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## TEACHING SPEAKING THROUGH STORY TELLING: THE CASE OF A JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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### **Abstract**

This collaborative classroom action research described the use of storytelling in teaching English speaking. The subjects of the research were 13 junior high school students at *SMP Laboratorium STKIP* Jambi, Indonesia. The qualitative data consisted of field notes, students' diaries, photographs, and videos of teaching and learning process collected through observations and analyzed descriptively. The quantitative data were the *students'* scores in their English *speaking performance* generated through speaking tests and analyzed by using Microsoft Excel. The findings showed that the use of storytelling in teaching speaking could attract students' attention to the lesson and encourage them to speak English. Pronouncing words, constructing sentences, and retelling the story could enhance students' speaking performance. The students' mean scores in their speaking performance tests got a significant improvement from cycle to cycle.

**Keywords:** speaking test, storytelling, teaching speaking

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### **Introduction**

Among the four skills of language, speaking is one of the basic skills taught in language classroom. As a productive skill, speaking helps the students use their English in communication and interaction with other people. Most of the students have daily practice on English listening, reading, and writing at home, but only a few of them have opportunities to speak English at home

due to lack of social environmental support to practice. Therefore, speaking skill should be taught and practiced in the classroom.

To develop students' speaking skills, English teacher should have creativity to design communicative activities in teaching speaking. These activities can motivate students to produce the language actively and productively. Effective learning with appropriate techniques and adequate opportunities should be created to motivate students speaking English. Therefore, one of the purposes of teaching English at *SMP Laboratorium STKIP* Jambi, Indonesia is to develop students' communicative competence. At the end of the semester, the teacher found that the students got unsatisfied scores in speaking skill, under the Minimum Mastery Criterion (*KKM*) for all four skills in English subject (75). So, the researchers tried to investigate this problem by collaborating with the teacher.

It was found that the students' speaking skill was unsatisfied due to lack of vocabulary and motivation to speak. The teacher did some reflections, especially towards the lesson plan. Although, the example of real life conversation had been provided for the students, they still had difficulty constructing their sentences and responding to the input orally. This made them reluctant to use English. Therefore, it was important to use appropriate strategies to improve students' vocabulary and motivation to speak.

Curriculum 2013 has pointed out some important issues. For example, in English subject, listening, speaking, reading, and writing should be taught integratedly. They should not taught separately because they are related each other. The more they are taught individually, the less communication will take place. To address this issue, the researchers applied integrated-skills teaching. Speaking was taught integratedly with three other skills (listening, reading, and writing) through the use of storytelling. Storytelling activity can facilitate students in expressing their ideas and constructing their own sentences in story format including characters and settings. This provide enjoyment and motivation for them to use English. Through watching and listening to the story, the students can listen to native speaker of English and other storyteller's voice, and then retell the story. In addition, storytelling can be a strong support in pedagogical theory as it is fundamental to education, specifically to language teaching. An Indian proverb says, "*Tell me a fact and I'll learn. Tell me the truth and I'll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever.*" So, the use of storytelling in teaching speaking enables students to listen, retell, and create the story by using their own words.

## Literature Review

According to Widdowson (1994), as an active oral production skill, speaking enables students to express what they feel and think orally. It also as an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving, and processing information. As Underwood (1997, p. 11), "Speaking means creative process, an active interaction between speaker and listener that involves thought and emotion." They are often spontaneous, open ended, and evolving. But, most of the students feel that speaking is complex and harder than other skills because it happens in real time. Unlike in writing, the words that have been produced cannot be edited or revised in speaking. As a complex skill for the students, the teachers are demanded to create the classroom activities in teaching speaking. Through these activities, students get more opportunities and practices to speak automatically and fluently (Walters et al., 2005).

