhance their awareness of the rich use of English (Mart, 2012).

There are several studies related to the use of short stories in young learners classroom, such as Hatta (2005), Sutini (2012) and Sudartini (2006). Action research conducted by Hatta (2005) revealed that storytelling with non-linguistic support such as gesture and illustration and limited use of mother tongue could be comprehended by young learners in Japan. They could guess what the story is about and what will happen next. A qualitative study conducted by Sutini (2012) showed that the students responded positively toward the use of storytelling. Sudartini (2006) supports the benefit of using stories in teaching English for children. "stories, which relies so much on words, are believed to offer a major and

constant source of language experience to children" (Sudartini, 2006).

This paper intends to elaborate more on why short stories are worth integrating in language learning and how it can be applied in young learners classroom.

Why using short stories in young learners classroom

Brown (2001) proposes five categories that may be effectively used to give some practical approaches to teach children, namely intellectual development, attention span, sensory input, affective factors, and authentic meaningful language. Considering those basic principles in teaching English for children, it seems that teachers need to be very creative in selecting the materials as well as conducting their teaching.

Stories is recommended to be explored in young learners classroom, in this context when they learn English as foreign language. Naturally, children love stories. In EYL classroom, stories can be a means of entertainment and having fun since stories explore lots of amusement and interest (Al Harrasi, 2012, p. 52). Instead of attractive, short stories is considered to be taken into account because of some reasons. Short stories are acknowledging, educative, involving skills and language aspects, and fixed for young learners' character.

Talking about acknowledging, stories acknowledge children by intercultural understanding. Learners will enhance their intercultural understanding and it

help them to be tolerant and open-minded to other speakers of FL (Žigárdyová, 2006 as cited in Al Harrasi, 2012:53). By using short stories, English as new language can be taught in a meaningful context because it also involve cultural content in their learning. In addition, motivating young learners to learn English through stories at an early age provides them the opportunity to widen their horizons and stimulate their early enthusiasm and enhance their awareness of the rich use of English. Stories are unquestionably a significant part of children's literacy development (Mart, 2012, p.101)

According to Al Harrasi (2012, p.53), stories can educate moral lessons to children for instance, the good people are rewarded and the bad are punished. Stories also provide authentic uses of language (Loukia, 2006 as cited in Al Harrasi, 2012, p. 54).

In addition, being engaged in story events makes children try to predict what will happen next and guess the meaning of new words. Thus, stories not only develop language skills but also help children broaden their vocabulary repertoire because they will hear many new words while they are listening or reading (Cameron, 2001). Added to this, stories have been recognized as an effective aid for internalising some grammar rules because they provide a rich source of language structures and repetitive sentence patterns (Ellis & Brewster, 1991; Mart, 2012).

Collie & Slater (1991, p. 196) state that short stories are the most suitable literary genre to use in

English teaching due to its shortness. In line with this, there are four advantages of using short stories for language teaching. First, short stories are practical as their length. It is long enough to cover entirely in one or two class sessions. Second, short stories are not complicated for students to work with on their own. Third, short stories have a variety of choice for different interests and tastes. Finally, short stories can be used with all levels (beginner to advance), all ages (young learners to adults) and all classes. So, it helps also young learners to learn language.

There some important reasons why stories can be very effective in teaching language to children (Wright, 2004, p. 4-5).

1. Motivation

Most children like stories and they may spend much of their time and attention to listen or to read stories. However, stories will lead to a very strong motivation to learn and understand not only the stories but also the language used to deliver the story.

2. Meaning

By using stories, teachers will be able to teach not only the language but also moral values to their students. They need also consider the moral values underlying each of the stories used in the classroom in order to match with the local culture, as well as the national culture.

3. Fluency

Stories also can improve the students fluency in terms of encouraging their receptive skill. Reading and listening stories may

develop the students skills of searching for meaning, predicting, and guessing.

4. Language awareness

Stories can help the children to be aware of the language. They can be used to introduce children to the language items and sentence constructions.

5. Communication

Stories are also useful in developing the children ability to express their feeling and share their ideas with other children. This may lead to the ability to communicate with others.

How short stories can be applied in young learners classroom

Teacher could explore short stories and use it in some ways. The followings are some examples of activity that can be applied in young learners classroom.

Storytelling

Listening to a teacher read or tell a story is a useful language learning activity at any age (Cameron, 2001). In this technique, listening to stories helps children become aware of the rhythm, intonation and pronunciation of language (Ellis & Brewster, 2002) cited in Mart (2012). Teacher functions as a role model in pronouncing words and students could imitate after listening to it. Stories also provide authentic language for young learners to learn.

The followings are some procedures taken from Cameron (2001) that can be applied in storytelling technique. For the beginning activity, it is better for the teacher to introduce the ideas and the key words. The teacher could

show some pictures and ask the students vocabularies related to the pictures. Then, the students are asked to write the words on board. For the whilst activities, the teacher reads the story to the children and gives them enough time to look at the pictures. In the first reading, the teacher should read on through the story and it is recommended not to stop too much to talk about words or the plot. Instead of explaining to the students, the teacher could benefit the use of picture to emphasize what is happening in the story. In the second reading, the teacher can pause to point keywords or ideas or ask the students to guess what happens next. The last, the children could respond the stories by using simple sentence. The follow-up activities could be drawing a picture as response to the story and writing down some vocabularies next to the pictures. They can take the pictures home to show to their parents and practice the words.

Acting roles

According to Brown (2001) cited in Huang (2008), "role-play minimally involves (a) giving a role to one or more members of a group and (b) assigning an objective or purpose that participants must accomplish." Liu & Ding (2009) argue that "role play is an effective technique to animate the teaching and learning atmosphere, arouse the interest of learners and make the language acquisition impressive." Cameron (2001) suggests some steps for the teacher to apply in the classroom. In this technique, the teacher could separate the narrative and the

dialogues in the story. The teacher could read the narratives and the children dress up and act out the dialogue. By practicing the dialogue, it will promote language learning during the process. In addition, teacher could also focus on one interesting part to practice by the students.

Teacher can make it simple since it is intended to teach young learners. British Council (2012) suggests "It could start with miming basic actions, then speaking or improvising dialogue". The teacher could arrange the chair in such a way and provide some simple properties for students to act. Using puppet is also recommended to vary the activity. Students hold the puppet and practice the dialogue. They should adjust their voice with the characters in the story.

Drawing illustration

After listening or reading to a story, teacher could ask the students to draw illustration describing parts of the story in order (Brown, 2004). Making a poster can also be a choice to illustrate the story followed by adding some

vocabulary labels in the picture. For example, in the story 'Little Red Riding Hood' the students draw the wolf and the forest and label them. Delage (1989) asserts that young learners like drawing or colouring pictures and they will do it while they are listening to a song or a story. This activity makes them calm down because they love doing it.

CONCLUSION

Children are very active and imaginative and they love stories. Short stories facilitate young learners to engage in language learning since they are interesting and amusing. They also provide authentic language use and rich vocabulary which are beneficial for young learners. Besides, children can learn the moral lesson in the story which is important for their self-development. Teacher could explore the use of short stories to be integrated in learning English. Story telling, acting roles and drawing illustration are some examples of the activity using stories.

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