

DEVELOPING YOUNG LEARNERS' SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH STORYTELLING TECHNIQUE

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Abstract:

In recent years, educators and researchers have recognized the tremendous benefits that storytelling can have on language development and vocabulary acquisition, particularly in young learners. By introducing young learners to the magic of storytelling, not only do they develop a love for narratives, but they also sharpen their language skills and expand their vocabulary. In this article, we will delve into the ways in which storytelling enhances language skills and vocabulary in young learners, exploring the various techniques and strategies that educators can employ to maximize its impact. Everybody, both young learners and teenagers, as well as adults, loves stories, whether these stories are fairy tales, folktales, legends, fables or short stories, because they are based on real-life incidents experienced by learners themselves, therefore implementation of storytelling technique is considered one of the most beneficial approaches for teaching speaking to different age group learners. This technique is a unique way for developing an understanding, respect and appreciation for other cultures, as well as it can promote a positive attitude towards people from different lands, races and religions.

Key words:

diverse linguistic patterns, use different types of activities, young learners, primary classes, storytelling technique, language acquisition, speaking, developing an understanding , cognitive development, language skills, including communication and language skills , communicative activities.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English to young learners is different from teaching teenagers and adults. It is one of the most demanding, at the same time challenging and rewarding job. Young learners are extremely energetic and have a lot of physical energy, as they play, they learn and practice social skills, including communication and language skills, and stories play a significant role in their language learning process, as well as enhancing their speaking skills. So, this article deals with the benefits of using storytelling techniques in teaching and developing

young learner's speaking skills. They are social, energetic, playful, naturally curious, still developing and able to formulate their own language rules through comprehensible language input, as well as they are open to what happens in the classroom. They learn languages through playing games, practicing social skills, including communication and language skills.

Young learners are "me"-focused learners and they respond emotionally to learning activities. Therefore, teachers should know how to create a warm, friendly English atmosphere in the classroom, how to use different types of activities and how to set up activities in order to enable children to work together in groups. Speaking is one of the most important skills, which allows learners to communicate with each other and express their thoughts and feelings, and the goal of teaching speaking is communicative efficiency.

Telling a story or using storytelling techniques in the classroom is one of the most effective ways of teaching speaking in English to young learners. It is fun, as they create a motivating and challenging atmosphere in the classroom and help children enhance a positive attitude towards English.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

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.

Storytelling exposes young learners to a variety of language patterns and structures. Through stories, children encounter different sentence structures, verb tenses, and grammatical forms. This exposure to diverse linguistic patterns helps them internalize the rules of language and develop a strong foundation for effective communication. As they become more familiar with these patterns, children can incorporate them into their own speech and writing. Young learners learn better with stories, as stories are energizers and can lead to harmony, understanding, and peaceful resolution of conflict. Stories are unquestionably a significant tool in the learning process. They are not only a rich resource in language learning and teaching, but also they offer a wider window on the world,

and through them children learn much more than words. Telling stories can reduce the stress in the classroom, promote literacy and speaking, as well as help children develop thinking strategies and language skills.

So, why is story telling considered one of the most effective approaches and why do teachers need to use stories in teaching speaking to younger learners?

A.Wright, in his book "Storytelling with Children" defined some important factors on effectiveness of stories in teaching languages to children:

Motivation. Stories lead to a very strong motivation to learn and understand the story and the language used to deliver the story□

Meaning. Teachers, using stories in their classes, will be able to teach both the language and moral values.

Fluency. Stories will improve fluency as well as promote language learning, as there are a lot of acting roles and practicing dialogues

Language awareness. Stories can help the children to be aware of the language.□

Communication. Stories develop young learners' ability to communicate and to share their ideas with others Methodologists Slattery & Willis state that "young learners acquire language unconsciously. The activities you do in class should help this kind of acquisition. Stories are the most valuable resource and they offer children a world of supported meaning that they can relate to. Later on stories can help children practice listening, speaking, writing and reading". According to Cameron, 'stories use a holistic approach to language teaching and learning' as "stories offer a whole imaginary world, created by language that children can enter and enjoy, learning language as they go", and Al Harrasi stresses that "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". Moreover, Rivers states that young learners "Love to imitate and mime; they are uninhabited in acting out roles, and they enjoy repetition because it gives them a sense of assurance and achievement". So, taking into account all above-mentioned methodologists' opinions we can say that stories play a beneficial role both in teaching speaking to young learners and improving their language acquisition, as well as cognitive skills.

Cultural Awareness

Storytelling serves as a window into different cultures and traditions. Through stories from around the world, young learners are exposed to diverse perspectives and experiences. This exposure fosters cultural awareness and empathy, helping children appreciate and respect different languages, customs, and traditions. By

engaging with stories from various cultures, children develop a broader understanding of the world and expand their language skills in a culturally sensitive manner.