In creating the activities, the teacher may not ignore the three functions of speaking. As Brown and Yule (1983) as cited in Richard (1997, p. 21) point out, “Talks as interaction, talk as transaction, talk as performance.” Talking or speaking as performance happens in storytelling. Hence, according to Harmer (2002, p. 144), Fulcher and Davidson (2007, p. 94), “Five components can develop students’ performance in speaking namely grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.” In addition, the characteristics of successful speaking activity based on Ur’s opinion (2009, p. 120) are as follows “Learners talk a lot, participation is even, motivation is high, students are eager to speak, and language is of an acceptable level.”

Meanwhile in language teaching, stories are used to develop efficient listening, fluent speaking, and ability to read and write easily and competently (Celce and Murcia, 2006, p. 144). One of the story activities according to Donna Brinton as cited in Celce and Murcia (2006, p. 145) is retelling the story. Scrivener (2010, p. 337) and Harmer (2007, p. 130) mentioned that the activity of storytelling can make students successful in speaking skill. This activity enables them to summarize the story in their own words. Narrative or monologue text is one kind of texts that should be taught to the junior high school students and storytelling is one of the activities suggested in teaching narrative text.

Characteristics of a good storytelling are as follows: (1) It provokes students’ curiosity; (2) It evokes students’ imagination and interest in language skill; (3) It improves language skills such as grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, sequencing, and story recall; (4) It improves listening and oral communication skills; (5) It is an interactive and co-operative process; (6) As an art it is an enjoyable tool for practicing language learning skills and verbal expressions; (7) It binds listeners together; (8) It helps listeners to remember; (9) It uses all kinds of language conventions to make the story vivid; (10) It makes listeners forget their misery. Techniques for retelling the story include voice, body language, and composure. Voice consists of volume, pitch, pace, and silence. Body language consists of stance, gestures, and facial expression. Composure is needed when retelling the story. Nervousness can be controlled and eliminated by a lot of practice.

To teach speaking through storytelling, teacher can ask students to read a text or watch a video of a story (Moon & Tongue, 1991, p. 187). Teacher can use tape recorder, video, etc. (Scrivener, 2010, p. 365), and ensure the text or recording can involve students to read, listen, and retell the story (O’Malley & Pierce, 1996). Teacher should follow three activities proposed by Howe and Johnson (1992 as cited in Gomez, 2010, p. 14); pre-storytelling stage, while-storytelling stage, and post-storytelling stage.

## **Methodology**

The researchers used a collaborative classroom action research (CAR) approach to describe the implementation of storytelling in teaching English speaking. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) as cited in Burns (2010, p. 9) state that CAR consists of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The subjects of this research were 13 eighth grade students of junior high school at *SMP Laboratorium STKIP* Jambi, Indonesia, which consisted of 7 females and 6 males at the age of 14–15 years old.

We prepared two cycles for this research, and added one more cycle of teaching and learning process. The treatment was given to the students through several activities and tasks in group and individual works in pre-storytelling stage, while-storytelling stage, and post-storytelling stage. We were assisted by the teacher as research collaborator by using field notes, students’ diaries, documentations, and tests to generate qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data

consisted of field notes; students' diaries, photographs, and videos of teaching and learning process were collected through observations and analyzed descriptively (Zikmund, 2003). The qualitative data from field notes and students' diaries were written and analyzed by doing elliptical writing; omitting words from a direct quotation and beginning the expression with semicolon, then inserting a comma. Meanwhile, quantitative data were obtained through speaking test conducted in each cycle. Students' speaking scores were analyzed by using Microsoft Excel to get the mean score to determine the improvement of students' speaking performance.

### **Findings and Discussion**

Several activities were carried out in pre-storytelling, while-storytelling, and post-storytelling stages to teach speaking from cycle one to cycle three. The researchers found that pre-storytelling and while-storytelling activities were easy for the students to do, while post-storytelling activities were difficult for the students to do.

