

PLAY PERFORMANCE SUBJECT FOR NON-LITERARY STUDENTS: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGY

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Abstract	Article Information
<p><i>Mastering English language skills can be quite challenging for students in any levels, including college students. To answer the existing problem, there are many introduced techniques in building students' language skills. One of the techniques of learning is using role play or play performance. This study aims at investigating students' perception of Play Performance, as a subject taught in semester four, in improving their language skills namely Speaking, Reading, Listening and Writing. This study uses qualitative approach which requires students to fill out the written open interview of how they perceive the subject. The findings are positive. Majority of students respond that Play Performance subject help them improve reading, listening, writing and speaking skills significantly. The improvement boosts their confidence in using English in their academic activities.</i></p> <p>Keywords: Play Performance, Polytechnic, Language Skills, Confidence, Self-Expressions</p>	<p><i>Received:</i> 30/08/2024</p> <p><i>Revised:</i> 03/09/2024</p> <p><i>Accepted:</i> 13/09/2024</p>

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, mastering English is not considered as option but obligation due to the demanding professional scopes and social interaction with different types of personal backgrounds. As learners and work forces to be, students are challenged to build the communication skills meaning to master the four language skills in its as a possible maximum level. In responding the rising demand and normality in mastering English language skills, teachers are challenged to provide varieties of techniques in the firm intention to equip learners with multifaceted edges in learning environments.

English language itself has transformed itself to be more dynamic and gone through dramatic changes (Renandya and Widodo: 2016). The usage of English in different settings has initiated teachers and academic pundits to versify different sorts of techniques and ap-

proaches in fulfilling such demands. An old method in teaching English, or all kinds of languages, has been put into cages. Thus, it is proper to claim that student-centered learning becomes an answer to welcome the new era of teaching and learning perspective.

In accommodating the view of more progressive way in teaching and learning English, student centered learning has been offered in revealing the beneficial points in that dynamic relation between teachers and learners. Jacobs et al. (2016) proposes more than ten elements in justifying their views about student centered learning. Teachers are not the ones who know everything but learn with students to fill the gap each other. Teachers as encouragers facilitate and motivates students to collaborate with their peers to build the mutual learning environments in classes. In that engineered situation, students are hoped to participate and express ideas, make new connection, provide examples or even to disagree. It is called learner autonomy. The ideal goal of student-centered learning, borrowing Felder and Brent's perspective is to boost students' latent power in their lifelong learning not only in classes but outside (1996:43).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Role Play, in this context Play Performance unit, has been integrated into one of a number of English subjects at Politeknik Tonggak Equator, Pontianak. This subject is firstly viewed a bias but the principles behind the introduction of this study unit in the curriculum should be testified as answering the challenge of creativity in providing as provoking by holistic approach in the student-centered learning. Play Performance unit of English based units for students to improve their language skills has been seen challenges for non-literature students' background. In the event of this study, students' perception on Play Performance subject will be the key point of this study.

The goals of this unit are meant to grab some output points. First, this units prepare students to use English in a higher event of performing scripts in different contexts. Students are provided with simple to advanced scripts to enable them to express their English performance in suitable atmosphere based on the text setting. Second, Play Performance is one of learning techniques to facilitate students to take a higher challenge than speaking unit learned in the previous semester. In this stage, Play Performance requires more holistic aspects of speaking elements such as voice variation, character to voice interpretation, and voice projecting, to name some. These require innovation and creative language expressions. Third, this unit should be called fours aspects language challenges, which triggers students to maximize their language skills in practices namely speaking, listening, reading and writing. In this ideal concept, students should progress from listening to others, read scripts, perform scripts and write a piece of scenario of their owns.

It should not be complicated to claim what Play Performance could offer in learning contexts. In the initial stage, it is agreeable that student centered learning offers more freedom for students to express what they feel: agreement and disagreement. Student's autonomy is fulfilled in the persona of Play Performance. This conception can be simply traced in connection to the four stakes of language skills.

Listening is not as simple people may consider. Students of English as a foreign language may struggle in identifying sounds and words, let alone the meanings. Biber (1988) discloses the challenges of listeners may face in dealing with listening comprehension. Fast speech rates, unfamiliar accents, transient information or colloquial usages are some obstacles in listening comprehension encountered by non-English speaking listeners.

The listening comprehension challenges are not only triggered by external factors as stated above, some internal issues can be also hindering listeners such as listening proficiency, background knowledge and motivation (Samuels: 1984).

Play performance answers the very stage of human language skills called listening. In a very primitive way of human beings' learning a language is hearing and recognizing sound pattern. By simply listening a certain line with different tonal expressions, students can identify what kind of emotional aspects to label at. A sentence "are you happy now?" can be expressed to different tonal aspects. Students may pinpoint the sentence as polite asking to angry investigation. Students can detect the characters based on the voice they detect.

