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TEACHER'S PERCEPTION OF TEACHING WRITING TO YOUNG LEARNERS USING STORY

Iin Inawati

English Department, STKIP Muhammadiyah Pringsewu Lampung
email: inawati.upi@gmail.com

Abstract

1 This study aims to explore the teacher's perception of teaching writing to young learners using story and to investigate her practice of teaching writing in primary school context. This study utilized a case study research design in which an English teacher became the participant. The data were obtained from interview and documents analysis. Analysis of data showed that the teacher neglect to use story in her writing class because of her perception that story is difficult to be used in teaching writing for young learners. The second finding showed that the teacher had provided various activities in writing development in which the students should use their thinking skill, such as: drawing a school map and writing based on the picture they draw, or open response to a picture.

Keywords: writing, young learners, meaningful language, story

1. INTRODUCTION

1 Writing is recognized as the most difficult of the four language skills. However, writing English can be a lot simpler than often appears, and the children can have a lot of fun while learning. There are some reasons why writing is important to be learned by young learners (Paul, 2005). One reason is simply that by adding another skill, the children can learn target pattern more deeply. Another reason is that writing is very visible. The children, the teacher, and parents can all see what the children are learning and can have a better idea of what has been accomplished. This

visible record can also help the children look back and clearly see their progress. When the children can express themselves using new pattern, we can be confident that she is ready to move forward

According to Brewster, Ellis and Girard (2003), the kinds of writing activities pupils do tend to fall into two sets. The first is learning to write and the second is writing activities that involve thinking process. In the learning to write stage, pupils are involved mostly in tightly guided copying which focus on 'surface' features, such as handwriting, spelling, punctuation and using the correct words and grammar. It is in line

with Paul (2005) and Suyanto (2007) who state that in this first stage in developing writing skill, the teacher can ask the students to be engaged in copying activities. The second stage is writing to learn, there may be less tightly controlled writing activities, moving to much freer or even creative writing where there are higher cognitive demands and a greater focus on meaning and personal expression as well as form. It is supported by Linse (2005) who says that the next stage in writing is using their cognitive skill to formulate ideas and write them onto paper. In this stage, the students thinking skill is needed in accomplishing the task given by the teachers. In doing this task the students will make various writing results, the fluent and correct work is considered.

However, the activities of writing in young learners classrooms are dominated with the surface of writing which demand linguistics correct. The range of writing in English language classes for young learners is often limited to gap-fills, vocabulary lists, and short essays (Collins, 2008). Nevertheless, those activities are only the first stage in writing development. There is another stage of writing development which demand the students to use the language in

meaningful context and enhance their thinking skill.

To reach the second stage of writing development, the students need guidance from other knowledgeable person , especially teacher. Story can be used by the teacher as alternatives to make the students write in meaningful context (Collins, 2008) because stories provide rich and authentic uses of the foreign language (Cameron, 2003). The other advantage is that story can enhance students' literacy skills (Hismanoglu, 2005; Mok, Chow, and Wong, 2006; Miller and Pennycuff, 2008).

Considering the significance of story to improve the students' writing in meaningful context, the researcher attempts to investigate the teacher's perception of the use of story in teaching writing to young learners and the practice of the teaching of writing, especially in primary school. Hopefully, the finding of this study will provide an insight for teachers of young learners in enhancing students' English writing skill.

Writing Tasks for Young Learners

There are some writing assessment tasks that can be used for formal writing assessment, either in the classroom or in external assessment procedures, such as:

writing in speech bubbles, writing in response to a picture, completing a story, open response writing, re-forming a text (McKay, 2006). Since the use of story becomes the focus in this study, moreover Cameron (2003) suggest that the students can be asked to retelling the story to enable the students understand the discourse of the language use. The students can be asked to retell the story in written form. Because the demand of retelling story in foreign language is more demanding than retell the story in their first language, the demand will be needed to reduce. For example, the teacher can provide picture as prompter or the teacher can ask them to write the story in a simpler text.

