

Experiential Learning of Future Teachers in Story Dictation for Early Childhood Education

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Abstract: This paper is a part of a bigger on-going research. This study investigates the application of story dictation in the context of kindergarten students learning languages. It focuses on the teachers' perception towards the preparation and implementation of story dictation to uncover important steps. The discussion is divided into two main stages, the preparation stage and the teaching and learning stage. Qualitative method is employed in the study. The research subjects are three future teachers who implemented story dictation in two kindergarten classes. Those teachers are asked to apply story dictation to Kindergarten children in one of Indonesian kindergartens in Bandung. The result of the study reveals some important steps about the implementation of story dictation. The first stage contains some steps, which are, designing a lesson plan, developing learning media, selecting story for exposure activity, designing doodle book. In addition, the second stage includes storytelling as exposure activity, introducing doodle pages, planning story extension, story dictation, revising the story, publishing the story. The study also reveals the challenges faced by the teachers in implementing story dictation. To overcome one of the challenges, doodle book is employed as a modification from the original form of the story dictation.

1 INTRODUCTION

The study is motivated by the importance of critical thinking as one of the skills needed in the 21st century to establish a society with adequate ability of communication, ICT, citizenship and collaboration (Trilling and Fadel, 2009). Furthermore, Wray (2013) states that critical literacy is one of the most important skills for the 21st society. It is believed that the skills can be developed since the early years (Roche, 2015). In the context of early childhood education, story is one of the most suitable media for children (Damayanti, 2007; Brewster, Ellis and Girard, 2002; Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer and Lowrance, 2004; Collins, 1999) to develop their critical literacy (Roche, 2015). Through story, children have the opportunity to relate the context in the story with their own real life (Ananthia, 2010; Kuyvenhoven, 2009). The children's critical literacy skill can be developed through many ways; one of them is story dictation (Gadzikowski, 2007).

Story dictation is happened when stories are being invented by children. Therefore, children are not only being a loyal consumer of a story, but they can also be the ones who create their own stories (Christ, Wang and Chiu, 2011; Vasquez, 2014). In this activity, teacher is the one who will facilitate the children to invent stories. However, the presentation of story to children is still limited to only doing the story-reading and storytelling, especially in Indonesian schools. Even some teachers teaching EFL in Indonesian context tend to not include story in their teaching (Ananthia, 2010; Harun and Ananthia, 2013).

This study involves three Early Childhood Education Program (henceforth it is called PGPAUD) student teachers as future teachers on how they apply story dictation in kindergarten classes. It attempts to identify the story dictation in Indonesian kindergarten from the teachers' perspective as their experiential learning. The study also tries to reveal challenges faced by the teachers in implementing story dictation with young learners.

2 STORY IN THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

The employment of story in educational context has been conducted across curriculum, such as mathematic (Casey, Kersh, and Young, 2004), science (Monhardt and Monhardt, 2006; Pringle and Lamme, 2005; Sackes, Trundle, and Flevaras, 2009), and history (Smith, Noonan, and Guillain, 2016). The using of story is also popular in the context of developing children's language skills and has received big attention (for example Paquette, 2007; Isbel, *et al.*, 2004; and Brewster, *et al.*, 2002).

The attempt in developing children's linguistic skills is usually in relevance with the need to develop their literacy skills. Numerous research have been conducted about developing children's literacy and critical thinking through stories (such as Roche, 2015; Stribling, 2014; Vasquez, 2014). Literacy and critical thinking refers to problem solving ability (Stribling, 2014; Wray, 2013) which recommend the learners to have the ability to create something (Wray, 2013). It makes creativity as one of the indispensable skills in developing critical literacy. This study attempts to identify how teachers can develop children's creativity in inventing story through story dictation.

3 STORY DICTATION IN KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM

In the implementation of story dictation, teachers play an important role in developing children's creativity in making story. It means that the teachers should be able to expose story environment in the classroom so that the students could later on invent their own stories. However, not many teachers are used to the employment of story in the classroom, especially in Indonesian context (Ananthia, 2010; Harun and Ananthia, 2013). Teachers mostly do not have enough self-confident in implementing story in their classroom that makes them to have storytelling in-service training (Groce, 2004).

Furthermore, previous research on the story application in preschool were limited to only how teachers present the story to the children through storytelling and story-reading (such as Groce, 2004; Ananthia, 2010; Harun and Ananthia, 2013; Yuliaratiningsih, Ananthia and Yanthi, 2013).

