

PRIMARY STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE USE OF FOLKLORE IN THE EFL CLASS

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ABSTRACT

Teaching English to young learners is unique because young learners have different characters with other learners. These characters should be accommodated in learning activities to encourage the young learners enjoy the lessons. This enjoyment makes them involve in the lesson so they get opportunities to practice their language skills. One of the characters of young learners is rich of imagination. The lessons will be more interesting if they have opportunity to use their imagination. Imagination can be included in the lesson with the use of representational language (Mc Rae, 1991). Representational language can be found in some types of texts such as stories and poems. Stories are commonly heard and read by young learners. Some types of stories such as folklore are popular in children world over the course of time. This study aims at investigating students' attitudes towards the use of folklore in learning English. The participants of the study were 126 fifth graders in a private school in Jakarta. In four weeks, they attended the lessons in which folklore was used as the learning material in teaching English. They filled the open-ended and close-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to gather some information such as students' interest and involvement. The result of the study shows that more than a half of the students have positive attitudes. Around 30 percent to 40 percent students have neutral opinions. A number of students want to study English again using stories because it is fun and they like the activities. It can be seen that using stories is useful and in line with children's characteristics. It also shows folklore as the authentic material can be applied in the language class for young learners.

Keywords: literature, attitude, young learners

1 INTRODUCTION

A number of primary schools especially in the big cities provide English classes for the students. It may be done because the schools realize a need to learn English to prepare the children for the globalization era. Besides, they believe the earlier the students learn English, the better their English proficiency will be. Teaching English to primary students is categorized as teaching English to young learners. Those who are interested in this area have learnt that young learners' characteristics should be considered in conducting the lessons to create language learning activities that help young learners learn language

effectively. Some scholars explain how English should be taught to young learners regarding their characteristics.

Pinter (2006) emphasizes the importance of opportunities to interact in English during the lesson. This interaction could be done among students or with teachers. Having this opportunity gives the students experience the real language use especially in the EFL context where the opportunity to use spoken English outside the English class is rarely found (Shin, 2014). By doing so, they use English for the purpose of communication.

Some characteristics of students in primary schools are discussed by Halliwell (1992). The students are able to interpret meaning even though they do not know all meanings of the words. They also have a good ability to imagine. Imagination and fantasy help them to be creative. The lesson that gives them opportunity to use imagination and fantasy makes them enjoy the lesson. In addition, they like to talk in the class. It makes some of them prefer activities that do not focus on doing written exercises. Besides, they enjoy the lessons by having fun. To make them fun, they need to be involved in projects that attract their attention.

Moon (2004) mentions that children use language creatively. In addition, they also use representational and referential language. According to Mc Rae (1991), referential language focuses on delivering information. Representational language appears when the texts represent meanings for the students. It is necessary to use the texts that have both representational and referential language. Some examples of such texts are stories, poems, brochure, etc. Using these texts also gives benefit for students because they contain things related to imagination and it suits to young learners' characteristics. It could appear as stimulus in language learning. The use of stories, songs, videos, and comics facilitates the students to imagine many things.

Some scholars also propose the use of stories in the class. Using literature in teaching English also has an important role in children learning. Vale (1999) focuses on the use of literature that can give contribution in social and emotional values of the students. Through these values, students' language and literacy are developed. One of the simple examples of literature is story. Through stories, they do some processes that help them learn language those are picturing and imaging, predicting and recalling, identification and personalizing, and making value judgment.

Mixon and Temu (2006) argue that the benefit of using stories in language class exists because stories are close to what children experience every day. Stories also contain some moral values that are needed to be possessed by the young generations. Therefore, values are important points in the story-based lessons. The lessons do not only focus on language aspects such as grammar, expressions, vocabulary, or language strategies but also good values that are necessary to have. Folklore is good to be used in such lessons because folklore has universal theme. Wherever the stories come from, they have universal themes that can be accepted by people from all countries (Campbel in Mixon and Temu, 2006).