In addition, Stern (1991) in Hişmanoğlu (2005) suggests that there are three main kinds of writing that can be based on story (as a kind of literary work) as a model : The first kind is *Controlled Writing* which are used mostly in beginning-level writing typically require rewriting passages in arbitrary ways to practice specific grammatical structures. For instance, students can be reporters doing a live newscast, or they can rewrite a third person passage into first person from a character's point of view. The second is *Guided*

Writing. This activity corresponds to intermediate-level ESL / EFL. Students respond to a series of questions or complete sentences which, when put together, retell or sum up the model. In some cases, students complete the exercise after they receive the first few sentences or the topic sentence of a summary, paraphrase, or description. *The last kind is Reproducing the Model*. This activity comprises techniques like paraphrase, summary, and adaptation. These techniques are very beneficial ESL / EFL writing exercises. In paraphrasing, students are required to use their own words to rephrase the things that they see in print or hear aloud.

Assessing Writing in Young Learners Classroom

Assessment is “any systematic way of finding out about learner’s level of knowledge or skills” (Rixon, 2003: 1). He suggests that there are two purposes of assessment. The first is the formative purposes which “take place throughout a course of teaching” and the second is the summative purpose that enables the teacher “to see how well learners have done at the end of teaching period”.

The following are some specific classroom writing assessment strategies and

tasks to supplement the classroom assessment strategies (McKay, 2006):

Observation: Observation of children's writing ability involves ongoing checks of children's writing processes as well as their writing products. Children's writing process involve, for example, their abilities to plan their writing, to concentrate on the writing task, to evaluate their own writing and to undertake a drafting process. (Cameron, 2003)

Writing Conferences: Teacher-students writing conferences and interactions are perhaps the main informal assessment strategy used by teachers for writing. Writing conferences involves teacher and students in one-to one extended discussion of the writing that has been or is in the process of being done. Conferences can take place as the teacher moves from student to student.

Portfolios: Portfolios lend themselves very well to writing assessment. Samples of work can be collected in chronological order with completed criteria sheets attached to them; observation sheets can be dated and kept together with records of writing conferences with children. (Pinter, 2006: 136; Linse, 2005: 157).

Self-assessment: Self-assessment gives children an important opportunity to develop their awareness of the nature of their progress and needs in writing. With awareness can come a degree of ownership and control of their own writing development. Logs and journals can be used in self-assessment. Logs can be used to record their experience in writing, for example, setting out the date, the form of writing, who the audience intended was, and whether they completed the writing. Writing journal can be more detailed because children can write reflectively about their writing, setting out, for example, the things they can do, or what they finding hard. Logs and journals can be written in the children's first language.

Stories in Teaching English for Young Learners

Stories represent holistic approaches to language teaching and learning and that place a high premium on children's involvement with rich and authentic uses of the foreign language. ³ Stories offer a whole imaginary world, created by language, that children can enter and enjoy, learning language as they go (Cameron, 2003). Further she suggests the features of story can be used to teach English for young learners.

2
The first, obvious, key organizing feature of stories is that events happen at different points in time; they occur in a temporal sequence. The other key organizing feature of stories is their thematic structure i.e. 2
difficulties or evil are overcome, or a major event is survived. In details, she explains the structure of typical stories (Propp, 1958 and Labov, 1972 in Cameron 2003) as follow: an opening: often formulaic in fairy tales e.g. ‘Once upon a time...’, introducing of characters, description of the setting, introduction of a problem, a series of events that lead to the resolution of the problem, a closing often formulaic in fairy tales e.g. ‘They all lived happily ever after’, and a moral which may or may not be explicitly stated.

Simpler Suyanto (2007) highlights the characteristics of story to teach English for young learners, those are if the story is aimed to reach specific goal, the teachers should choose the story that provide repetition vocabularies. Moreover, the stories tell the interesting topic for children. The last is that the plot of the story must be simple and not complicated. It should be appropriate with the students’ language level.

Advantages of Using Stories in Teaching English for Young Learners.

There are some advantages in using story in young learners’ classrooms. The first advantage is that story can make the students personally involved in a story as they identify with the characters and try to interpret the narrative and illustration. The second advantage is that story provides ideal opportunities for presenting cultural information and encouraging cross-cultural comparison. The next advantage is that story offer positive concrete outcomes in the form of games, competitions, quizzes, drama, songs, projects, book making, etc. The other advantage is that story can enhance students’ literacy skills (Miller and Pennycuff, 2008).

