

Project-based Drama Learning: A Model for Improving Students' Reading Achievement

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Abstract: This study aims to find out whether or not Project-based Drama Learning could improve students' reading achievement. Project-based Drama Learning allows the students to learn cognitively, affectively and physically because they did critical reading, character analysis, class discussion, essay writing, script-writing, casting and team formation, hot-seat interview, team presentation, drama practices, rehearsal, and drama in stage. One pretest post-test experimental group design was used with the intention of finding out the difference of reading achievement before and after the students learned through Project-Based Drama Learning. The sample was 20 students enrolled in Literature in ELT course at English department at one state university in Palembang. To collect the data, reading test was given to sample before and after the treatment. The results showed that the average score for pretest was 56.05, and the mean score for the post-test was 62.40. T-obtained was 5.146 while Df = 19, with a significance value of 0.000. With a significance value of 0.000 which was lower than 0.05, it can be concluded that there was a significant improvement in students' reading achievement through Project-Based Drama Learning. Conclusively, Project-Based Drama Learning can be an alternative in teaching reading to EFL students.

1 INTRODUCTION

Language and literature learning is a unity. When a teacher teaches a language, there is obviously a learning material in the form of literary works, such as poetry, short story, drama, or novel. Conversely, when teaching literature, the language aspects should also be explained for literary appreciation, literary analysis or criticism. Exploring aspects of language in literature classes can be done by analyzing the language used in literary texts or by using language (speaking and writing) to discuss literature. Therefore, language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing are not separate parts of literary teaching. When there is separation of language and literature, the result is that literature will be neglected. Yet, many benefits that can be obtained from learning or teaching literature.

There are several benefits of literature learning that can be achieved. In general, these benefits include: 1) cultural enrichment, 2) language modeling of authentic material, 3) language enrichment, 4) self-reflection or character building (Parkinson & Thomas, 2000; Hismanoglu, 2005; Musthafa, 2008; Alwasilah, 2014). Concisely, by studying literature,

students will involuntarily and intentionally recognize new vocabulary, sentence structures, tone and different language styles which can then be used as the models and can be applied in interaction. In addition they also benefit from experiences such as cultural experience, ways of thinking, emotional experience, which allows the occurrence of mindset or character building.

In this manner, literature learning provides an important role to all learners from the level of kindergarten to college. As Mustafa (2008, p. 201) states "At the global level literature has at least a dual role: as a vehicle for students to compete internationally as well as national and even local or regional identity". This means that literature learning actually will not be cracked with the times and can be used as a means of character building of learners.

As a result, research in the field of literature has been in great demand and conducted by scholars including those whose interest is in the field of foreign language education, such as English. They attempt to examine how literature can be used optimally in improving English proficiency. In their efforts, they use one of several literary genres, such as poetry, short stories, legends, novels, fables, and

dramas each of which has its own uniqueness. Ganesan et al (2016) explain that the use of novels as learning materials in the language class makes learners rich in language, personal or emotional, intellectual and cultural experience. This can be done with extensive reading and or close textual analysis. With certain techniques, short stories can also develop the ability to speak and listen in English (Khorashadyzadeh, 2014). Meanwhile, Erkaya (2006) states that reading short stories can improve almost all language skills, such as reading, listening, speaking and writing, including vocabulary development. Erkaya also mentions that short stories can increase motivation, critical thinking, and cultural enrichment. Pourkalhor and Kohan (2013) conducted a 10-week experiment with a group of short story reading and another group reading other texts. The results showed that groups who read short stories get better results. Another influence of the use of short stories in English learning is that students can improve critical thinking skills (Young (1996) cited in Pourkalhor & Kohan, 2013). Similar to short stories, poetry, and novels, drama also has a positive effect on English learning.

Drama has been applied by many scholars for English language teaching. They use it for the sake of improving students' English ability (Shokri & Philip, 2013; Bengtsson, no date; Rew & Moon, 2013). Drama offers students opportunities in making better their reading and speaking skills (Hismanoglu, 2005; Miller, 1996 cited in Gungor, 2008). In addition, students' English language skills might be improved because the features in drama allow them to learn affectively, cognitively and physically (Bengtsson, no date).