Other scholars explain the good points of using stories in the language class. According to Ellis and Brewster (2014), the use of stories could motivate and give challenge and pleasure to the students. By doing so, students' positive attitudes towards language learning are increasing. Using stories also gives them opportunity to use imagination that is a part of children's characteristics. While listening to stories, the students share responses such as happiness, sadness, or excitement. They try to share their feelings. In language learning strategies, they practice some skills such as listening for general meaning, predicting, guessing meaning, and making hypothesis. They learn how to apply those skills when they are exposed to the stories. Moreover, stories have

authentic language that supports the process of language acquisition. Stories based lessons facilitate the students to be aware of language use, learning strategies, and sociocultural values.

Martinez (2007) applies story based lessons to a class of a bilingual school. The result shows the role of stories to attract students' attention in learning particular topics, vocabulary, and grammar. Such lessons also provide engaging activities. With more engagement, the students learn more effectively. It is successful to motivate the students learn better.

Based on the review of literature, the scholars mention the benefit that can be gained if the characteristics of children are included in the lesson. It is also found that children' characteristics can be accommodated well through the use of stories. However, children' attitudes themselves towards this issue have not been investigated well. This study focuses on the use of stories especially folklore in the EFL class for primary school students. Folklore was chosen because usually it exists for years and passes from one generation to another one. It shows that it is interesting because it can survive for years. In addition, it has good moral value which gives benefits to students characters' development. This study seeks to answer this research question:

What are students' attitudes towards the use of folktale in the English class?

2 METHOD

The study was conducted in the EFL setting with 126 fifth graders as the participants. They studied in a bilingual school in which English was used as the medium of instruction of some subjects besides Indonesian. They had studied English since they were in kindergarten. For four weeks, various folklore from different countries was given in the English lesson. The titles of the folklore are a baker's dozen, the empty pot, the story of Mr Dungu, and Alladin. They were taken from some websites in the internet and story books.

Based on the folklore, they did some activities such as listening, reading, watching, discussing, acting out, creating a comic, giving comment on others' works, and reading a poem. After that, they were asked to fill the questionnaire that has two parts i.e. open-ended questionnaire with three scales and close-ended questionnaire. In the second part, they were free to answer the questions. The result of the first part was analyzed using descriptive statistics. It was presented in the form of percentage and numbers. After that, it could be seen whether the result is in line with what scholars say. The second part of the questionnaire investigated about what the students remembered most and whether they wanted to study English again using folktale. In every question, the students were expected to give the reasons.

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this part, the finding of the study that was first reported is the result of closed-ended questionnaire. Then, the result of the open-ended questionnaire was presented. In discussing both results, the findings were compared directly to the findings in the literature.

In the first item that asked whether using folklore in the English class gives pleasure or not, 69 students (54.8%) agreed and 47 (37.3%) students felt neutral. There are 10 students (7.9%) that did not agree with this statement. It can be seen that more than half of the students still enjoy the lesson. The lesson still attracts their attention. This finding is in line with what Brewster (2014) and Martinez (2007) mention. Having

pleasure in the lessons makes the students feel comfortable during the process of learning. For young learners, they do not realize that what they do are learning activities. They do not have any burden that might cause them anxious or depressed.

The second item required the students to state whether students' emotional values are included in the lesson. The findings show that the number of students that chose agree and neutral options are same. The number of students who agreed is 51(40.5%), disagree is 24 (19%) and neutral is 51 (40.5%). Based on literature, stories can sharpen students' emotional value (Vale, 1999; Mixon & Temu 2006). They become sensitive with what others feel. In this case, only some students are involved emotionally. Even though it is not a half of the students agreed, the number of the students who agreed is still significant. Some student participated cognitively and emotionally.

In the third item, in which they were asked to give responses towards whether it is fun to act out the folklore, 66 students (52.4%) agreed, 46 students (36.5%) felt neutral, and 14 students (11.1%) disagreed. Acting out the folkltore was designed to make the students actively participated in the lessons. Besides, they are kinesthetically active. They enjoy the lesson that makes them use their body movement. This item was used to measure what they felt while doing hand out activities like acting out. In this activity, they used spoken English to interact when they performed. It was expected that they felt happy with the activities in which acting out was done based on folklore. This finding is relevant with what is mentioned by Pinter (2006) that the young learners enjoy interacting with others.