In addition Hsiu-Chinh (2009) finds that children literature, especially story picture books bring three main values to the children based on their own views as follow: 1) linguistics value: help students to understand lexical and syntactic level; 2) value of the story: help students motivation; and 3) value of the picture: stimulate the students’ imagination and expanded their perspectives of the world.

Stages in Teaching Writing to Young Learners Using Stories

Teaching writing using story needs preparation and stages that should be fulfilled. The following stages are the basic procedure in teaching writing for young learners suggested by Brewster, Ellis and Girard (2003: 125):

The first stage that must be done by the teacher is preparing pupils with a range of pre-listening activities to listen to a story to introduce the topic and key words. The teacher can give the pupils a list of key words and make them understand about the new words. Introducing the new vocabularies or the key word can be done by using pictures, gestures, realia, etc.

The next stage is tell or read the story once, not too fast. After the first hearing the key words list is read through and pupils find the words. Pupil may listen to the text a second time and while they listen they tick off the words from the list. Afterwards pupils complete the gap-filling activities.

The third stage is re-tell the story orally in pairs. This activity can be done by using the completed gap-filling text and pictures. After they share their understanding toward the story orally, pupils now re-tell the story in writing working in pairs or individually, trying to reconstruct the text together. They must not try to reproduce the text exactly but

recreate the meanings with grammatical accuracy and well organized ideas.

The last stage is displaying finished versions and discuss the story produced. Before the students display their work, ofcourse, the teacher can give feedback and comment variation is that pupils try to create a different ending. When the students can join all stages, it means that they are engaged in different activities that develop their oral and literacy skill. It is because this task involves listening for details, predicting words, matching spoken to written words, working out what is missing from sentences by using memory, clues from visuals and the context and constructing coherent sentences. It also involves discussion, drafting, and revising a text. It provides a good example of the way in which writing can be integrated with other skills and how pupils can produce writing collaboratively.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study can be regarded as a case study since the researcher explores a single entity or phenomenon ("the case") bounded by time and activity (a program, event, process, institution, or social group) and collects detailed information by using a variety of data collection procedures during a

sustained period of time (Meriam, 1988; Yin, 1989 in Craswell, 2008).

Since this study focus on investigating the teacher's perception, interview is the primary data of this study. The purpose of the interview is to find out what is on their mind—what they think and how they feel about something (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2007). Besides, to enhance the validity of the data, documents analysis is also utilized. The documents were gathered from the students work on writing task.

The participant of this study was an English teacher who responsible for teaching third until sixth grade at a private primary school in Bandung. The reason for choosing the participant was that she had taught English in primary school more than five years. Her experiences on teaching English skill for young learners seems to be appropriate to be investigated.

Data Collection

Interview was utilized to gather the primary data besides documents analysis to support the primary data. The interview was used since one of the aims of **this study** was **to investigate the teacher's** perception of the use of story in writing instruction in young learners' classrooms. It is in line with Fraenkel and Wallen (2007) who state that

the purpose of interviewing people is to find out what is on their mind.

The interview was conducted face-to-face took sixty minutes. There were 25 questions which divided into two parts. The first part included the teacher's perception of teaching writing using story which covers the importance of story in teaching writing, the stages in using story in teaching writing, and difficulties encountered in teaching writing using story; and second, the implementation of teaching writing for young learners which includes the importance of writing in young learners' classrooms, the commonly used method in teaching writing and the teachers' strategy in assessing students' writing.

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Data Analysis

All data were transcribed and subsequently categorized and interpreted in a condensed body of information (Alwasilah, 2002: 229), and lastly conclusion could be drawn. To enhance the validity of the conclusion of the study, data source triangulation (Cohen and Manion, 1994) were conducted, to make contrast and

comparison of all data obtained from different sources, i.e. interview and document analysis.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings here reveal the implementation of the teaching of writing using story in a case study school, which include 1) the teacher's perception of teaching writing using story which covers the importance of story in teaching writing, the stages in using story in teaching writing, and difficulties encountered in teaching writing using story; 2) the practice of teaching writing for young learners which includes the importance of writing in young learners' classrooms, the commonly used method in teaching writing and the teachers' strategy in assessing students' writing.

The teacher's Perception of Teaching Writing Using Story

This section discuss about the importance of story in teaching writing, the stages in using story in teaching writing, and difficulties encountered in teaching writing using story.