#### ***Cycle one***

In pre-storytelling stage, the students mentioned and pronounced the words related to the story in pairs. It was difficult for some students to do these two activities. Showing the real objects to the students could help them memorize the words. In learning pronunciation of the words, they were encouraged to do many repetitions as supported by Thornbury (2005). In while-storytelling stage, students watched the video in group, and then they had to answer some questions related to the story prepared by the teacher. It was found that all students enjoyed watching as they were curious about the story. However, only a few students responded to the questions, while the others just kept silent. To overcome this problem, the teacher delivered the questions in two languages, English and Indonesian. They gave responses to questions when the teacher asked the questions and explained in Indonesian. In post-storytelling stage, the students had to discuss the story and then retell the story in their own words in front of the class as speaking test. It was found that most students could not construct their sentences in English. They used Indonesian when retelling. Therefore, the teacher gave students some treatments to write sentences with correct grammar based on the questions prepared in while-storytelling stage and pronounce their sentences aloud. The results of the speaking test indicated that only a few of them were brave to stand up and retell the story in front of the class, while the others were reluctant and *unsuccessful* in the test as their speaking scores were very low, only three students (23.08%) passed the *KKM*.

#### ***Cycle two***

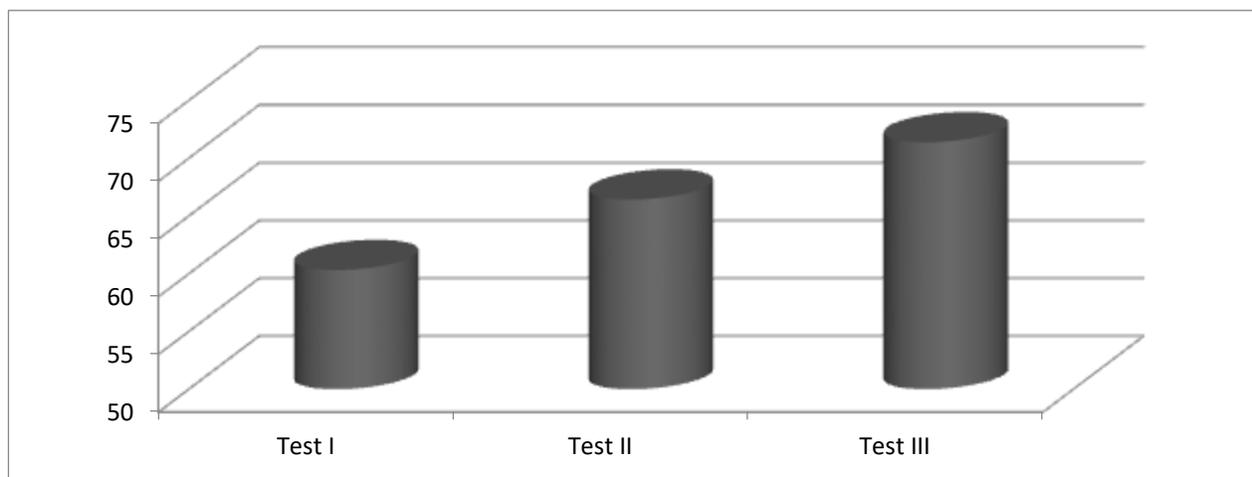
In reference to reflection results of cycle one, the teacher did some revisions by using another material and implementing several strategies in teaching and learning process. In pre-storytelling stage, students could mention all words related to the story as the teacher provided some clues. In pronouncing the words, some repetitions were done to some students. For while-storytelling stage, the teacher arranged the students into groups and asked them to sit and watch the story in their groups. They enjoyed watching the story but in question and answer session for part three and four, some groups gave no response to the questions. The teacher explained in English and Indonesian to get students' responses. In post-storytelling stage, the groups were