COLLABORATIONS AND COMMUNICATION

Storytelling provides opportunities for collaboration and communication among young learners. Group storytelling activities encourage children to work together to create and share stories. This collaborative process promotes language development as children engage in discussions, negotiate ideas, and express their thoughts. Through storytelling, children learn to communicate effectively, listen to others, and respect different viewpoints, all of which are essential language skills.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

One of the key benefits of storytelling is that it provides children with context for language learning. Instead of presenting isolated words or grammar rules, storytelling offers a meaningful and contextualized experience. By listening to stories, children can grasp the meaning of words and phrases in a natural and authentic way. They learn how language is used in different contexts, which aids in their overall language development.

Naturally, children love stories, as they enjoy listening and retelling, as well as acting, and, of course, they want to understand what is happening. In addition, being engaged in story events makes children try to predict what will happen next and guess the meaning of new words. This may lead to the ability to communicate with others and improves young learners' fluency in terms of encouraging their receptive skills. Although stories are excellent to use in the classroom, teachers need to use them from the students' own culture and heritage, but, first, teachers should select stories carefully according to their teaching objectives and their pupils' needs. Ellis & Brewster point out, that when choosing a story, teachers need to select carefully "authentic storybooks that are accessible, useful and relevant for children learning English". That is why methodologists suggest the following criteria, which should be taken into consideration for selecting the right story in teaching young learners:

- The theme - the story should deal with a topic children are learning about in English class.
- Appropriate language level - the language should be accessible, but rich, authentic and expressive as well.
- A clear storyline - children should be familiar with about 75% of the language in order to understand the story.

- Plenty of repetition – if children are exposed to repeated chunks of language, they will immediately pick them.
- Content - it should be interesting, fun, motivating, memorable and should encourage participation while developing imagination and arousing curiosity.
- Helpful illustrations – it should have high quality illustrations, which synchronize with the text; a good visual aid provides a supportive context for language learning and helps children understand the story.

Therefore, while selecting activities, teachers should follow the following principles:

provide plenty of opportunities for children to work in pairs or groups. This encourages maximum participation and individual practice in speaking.

use instructions, which have a clear and strong beginning, middle, and end, they should introduce things using strong opposites, address absolute meaning and should have strong emotional and moral appeal.

take into account learner differences in developmental levels and individual characteristics.

When teachers incorporate storytelling into their English lessons in Primary education, they can create a dynamic and interactive learning environment that fosters language development and sparks young learners' imagination and creativity.

In order to improve young learners' speaking skills teachers should take into account the following specific tips for using storytelling:

Choosing age - appropriate stories. Stories should be suitable for young learners in terms of content and language complexity;

Using visual aids. Colorful visual aids, such as pictures, flashcards should be chosen in order to help support comprehension, capture the attention and make the story more engaging

Encourage interaction. In order to encourage young learners actively participate in storytelling process teachers should use simple questions, invite them to predict or retell some parts of the story.

Focusing on vocabulary. New words should be chosen in the context of the story and provide opportunities to practice using them in communication.

Teachers should know the ways of designing vocabulary activities related to the story in order to reinforce learning.

Follow up with activities. In order to help reinforce comprehension and vocabulary retention hands-on activities, such as drawing, writing, role-playing, crafting related to the story should be chosen.

Cultural Awareness

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Collaboration and Communication

Storytelling provides opportunities for collaboration and communication among young learners. Group storytelling activities encourage children to work together to create and share stories. This collaborative process promotes language development as children engage in discussions, negotiate ideas, and express their thoughts. Through storytelling, children learn to communicate effectively, listen to others, and respect different viewpoints, all of which are essential language skills.

CONCLUSION.

In conclusion, we can state that teaching speaking to young learners through storytelling technique provides a possibility to communicate in real-life situations, discussing the plot of the story and presenting it. Through stories we, teachers, can increase children's exposure to English and help them build their own vocabulary, involving them directly in their learning process and it is considered an effective way to attract young learners' attention to learning to English, as they are interested in acting out.

So, there are a lot of advantages of using stories in teaching speaking to young learners, as telling stories can:

- * reduce the stress in the classroom;
- * promote literacy, speaking and listening skills of young learners;
- * allow the child to use his or her imagination more fully;
- * enable children to empathize with unfamiliar people/places/situations

In addition, the benefits of implementing storytelling technique in teaching speaking and promoting young learners' language skills are great as it increases children's willingness to communicate, encourage cooperation, develop imagination and creativity, enhance speaking skills, as well as understanding comprehension.

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