Play Performance wraps all sentential utterances in contexts. Students are put into a certain setting. In the process of performing scripts in a class, some speak while others listen. After comprehending and digesting what they listen, they can manufacture the understanding. The beauty of the process that listening becomes more contextual and fruitful as they express their opinions based on what they understand. Hence, listening is process through audio and visual expressions.

The reality stated above could be consistently related to the theory of post listening that it answers some purposes. Richard and Burns (2012) call the post listening phase can be utilized to confirm comprehension, clarify uncertain points and reflect listening problems. Thus, after listening others' performances, students can recite what they have attained using their ears and eyes, and also obstacles they may face in understanding the performances. In such a communicative and flowing environment of learning, the performers will acknowledge what they may short of. In this chained relation, listening triggers further language learning for others that are performers or speakers.

Compared to listening, speaking is considered more challenging as an active skill. In speaking, students are judged by several factors. A competent speaker is said to be able to utter various sentences with numerous vocabularies, to express them in context with grammatical accuracy and to be able to choose and construct utterances, to name a few. The demand is quite from top to toe. Speaking is definitely perceived as dynamic interactions of mental, articulatory and social processes (Goh: 2016). Speaking competence is then ruminated as not only a simple matter of word and sentence coming out from one's mouth as a result of the process of articulators but also the results of mental processes and experiences. It is about controlling and handling internal and external factors.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted through two tools namely observation and interview. Observation was carried out through class meetings in a semester of one class consisting of 27 students. During the academic activities in class, students were observed in related to the subject teaching. Besides intensive observation, subjects of study were also asked to fill the written interview. The answers were then analyzed. For some insignificant answers of the written interview, oral interview was also conducted to clarify the grey area of the written answers. The approach utilized in this study was qualitative involving observation and written and oral interview.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The complexity of Play Performance, even in a simple script act, triggers students to unleash the potentials. In classes, students have to understand what the script is about. Characters and problems should be identified in the process of comprehending the content. Students then figure what kind of characters and contexts would be. The reflection of the issue and characters is fully digested by each student as everyone should be connected to bring the script alive.

In this stage, it could be stated that the speaking, including acting and other gestures, is the manifestation of processing the reading comprehension and output. As it is contextual, this requires more than producing sounds and lines. The deliverance should be containing not only the contextual utterance, but also emotional aspects in regards to the characters and situation. Hence, it is firm to say that the speaking skill in this unit will gather all possible components students may achieve and afford. It is not only utter in-contextual and loosen sentences yet meaningful to suit the characterization and story line.

How is about reading in relation to Play Performance unit? This is significantly obvious that all commences with Reading aspects. Reading script is surely classified into Extensive Reading. This holds the facts that reading script should not be seen as telescoping details yet reading to sense the holistic part of the script, and then follow with the manifestation of what has been comprehended. The very unique comprehension in this reading type is knowing how to deliver what is understood on characterization, contexts and make them alive in performance magic.

Reading script is continuous efforts until one penetrates oneself to the character spirit. All should not stop there but giving back all process to the audience. This requires deep understanding on the characters and interpretation. Consistency should be added to the speaking outputs. Audience or listeners can judge when the speaking is carried out. Is the voice too weak for that character? Is the emphasizing on lines missed out? Is the character wrongly presented? There can be more than dozens of criticisms to state.

Reading in Play Performance subject can be more interesting and challenging than normal readings. Reading, in this case, can be claimed as reading for the next phase of outputs namely speaking as a part of performing. Reading in Play Performance shapes not only silent

reading but it is also very much about reading out loud that includes sound management, voice projecting and feelings.

After discussing listening, speaking and reading skill in Play Performance, writing will be the next target to specify. Writing is always considered to be closely related to Reading. Young (2008) states the key premise that writing is the clarification of what one has read and understood. This is simply said that writing should be the proof of reading and understanding result. Play as a part fiction, requires interpreting, a deeper form of mere understanding.

Writing as a component of four language skills is also viewed the most challenging and complex skill among others. Writing has been more challenging time to time. It was time when the success of writing was measured by the length (Crosley et al., 2011). It could be viewed in a different of success by seeing the variety of vocabulary (McNamara et al., 2013). Some linguists claimed that the successful writing meant fewer errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation (Ferarri et al., 1998). Above all, the successful writing is then considered to contain non-technical elements called stylistic factors such as choice of words, sentence complexity, text cohesion and length (Yin, 2016, p. 181).

Teaching language skills should be isolated by merely focusing on one aspect. The target of all units offered is to produce graduates who are ready to compete and fulfil workplace demands. It was well said by Jaidev and Blackstone in Renandya and Widodo:

“... it was noted how important it is for soon-to-graduate university students to have experiences that allow them to develop their personal brands and shape their language and communication styles through practising the requisite skills and competencies (2016, 295)”.

Similarly, Wee (2008, p. 263) added that:

“The nurturing in students of “self-based authenticity,” or the individual’s ability to project confidence, commitment to the task at hand, trustworthiness and sincerity in professional contexts, is “achievable with sufficient practice” through planned and carefully designed classroom activities”.