The importance of story in teaching writing

As mentioned earlier in the literature review that writing can help students

develop oral and literacy skill in a discourse (Cameron, 2003). It means that story can provide students the activity of writing in the second stage where they can use their cognitive and thinking skill on their writing (Brewster, Ellis and Girard, 2003). However, the following data showed that the teacher did not use story in her class because she thought that the students would get difficulties when stories were used in the class, moreover in writing section.

“I think, it is too difficult to use story in teaching writing. I never use (popular) story in my class, only when they want to join an English competition.”

It seemed to suggest that the teacher had limited knowledge about the use of story in teaching English for young learners. Furthermore, this perception is in contradiction with the findings of Mok, Chow, and Wong (2006) who state that the use of story (as one of language arts activities) in the English class have been rewarded with very positive comments from students and fellow teachers.

Besides, based on the data, the teacher looked like also has limited knowledge about the characteristics of good story to teach English for young learners.

“It must be interesting but, I think, it is still difficult for the pupils to understand the

story. For example, the story Ugly Duckling contains difficult vocabulary for them.”

Simpler Suyanto (2007) highlights the characteristics of story to teach English for young learners, those are if the story is aimed to reach specific goal, the teachers should choose the story that provide repetition vocabularies. Moreover, the stories tell the interesting topic for children. The last is that the plot of the story must be simple and not complicated. It should be appropriate with the students’ language level. Cameron (2003) suggests the features of story can be used to teach English for young learners. ² The first, obvious, key organizing feature of stories is that events happen at different points in time; they occur in a temporal sequence. The other key organizing feature of stories is their thematic structure i.e. ² difficulties or evil are overcome, or a major event is survived.

The stages using story in teaching writing

Teaching writing using story needs preparation and stages that should be fulfilled. Nevertheless, the teacher appeared that she did not have adequate information about the stages in using story in teaching writing to young learners. The following data can be used as prove:

“It depends on the materials, for example, the topic is occupation. I would like to make the students understand about the material

then I will ask the students to answer the questions.”

The data showed that the teacher’s understanding about the stages of using story in teaching writing did not match with the basic procedure in teaching writing for young learners suggested by Brewster, Ellis and Girard (2003: 125) as mentioned earlier in literature review. Actually, the teacher could refer to Cameron (2003) and Suyanto (2007) to select the story to teach English for young learner. Furthermore, she might also refer to basic procedure in teaching writing for young learners suggested by Brewster, Ellis and Girard (2003: 125) to guide her to teach writing using story.

The difficulties encountered in teaching writing using story

From the interview, the teacher admitted that she rarely used ¹ story in her class because she thought that story was difficult to understand because of the strange vocabularies. The following data could be used as a prove:

“The students do not understand the story. For example, they always ask the meaning of the new vocabularies. Even they can not understand the questions and they do not understand how to answer the questions. I think, it is too difficult to teach them using story.”

The data indicated that the teacher faced difficulties in choosing the story that

appropriate to be used in English for young learners classrooms. She also looked like that she had the difficulties in introducing new vocabularies for the students.

The Practice of Teaching Writing for Young Learners

This following section discusses the practice of teaching writing for young learners which includes the importance of writing in young learners' classrooms, the commonly used method in teaching writing and the teachers' strategy in assessing students' writing.

The importance of writing

As mentioned earlier in literature review that writing is important to be taught to young language learners because of two reasons. The first reason is that writing can support the development of other skills. Another reason is that writing is visible (Paul, 2005). The following data could be used as the prove about the teacher's perception on the importance of writing in her class:

“Writing can be taught maximum 50% because writing is hard for elementary students, so the focus is in speaking. The heart of learning activities in primary school is in ‘calistung’ but in English lesson the center is the speaking because there is no one to one correlation between the letter and the sound in English.”

Based on the data from interview, it seemed to suggest that the teacher focused more on the teaching of speaking skill. She uttered that writing is hard for the students so it is better to make them brave to speak in English first.

The activities used in teaching writing

However, when the teacher provided writing activities; whether it was before, while of after they master the oral skills, in a classroom must be considered.

“I think, the students can learn to write after they understand the meaning of the words or sentences. It is better for them to learn about the pronunciation at the beginning. If the students that have literacy skills learn about the writing form of the words or sentences, the way they say English words will be influenced by the Indonesian language.”