In the fourth item that investigated whether they learn better through folklore, 69 students (54.8%) agreed, 51 students (40.5%) were not sure, and 6 students (4.8%) disagreed. Vale (1999) explains that some processes that support the language learning happen when stories are used. It helps them learn better. Based on the finding, around half of the students stated that they can learn better through stories. It is in line with what Vale (1999) explains. The students view that it is more effective for them to learn language using folklore. The use of authentic language and interesting topics encourage them to learn better.

Responding to the fifth item whether they use creativity, there were 64 students (50.8%) who agreed, 50 students (39.7%) were in the middle position, and 12 students (9.5%) disagreed. Although it is only around a half of the students that agreed with the statement, this finding is still relevant with what Moon (2004) states. According to her, children have capacity to be creative. This finding shows a support to use folklore in English class in relation to students' creativity development. The students try to use their creativity to accomplish the tasks.

In the sixth item in which the students were asked whether they like to discuss the stories or not, 55 students (43.7%) agreed, 52 students (41.3 %) were neutral, and 18 students (14.3 %) disagreed. The purpose of discussion is to encourage the students to use English for communication goals and identify some elements of the stories. They discussed the characters, the settings, and the moral values. This finding also shows that 43.7 per cent of the students have positive attitudes towards discussing the stories. According to Halliwell (1992), children enjoy talking to others. They might enjoy this activity because it gives them opportunity to talk when they share ideas.

In the seventh item asking whether they use imagination, it shows that 60 students (47.6%) agreed, 51 students (40.5%) were neutral and 15 students (11.9%) disagreed. This finding is relevant with what McRae (1991) & Halliwell (1992) discuss that the use of stories can give positive effect because it encourages the students to imagine. Even though, it is not until half of the students agreed with this statement but

among three scales (agree, neutral, and disagree), more students agreed than felt neutral and disagreed.

In the last item, the students were required to give responses whether they enjoy the activities in which they create other stories based on the main ideas in the folklore given. There are 67 students (53.2%) who agreed, 48 students (38.1%) were neutral, and 11 students (8.7%) did not agree. In this activity, they learn English especially in productive skill. Based on the result of this finding, more than half of the students enjoy this activity.

There are two questions of open ended questionnaire. The first question asking about what the students remember most, their answers vary i.e. the folklore, characters, and activities (act out the folktale, sing, make stories with friends, make comics, and tell the story). They remember those things most because the lessons are funny and make laugh, exciting, interesting, and easy to remember. In addition, they were also impressed by particular activities related to the stories such as drawing, rapping, reading a poem, and watching other groups' performance in reading a poem or acting out. Two students answered nothing in the question what you remember most. One of them answered that s/he was not good in remembering folklore and the other wrote that the folklore is not interesting.

Responding to the second open ended question whether they want to study English using folktale, among 126 students, 21 students did not want, 5 students were not sure, and 4 students did not really want. For those who enjoyed the activities, they wanted to use folklore again because they felt happy and excited, learned better and easier, and knew more folklore. Those who did not want have negative attitudes. Three students stated the problems are with the folklore. One of the student mentioned that h/she knew the folklore (Alladin) before it was learned in the school. Another student gave reason because the folklore was horrible. It can be said that using new folklore that the students do not know anything about it has particular benefit. It attracts more attention. It makes the students feel curious. They may not think that they know and then they feel that they do not need to pay attention. Some students mentioned it is boring. Moreover, they did not like stories or English, had stories at home, preferred other activities such as watching movie, learning from textbook, or playing games. Some students gave answer that shows that they did not like stories before and the lessons could not change their attitudes.

From the findings, in each item of the open ended questionnaire, there are 40.5-54.8 % of the students gave positive attitudes to the use of the folklore. They enjoy the lessons and have fun in the class. Their emotional values are also developed through the folklore they read or listened. This process makes them feel that they learn English better. In the process, they use their imagination that makes them creative. In some learning activities such as discussing the folklore and writing stories, they use English for the real purpose.

The usefulness of using folklore also depends on the activities. Majority of the students like the activities such as drawing comics based on the stories, acting out, reading out the poem, and discussing the folklore with friends. It also shows that such activities encourage them to involve in the lesson. They practice their language skills and use vocabulary and grammar by doing some projects. However, a few numbers of the students prefer other activities. It can be implied that the activities provided are not appropriate for a few students.