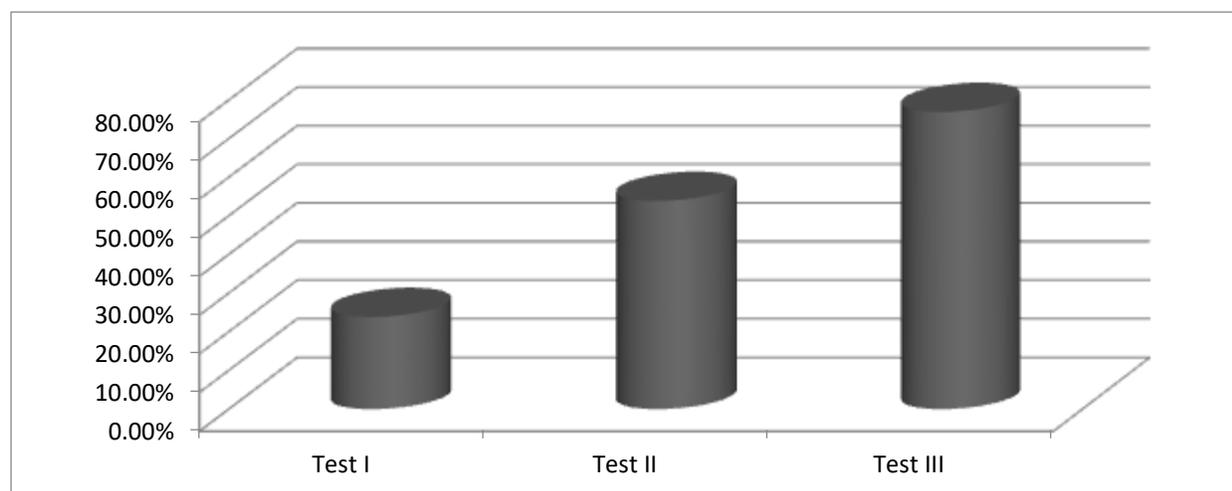
asked to construct their sentences for retelling the story. Some groups still had problems in writing English sentences with correct grammar and appropriate words. Referring to the results of students' works, the teacher explained how to write good sentences and then asked the students to do sentence writing practice. In retelling practice, low scoring students got scaffolding from other group members. Students enjoyed retelling the story in front of the class in groups. In speaking test, some of the students still had problem with their speaking performance. But there was an improvement in this cycle; seven students (53.85%) passed the *KKM* compared to cycle one, 10.20%.

***Cycle three***

Based on the reflection results of previous cycles, the teacher carried out different activities. In pre-storytelling stage, the teacher asked students to choose and read their favorite stories as suggested by Moon and Tongue (1991, p. 187). They were asked to visit school library to find their story books and reported their titles in front of the class. Their seats were managed based on the titles. The students with the same titles worked in a group, while the others with different ones worked individually. It was found that some students enjoyed working in group. In while-storytelling stage, the students were fond of reading the book they chose, looking up the unknown words in dictionary, and pronouncing them. Some of them did not have dictionary, so the teacher helped them in getting the meanings of the words. Some of them also had difficulty in constructing English sentences related to the story they read, so the teacher provided more explanations, asked questions about the story elements (orientation, complication and resolution), and helped the students in writing their sentences. To overcome the students' problems in retelling the story in front of the class, the teacher guided the students in pronunciation practice and encouraged them to be confident in speaking. The results of the test showed that students' mean score was 71.38, ten students (76.92%) passed the *KKM*, while three students (23.08%) still got low score.

**Figure 1.** *The students' mean score in test I, II, III*



**Figure 2.** *The students' percentage of KKM*

The results of this research indicated that: (1) the students were motivated to learn language skills, especially speaking through storytelling activities, (2) they had speaking awareness in retelling the story, (3) low-scoring students got scaffolding from high-scoring students, (4) they had significant improvement based on the results of their speaking performance tests from cycle one to three. In cycle one the mean score of students was 60.31, in cycle two was 66.46, in cycle three was 71.38. The percentage of the students who achieved the *KKM* also increased. In cycle one was 23.08%, in cycle two was 53.85%, and in cycle three was 76.92%. The mean score of the students and the percentage of students who achieved the *KKM* in three tests were shown in the following charts.

### Conclusions

The use of storytelling in teaching speaking could attract students' attention to the lesson, encourage students to speak English, and enhance students' speaking performance as indicated by their significant improvement in speaking performance from cycle to cycle. The students enjoyed learning speaking through storytelling. In conducting storytelling activities, the teacher helped the students determining the story elements in narrative context, constructing English sentences related to the story, pronouncing the words, and improving self-confidence in retelling the story.

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