Reading skill is one aspect of literacy. Literacy is basically defined as the ability to read and write, in addition to definitions referring to openness to the development of science and technology. Reading skill has a major contribution to students competence in society. To achieve this, one must be able to recognize letters, words, sentences and the interrelationship among them in order to create meaning. California Task Force (2002, p.2) reports that reading is the most superior academic skill and is the foundation of other academic skills. Furthermore, reading is a meaningful activity that does not only involve visual symbols but also knowledge of the world and linguistics (Hood, Solomon, Burns, 2005, p. 3). In this case, past knowledge and experience influence the development of meaning. Because of this, the reader also has the right to show disagreement and or agreement on the text s/he reads. The concept ultimately leads to the fact that actually

reading activities are cultural activities and social practices.

Reading literary works (narrative) requires different skills with other text reading skills. In literary works, there are figurative language, diction, literary device, symbol, which cause the readers to respond, think and interpret critically in accordance with the knowledge and experience they have. In addition, reading literary works usually involves the emotions or feelings of the readers to what happens in the text.

Reading skills of the students of English department, Sriwijaya University, according to the writers' observation, was quite good. They can comprehend texts well. But they got problems when it involves deep analysis and critical thinking. In this case, practice is needed to improve their achievement, especially with regard to reading and responding orally to literary works. Reading and responding to literary works requires thinking critically, understanding hidden meanings, recognizing language styles, and literary devices. To determine level of reading skills of the sample students, reading achievement is used as the the basis for measurement.

Since drama can be a good option for teaching language, the writers have started to apply it in the classroom from 2011 to 2015. At those times, the writers observed that the students gave a positive attitude to dramatic activities. Generally, students enjoyed it; they were motivated; they read in details drama materials or novels; they recognized new vocabulary and sentence structures; they discussed, thought critically, learned to define good characters, expressed opinions on the basis of their knowledge and life experience. Moreover, they felt excited and challenged because their drama (as a class project) should be performed and watched publicly. However, it was quite hard to guide the students as the instructions for teaching through drama in several references is more focused on language development denying other skills such as performance skills and teamwork skills.

To solve this problem, Project-Based Learning was chosen as the method which can create natural contexts for developing performance as well as teamwork skills. Project-based learning allows students to actively explore topics or problems that exist in everyday life so that they will get maximum results. Project-based learning is an easy way for students to overcome a problem with their own experience with "know" and "do". Moreover, Project-based Learning can help lecturers to improve classes with high performance where lecturers and students form learning communities that focus on

achievement, personal understanding, and contribution to the community. Through Project-Based Learning, students will find many new things about themselves and the world around them.

In language education, Project-based learning provides benefits in the form of a learning process that produces products. In the process, students practice self-confidence and self-esteem, and practice collaborating. Through learning method like this, students have the opportunity to improve language skills. This was stated by Haines (1989) cited in (Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009) that in Project Based Learning "Students engage in purposeful communication to complete authentic activities, they have the opportunity to use language in a relatively natural context".

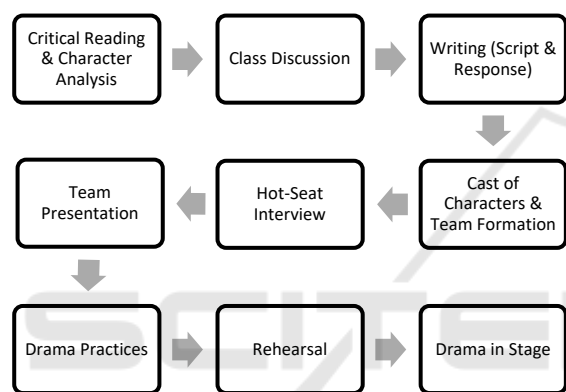


Figure 1: Project-Based Drama learning frameworks.