Studies conducted by Christ, Wang and Chiu (2011) and St. James Lutheran (2017) are among

few researches on how teacher could create opportunity for children to invent their own story through story dictation. Moreover, this kind of study in Indonesian preschool context has not been adequately examined yet. Story dictation offers the opportunity for young children to create their own story as soon as they are able to speak in sentences despite their limited reading and writing skills (Gadzikowski, 2007).

4 RESEARCH METHOD

The paper is written as a part of a bigger on-going research on the implementation of story dictation in Indonesian kindergarten. Qualitative research design was employed in the study. It involved three student teachers as the research participants. In selecting the participants, the researchers published an open recruitment to the PGPAUD student teachers. The student teachers who applied to be involved in this study were then selected based on their skills in doing storytelling using *Bahasa Indonesia*, *Basa Sunda* and English. From the selection process, three student teachers with adequate Bahasa Indonesia, Basa Sunda, and English storytelling skills were recruited as the participants of the study. The participants were asked to apply the story-dictation in the teaching and learning process in the kindergarten context. The story-dictation process was conducted after the student-teacher participants had delivered the storytelling as an exposure activity. In the process of story-dictation, each of the participants were sitting one-on-one with a child, ready with a pen and a doodle page, to write every word dictate by the child, until all of the children got their turn. Therefore, the term story-dictation in this context is not about the children writing what the teacher dictate to them, but more like the children dictate a story created by themselves to be written by the teachers. Observations, field notes, reflective notes and in-depth interview were employed as the data collection methods. The data were then qualitatively analysed by given coding until the themes and key concepts were identified.

5 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Having analysed the data collected in this study, two themes emerged in the employment of story dictation in Indonesian kindergarten, namely, the preparation stage and the implementation stage. The

preparation stage refers to the situation before class, while the implementation stage refers to the process of the story dictation in the class.

5.1 Preparing the Story Dictation

In the preparation stage, four steps were identified. The steps are designing a lesson plan, developing learning media, selecting story for exposure activity, and designing doodle book. The three teachers did not find any difficulties in designing lesson plan, since they were used to design lesson plans as parts of university course. As the student teachers in PGPAUD, almost all courses in the university require them to master how to make a lesson plan. Therefore, as it was confirmed from the in-depth interview, all of the future teachers as the participants of the study conveyed that the step of designing the lesson plan could be handled easily. However, the next three steps were considered as quite challenging.

In the step of developing learning media, the teachers were asked to deliver a story as an exposure for children before the story dictation activity. The teachers had difficulties in selecting suitable stories to be presented in accordance with their context. Unlike in the more developed English speaking countries (such as USA or Australia), the discussion about children literature in Indonesia is not well-researched yet.

There are myriad researches discussing about children stories based on numerous classifications in the context of Western (USA and Australia) children's literature. For example, the themes about gender roles (Peterson and Lach, 1990; Anderson and Hamilton, 2005; Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus and Young, 2006), character building and good habit (Cooper, 2007; Zeece, 2009; Almerico, 2014), science learning (Pringle and Lamme, 2005; Monhardt and Monhardt, 2006; Sackes, Trundle and Flevaris, 2009), mathematics learning (Casey, Kersh and Young, 2004) and language skills (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer and Lowrance, 2004; Paquette, 2007). Those researches could be used as a reference for the teacher in selecting appropriate story books relevance to their children's conditions, in term of cultural and ability. Besides those themes, the discussion of abstract concept and what books to choose is also available, such as the concept of cross-cultural understanding (Al-Jafar and Buzzelli, 2004; Ghosn, 204) and how to develop children's imaginative skills (Hislam, 1995). Therefore, when particular teachers need a particular book to develop their students' skill and ability, they just can easily

refer to those research to choose the right children's story book.

However, different situation was found in Indonesian context. There is not yet a comprehensive research about childrens' literature in Indonesian context. Besides schools in Indonesia are mostly considerer as under resourced regarding the children's literature collection (Damayanti, 2007), they are still few research in classifying the Indonesian children's story books. Thus, more often than not, the teachers in Indonesia also used the Western references in selecting the right story for their students in Indonesian context. After they found the right stories, they still had to adapt them to make them relevance with their students' characteristics. Hence, they arranged the story to be presented in the form of their-handmade-storybook as the learning media.