From both this could be simply concluded that all university subjects are obligatory to meet the target of preparing its graduates to be ready in the work place. This firmly means all strategies in delivering subjects should be subject to the professional demands. In brief, teaching strategies should be well planned and executed.

Play Performance as a subject in this vocational institution also experiences the same demand as other subjects may be required. Teaching higher education students is to shoot the target of employment and professional end. Play Performance, even though is not meant to produce play performers, actors or script writers, is set to accomplish the same mission of confident graduate of the work force. Graduate who are able to perform certain levels of language skills as prescribed by the specific required outcomes set by the institution. This is where all should start and end.

Teaching Play Performance to the non-literary students is challenging. It should start with the rationalization of the course purpose itself. Some of the students taking the obligatory subject asked “what is the correlation between Play Performance to our study program?”. The skeptical mind grew further by a question “Do you want us to manage and hold a play performance in campus?”. The questions are relevant viewing the existence of this subject to among other “normal” subjects is debatable.

First of all, considering the nature of students of this vocational institution, this subject should be said to have no hidden ambition of manufacturing either actors, performers, script writers or play critics. Students may forget that language mastery could be achieved using different kinds of media and techniques. One of the techniques of teaching is using play or role play. Students should understand that using Play Performance as the tool in learning and mastering language skills is not abnormal in teaching and learning field. Play Performance subject neither aims at students’ memorizing theatrical theories.

Second, it is wise to tell students what is required in the subject and kinds of activities students to do in the class. Students should unleash all potentials that may be hidden in the body and be brave in expressing emotional aspects to support the learning. As Play Performance, or simply said role playing, requires more than the ability to pronounce and speak but to deliver them in artistic manners based on the students’ levels. This is back to the nature of this subject of no ambition to produce actors but to improve language skills. Among other subjects, Play Performance can be beneficial in emotional expressions that leads to self-expression in performing characters.

Thirdly, Play Performance is about shaping confidence. It is not only confident in performing script, but also in real life. Considering that students lack fiction related activities, let alone performing experience, Play Performance subject can be treated a confidence therapy tool in revealing the hidden selves, escalating the esteem that students may have but mis-explored. The bravery in drawing faces, using properties and costumes and changing tones in speaking – or laughing and crying like hell – is something special in emotional outlets and personal statements that one is ready to explore any possibility in that subject. This is doubly offered by other subjects.

Fourthly, Play Performance subject is about everything it could reach. The strategy opens the 101 possibilities. Talking about language skills, it is undeniably a good example about integrated teaching and learning from reading script, interpreting story and characters, line production, voice projecting, non-verbal acts such as facial expressions to gestures and values through coding characters. To add these, exploring and surveying character’s appearance and behaviors are not always nonsense. This phase requires intensity in bringing a character to life.

Last but not least, the students are also trusted to give inputs and judgments based on what they have learned in the class. In this case, the topic “Analyzing and Evaluating Play” in their meeting will equip them with knowledge how to criticize the play including script and performance. This will give the students different exposure from reading to writing as

they will be examining the script, watching group performances, taking notes and revealing their opinions on the script and performance.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Play Performance as a subject is a complete weapon to offer for students. It involves for language skills in process and achievements. In the simultaneous process of learning, students are stimulated to use reading, speaking, listening and writing skills. The activities can be set from silently reading scripts to get the situation and mood. Performing by reading the script out loud using the interpretation. Bringing the character to life. Listening to other characters' lines. Giving inputs to other groups' performance. This can be enhanced by writing simple scripts and critical pieces in oral and written ways. Learning through contextual mode invites more challenging and involvements of learners. Contextual sentences can be derived from scripts. Characters are stationed by their destiny in the script. Antagonists are hardly to say things in such a good way and polite manner. Lines with hatred and evilness are for those who become the enemies of the truth in the script. Protagonists are destined to have proper lines. Lines are contextualized according to the characters and are connected to build the context. There is no way inconsistency happening that antagonists utter good lines and protagonists shout bad words. Lines in script are alive to support the facts about characters that will not be found in the school text books. Teaching values should be plotted in any level of education. Play Performance could boldly take part in the spreading human values. Through story lines, one can learn about the good and bad and societal and cultural complexity. The personal and societal problems are effectively sensed through stories. The good point about plays or play performance is the entertaining part as it blends different elements in revealing truth, taking away the rigid written propaganda. It can provoke laughter as well as tears and angers. Performers can learn different values through scripts. All can be summoned in the simple words called artistic and aesthetic values. Elements evolved in the play performance are various. It requires actors to perform well all characters from supporting and leading casts. It requires good sound and costumes. It also demands properties from hats to beds, and in a more complex set, it may bring old artifacts to support setting. All elements are detailly planned and executed no matter in the campus rooms to the theater halls. Artistic and aesthetic achievements in play performance do not only accept applauses and standing ovations, but also the contemplation about life values and humanity.

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