Considering the benefits of conducting drama activities and Project-based learning above, a learning method called Project-Based Drama Learning was designed. It is an integration between the use of drama as a technique for English language teaching and Project-Based learning. It is a learning process through a classroom-based drama whose ultimate goal is to stage a play after a series of activities like: reading critically the texts, analyzing characters, discussing, writing scripts, observing characters, having auditions, forming team work, practicing roles, and having rehearsal and performing in stage. In one semester, students prepare everything for staging dramas by forming a team work (players, directors, scriptwriters, photographers, costume, make-up character, music arranger). This method, as can be seen in Figure 1, offers an effective and systematic procedures for guiding students do the project. Teachers and lecturers in college level, especially teacher trainee will get advantages: 1) learn all the four skills (reading, speaking, listening and writing), 2) develop their personality, 2) learn how to

collaborate, 3) learn English in natural context, and 4) develop their potential.

The Project-Based Drama Learning begins with Critical Reading where students read novel or drama, and build interpretation, analysis and evaluation to the story. Lecturers will give some of the model questions for critical reading and then they will ask themselves about the facts in the story by comparing it with their background knowledge, experiences, and with other connected texts. The questions that might appear: *Why does the author write the story? What is his or her purpose; who is the author's intended audience? Or will you do the same thing if it happens to you?*. The second step is character analysis. It is when the students characterize major and minor character's personality by having questions: *who is the surgeon?; What kind of person he is?; Choose 3 adjectives that describe him?; Explain why do you choose those 3 characters!; is there any evidence in the story that support your argument?*. The third phase is class discussion. Class discussion is an activity in which the students share their personal response to their peers and find out that their perception could be different with others. The fourth stage allows the students to write their responses in an essay and to write the script of the drama. The fifth is to select major and minor players through cast of characters and to form managing team such as director, script writer, creative team, costume team, photographer, camera man, publishing team, property team and music arranger. The selected individuals or team are responsible for the role they got and must develop their roles during the preparation. To evaluate students' understanding, each role or team should report the progress of their work. The last two steps are drama practices in class and rehearsal. This phase may take five meetings or more. They practice roles in class and then practice at the stage before the performance. The final step is performing drama in stage. It is when the students show their work, talent, and product to public.

By doing the procedures, there should be impact to students' language skills. This present study, therefore, aimed at finding out the students' reading achievement before and after being taught by using Project-Based Drama Learning and whether or not there was significant difference of students' reading achievement before and after they were taught through Project-Based Drama Learning.

2 METHOD

To address research objectives, experimental research method was used in this study. The selected research design was one pre-test post-test experimental group design. This design allows the writer to identify whether or not Project-Based Learning Drama could effectively improve students' reading achievement. The Project-Based Drama learning was done to compare students' reading achievement before and after the treatment.

In this study, the population was all students of English department in academic year 2014 2015. Meanwhile, the research sample was 20 fifth semester students who were chosen through purposive sampling technique. That was the students who took Literature in ELT (English Language Teaching) course.

2.1 Data Collection

Data collection was done by giving reading test to the experimental group. The test was administered before and after treatment. In this reading test, the students were asked to answer 30 items of non multiple choice or essay test by comprehending three stories: *The Tales of the Three Brothers*, *Getups*, and *A Letter to God*. The items consist of three types of question. They are interpreting (*How did the author feel about her clothes?*), describing (*Describe Lencho's farm at the beginning of the story!*), and restating (*Who were the three brothers?*). To assess the response, reading comprehension/ or critical thinking questions rubric was used. The rubric evaluated categories like general description, language use, and topic development with range of score 10 to 30 for each category.

2.2 Validity

To achieve research objectives, the test instrument was checked for its validity. In this study, validity testing was conducted by examining the relevance of the objectives and materials about the reading test with the curriculum, RPS (Semester Lesson Plan), and SAP (Course Teaching Unit) used by the study program where the research was done. Additionally, the reading test was validated by examining the level of difficulty and the appropriateness of the reading test items. The results indicated that the test had a degree of difficulty and conformity that was proportionate and feasible to be given to the students.