Folklore used in this study can be categorized as story that was not created for language teaching activities. The folklore is authentic materials. The students were exposed to real language use. The result of open ended questionnaire shows there is no statement indicated students' difficulty dealing with authentic materials. As has been

stated by (Ellis and Brewster, 2014) such use of materials with appropriate learning activities help students to acquire English. They use English to accomplish some tasks that have a goal. The acquisition process is also supported by the learning activities. The learning activities were designed to make the students practice the language by considering young learners' characteristics. In this acquisition process there is no particular place in which the students learn grammar and vocabulary. Vocabulary was learnt incidentally. In some lessons, paper works such as word search was still given to the students. It aimed at giving more practice opportunity for the students. Having such learning activities makes the students practice their English without thinking so much on language aspects. These activities also help them to focus not only on written languages but also spoken languages. The English class is the most possible place for them to use spoken English. In the learning activities, they practice some points of spoken languages such as pronunciation, intonation, and communication skills that help to share their ideas and understand others. These processes might be what make the students feel that they learn better. Working with groups or in the pairs also has influence on students' learning process. They interact with friends and through this interaction they learn how to use language for communication. They help each other and discuss what to do in order to do the tasks. This activity also encourages the students to acquire language.

As a number of students mentioned so many times about feeling fun, interesting, and exciting and a few students wrote negative attitude shown by the use of words boring and shame, it can be stated that what develops their feeling or emotion in the lesson is important. It influences whether they want to learn with this particular materials or not. The students did not write clearly what parts of the lessons that make them have particular feeling. It could be the learning activities that did not suit to them. There are 34 to 36 students in the class and they have different learning styles and preferences. One of the students mentioned feeling shame. Most activities in the lesson required them to study in a group to do a project or perform. It could be the case in which the student does not have enough confident to do the projects. In this case, the teacher or friends may support the students to do the activities confidently.

From the open ended questionnaire, the aspect of imagination can be seen in one of the students' answer. The student gave answer towards the reason of why they remember most. This student remembers the story of Alladin most because Alladin flew with the magic carpet. This part of the story is in line with his imagination to fly. Another student answered that s/he remembered most the story of empty pot because when learning this story, s/he imagined that s/he was in China in which the setting of the story happened. The importance of imagination has a pivotal role in children's learning. In this case, the power of imagination encourages the students to learn. From the students' answers, it is proved that children tend to use imagination and the use of imagination is effective enough to arise students' interest. When they imagine, it is also related to something that gives particular feeling that is exciting and interesting to them. In this case, it is something that the students dreamt about.

In the aspect of emotional value, the student remembered most the story of Mr Dunggu because of the value that was learned from the story. From this story, three students learnt to be honest. They realized the importance of having honesty. They learnt this character based on what the main character in the story did. Based on the folklore, the students concluded that the honest character is the role model. To achieve this understanding, the students follow some processes including synthesizing. Synthesizing information makes them able to understand the values in the story. Besides honesty, another value written by one of the student is wise. This student remembered most one of

the character of the folktale because s/he learnt to be wise to solve problems. From the examples, it is not only students' cognitive but also students' emotion is involved.

4 CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

In each questionnaire item, around a half of the students (40.5-54.8%) had positive attitudes towards the use of folktale in the class. Around 36.5-41.3% of the students were not sure. A few of the students (7.9-19%) gave negative responses. Based on close-ended questionnaire, more than a half of the students enjoyed learning English by using folktale. They were still enthusiastic to learn English using folktale. Besides, a number of the students were involved in learning activities. They felt excited to learn. However, there was a few of students did not suit to the learning activities. Therefore, it is suggested to provide more various learning activities that cover all students learning styles. The folklore has moral values and the students understand the values through the lessons delivered. The lessons encouraged them to understand message, setting, plot, and the content. It is an effective method to help the students learn important values to develop their characters. Having the students listen to the folklore that they never listen or read before is also necessary. It might keep them paying attention and become more curious. The use of folklore also proves the benefits of using authentic materials. Authentic language use does not discourage the students to learn. Even though they do not understand all meaning of the words, no one of them mentioned that it was hard. It is in line that meaning interpretation does not need require the students to understand words by words.

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