The last step of this stage was designing a doodle pages. According to Gadzikowski (2007), teacher only needs a piece of blank paper and a pen or pencil in doing the process of story dictation. However the student teachers as the participants of this study were aware that the children would face difficulties in creating their own stories if they began out of nowhere. Therefore the student teachers decided to consider the story dictation as a continuation activity from the storytelling to the story creation by the children. This modification was conducted in our context to make it easier for children to invent their story since this activity is a novel one for them. Besides, there is no wrong way to do the story dictation (Gadzikowski, 2007, p. 3), which makes us possible to have any changes to fit into our condition. Based on the in-depth interview, it was revealed that the participants did not face any significant difficulties. The challenge in this step was more to the technical problem of making the doodle page layout so that the students understood how it worked to stimulate their ideas in creating the story.

After all of the steps in the preparation stage were conducted, the teachers were asked to do a simulation, to practise their storytelling skill. Two of the teachers said that it was the most challenging one for them since they are not used to doing storytelling. This simulation is important since teachers are expected to be a storytelling role model for the children (Gadzikowski, 2007, p. 13). In This step, the participants were asked to conduct a mini simulation in front of the researchers and the other fellow participants. Afterwards, feedbacks of the mini simulation were given to the participants from the researchers. From this step, the participants

difficulties in implementing storytelling were identified. Most of them still have lack of self confident in doing storytelling which affect to their whole performances, such as intonation, clarity, fluency, gesture and facial expression, speed and the volume of the voice.

5.2 Implementing the Story Dictation

The second big theme that emerged in the story dictation activity is the implementation stage. Six steps were identified in the implementation of story dictation, there are: storytelling, introducing doodle pages, planning story extension, working on the story dictation, revising the story, and publishing the story.

The first step of the stage was storytelling. The teachers were doing the storytelling based on the selected story prepared beforehand. The theme of the stories was friendship that was presented in the form of fable stories. The teachers confessed that they were quite nervous doing this in the first week. Moreover, it was the first time the children were with the participants (data from the field notes). Hence, the participants not only faced the challenges in implementing the storytelling techniques, but also keeping the classroom management. However, they started to enjoy this activity in the remaining weeks.

The next step was introducing doodle pages. Doodle pages, derived from doodle book, are set of unfinished pictures that should be completed. Doodle pages were included in this study as a part of modification toward the story dictation to make it fit with the situation. Although it is said that in story dictation children could start their own story from nowhere (Gadzikowski, 2007), but it was difficult when the activity has not become a routine yet. Therefore, doodle pages were employed since it could give context and stimulate children's imagination, fluency and originality of thinking (Dziedziewics, Oledzka and Karwowski, 2013). In this study children were asked to complete the doodle pages. They were given some choices on how they wished to complete their doodle pages. Some of the were given small pieces of pictures to be stucked on their doodle pages, and the rest of them decided to draw their own pictures on the pages. After that they were asked to create their own story based on the completed doodle pages.

The third step was planning the story extension. In this step children were given some time to think and plan the story extension based on the teachers' storytelling and their doodle pages. In the first week, this step was the most challenging for the children.

They mostly did not understand what to do. However in the second and third week, they were used to this activity.

After planning the story, the next step was the heart of the activity, which was the story dictation itself. Teachers were working with children, having one on one interaction. In this step, when a teacher was working the story dictation with one child, the other children had to wait their turn. Therefore teachers had to be ready with another activity for children while they waited for their turn. The most challenging thing from this step was when children were reluctant to speak telling their story. When it happened teacher could give stimulus by asking several question, such as, "how does your story begin?" (Gadzikowski, 2007, p. 42).

Having the story ready from the story dictation, the next step was revising the story. In this step all the doodle pages were gathered. Therefore everyone in the class gave the contribution to the book making from their individual doodle pages. The sequences of the pages were negotiated. After that the teacher and children check the pages and discuss whether or not they want to revise the story. The last thing from this step was giving title to the children work. Two of the teachers stated that this step was one the most challenging steps. Most of the children did not understand the concept of a title for a written work (book).

The last step of the implementation stage was publishing the story made by the children through the story dictation. In this step the teachers compiled the children's doodle pages into a form of a book and read the story to them. This step was the most wonderful one since everyone in the class were happy and proud of themselves that they could create a storybook.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has identified the employment of story dictation in Indonesian kindergarten from the teachers' perspective. The process of implementing story dictation is subject to the context and situation. Therefore different context could apply different stages and steps.

The teachers' experiential learning has also revealed that employing story in the classroom is still a big challenge for the teachers. Therefore, teachers' pre-service and in-service training on

presenting story, doing storytelling and story dictation is recommended.

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