However, when the teacher provided writing activities; whether it was before, while of after they master the oral skills, in a classroom must be considered. The important principle at all levels is that children should not be asked to write something that they cannot say in English (Brewster, Ellis and Girard, 2003: 119). It is in line with McKay (2006: 217) who states that ‘Oral language is the foundation for reading and writing’. It means that before the students understand and have the capability

in saying the English words, the students should not learn the written form of the target language.

The other consideration in teaching writing in young learners classrooms is the stages of writing development of the students.

“I ask the students to write greeting cards, making picture and write based on the picture, game, whispering game, the students are divided into some groups then I will tell one of the member of the group a sentence.”

According to Brewster, Ellis and Girard (2003), the kinds of writing activities pupils do tend to fall into two sets in the same way that they do for reading. The first is learning to write and the second is writing activities that involve thinking process. In the learning to write stage, pupils are involved mostly in tightly guided copying which focus on ‘surface’ features, such as handwriting, spelling, punctuation and using the correct words and grammar. Further, they say that copying at this level provides opportunities to practice handwriting, learn and consolidate their understanding of new vocabularies. It is in line with Paul (2005) and Suyanto (2007) who state that in this first stage in developing writing skill, the teacher can ask the students to be engaged in copying activities.

The second stage is writing to learn, there may be less tightly controlled writing activities, moving to much freer or even creative writing where there are higher cognitive demands and a greater focus on meaning and personal expression as well as form. It is supported by Linse (2005) who states that the next stage in writing is using their cognitive skill to formulate ideas and write them onto paper. In this stage, the students thinking skill is needed in accomplishing the task given by the teachers. In doing this task the students will make various writing results, the fluent and correct work is considered.

The assessment in teaching writing

There are some writing assessment tasks that can be used for formal writing assessment, either in the classroom or in external assessment procedures, such as: writing in speech bubbles, writing in response to a picture, completing a story, open response writing, re-forming a text (McKay, 2006). Dealing with the task the teacher used in teaching writing, writing in response to a picture, open response writing, drawing and writing, id cards are used in her classrooms. It seems to suggest that the teacher has used various activities, not

merely answering the questions or filling the gap activities.

Beside the activities, assessments strategies are also important to be considered. In this case study, the teachers used some assessments strategies to investigate the students' development in writing. The teacher used observation in writing process and product, writing conference, portfolio. Further the teacher explained that she paid attention not only in product but also the process of writing. When the students made error or mistakes, she would like to give clue in the mistakes. The following excerpt can be used as evidence:

“I will tell them that there is a problem in their writing. I usually give an underline or circle in the mistake then ask them to change it. Some time they can correct it but some time they make the correct one become false.”

Moreover, she explained that she gave the score and also the score and also the correct one bellow or above the false answer.

The difficulties encountered in teaching writing

The data from interview showed that the teacher did not find any serious problem in teaching writing for young learners. She thought that she only needed some

improvement. The following excerpt can be evidence:

“I have not been satisfied my self toward the result of my teaching of writing. However, it must be fun, simple, appropriate with the materials and acceptable. For time, I think, it is enough.”

However, the data seemed to suggest that actually the teacher still looked for the other interesting methods to teach writing even though she felt that the way she used was enough now.

4.CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the teacher's perception of teaching writing to young learners using story and the practice of teaching writing for young learners in the case study school. Based on the first research findings, the first research question has been answered. The teacher avoids to use story in writing class because of the difficulties of choosing the story and also finding the appropriate techniques in using the story in young learners classrooms. The result of the study also put the demands placed on the teachers to find the stories than can be used in teaching English, especially writing. Story provides authentic and meaningful language that is very beneficial for young language learners as well as

motivation. Moreover, the teacher also requires to get training in using story in English lesson, especially in writing class.

The finding of the second problems also indicates that some various methods and activities provided by the teacher help the students to write not only in 'surface' but also deeper. However, the freer activities give by the teacher have not given the students chance to use their thinking skill yet. The use of story, particularly in primary school should be encouraged and developed to arouse students to use their thinking skill in writing process. The use of story in writing class, such as re-tell the story in written form or write different end of a story may become alternatives activities to enhance the students thinking skill and their capability in understanding a discourse in language use since story provide authentic, meaningful language and language in a context.

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