2.3 Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, the calculation with t-test, especially paired sample t-test was used. Paired Sample t-test was used to find out whether or not there was a difference in students' reading achievement before and after being taught through Project-Based Drama Learning. In addition, SPSS version 22 was used for calculation. To convert raw scores, the categorizations from Handbook of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sriwijaya University 2009/2010 was used.

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After the calculation of raw scores using the rubric, the maximum score that was possibly obtained by the students was 90. The score was converted to a range of 100 value by dividing the score of the true number by the total number and multiplied by one hundred. From the calculation, the frequency of students' score category was obtained.

Based on Figure 2, 45% of the students before treatment were still classified as poor readers. After treatment there was an increase, only 30% were categorized as poor. There were about 40% of the students who got average score during pretest, and there were 35% of the students who got the average score at post-test. Furthermore, 15% of the students were categorized good readers at the time of pretest and 35% were categorized good at post-test. In the meantime, no student has the ability to read with a very good predicate on the pretest and post-test.

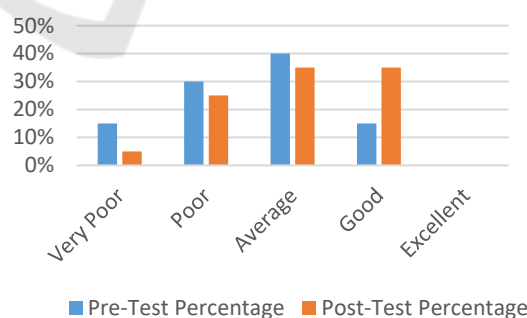


Figure 2: Score category percentage of reading test.

3.1 Statistical Analysis

Table 1 shows the result of statistical analysis with Paired Sample t-test. It was found that the average score for pre-test was 56.05 and the average score for

the post-test was 62.40. T arithmetic obtained is 5.146 while $df = 19$, with a significance value of 0.000. With a significance value of 0.000 lower than 0.05, it can be concluded that there was a significant increase of students' reading achievement because of the use of Project-based Drama Learning method.

Table 1: Statistical analysis with paired sample t-test.

Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Mean	56.05	62.40
Standard Deviation	12.800	14.207
Standard Error Mean	2.862	3.177
t	5.146	
df.	19	
Sig.	0.000	

3.2 Discussion

As revealed in the introduction section, Project-Based Drama Learning is able to improve students' reading achievement because it gives the students a chance to critically examine the text in order to implement the class project: drama performance. Students read, responded, thought and critically interpreted the plot or the theme, the symbol and especially the character of the story in accordance with the knowledge and experience they possessed. Specifically, in this study, the students analyzed the character traits, and gave reasons to explain these traits. Through such reading skills, students could recognize and understand the nature and personality of the characters and at the same time help them how they should be later when playing the story characters in the drama staging project. In each activity of Project-Based Drama Learning, students independently and continuously referred to the texts

they read in order to have deep understanding so that they can deliver the message to the audiences who watched the drama performance.

The fact that Project-Based Drama Learning is able to improve students' reading ability is supported by Hismanoglu (2005) who states that the drama activity "facilitate and accelerate the development of the work's plot and a deeper comprehension and awareness of its characters. Meanwhile, Miller (1996) cited in Gungor (2008) states that "students not only read what is in the text but also 'live' in the text", a process that leads to a better understanding. The advantage of learning method with Project-Based Drama Learning is that students can practice language according to context for a particular communication purpose naturally (Haines, 1989 cited in Fragoulis and Tsiplakides (2009).

Thus, it can be concluded that Project-Based Drama Learning with a series of activities that include critical reading, character analysis, class discussion, essay writing, casting, hot seat interview, team report, rehearsal, stage performance can improve students' sample reading achievement.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Conclusively, there was an increase in students' reading achievement when being taught through Project-Based Drama Learning. Students initially had the ability to read at low level, but after learning with Project-Based Drama Learning, their ability increased to average level. Project-Based Drama Learning gives students opportunity to read and re-read the literary texts selected from which they develop their project.

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