
STORY-BASED READING: AN EXPLORATIVE CASE STUDY OF STUDENTS' ORAL RESPONDING IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses how students' story and story-based reading can stimulate their oral responding to students of non-English Department. Exchanging life experience was used as a task that stimulated the students to share ideas based on the story they read. This activity was intended to encourage them to speak and explore their management skill. The action done would affect their oral responding, specifically fluency. Employing qualitative method, this study involves eleven out of forty first-year students of non-English Department at Siliwangi University. The authors illustrate how the activities were employed in the class and the students' impressions taken from written responses. This study is a reflection developing teachers' innovation and creativity in the EFL Context.

Keywords: teaching through story, oral responding, reflection in critical qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

It has been a general assumption that the most essential language skill to possess is speaking. Commonly, individuals think that by having speaking skill, they can show their language skills, particularly in public contexts. However, this notion should be criticize as everyone can utter some words even talk about ideas because of knowledge owned. The knowledge is absolutely reconstructed through many ways of input, for instance, reading, listening, observing, and many more. Reading as one of the factors constructing the knowledge should be experienced well by students in order to build the other language skills. Therefore, the practice of reading in the target language (TL) is crucial. Several studies suggest that learners of a second language should read intensively in the TL in order to acquire adequate vocabulary thought to be the key element of L2 learning (Abdelilah-Bauer 2006; Nation 2006). Thus, it is clear that reading adds the vocabulary and by acquiring the vocabulary, the core element in learning, they can improve their language competence.

The proved benefits of stories motivated us to use them in the class. Stories, which represent a series of events, have been considered a mode of thought (Bruner, 1991), a communication strategy, and a form of expression. There is also strong evidence suggesting that story is an important tool for learning (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; McLellan, 1996). As a psychologist and an interactive designer, Donald Norman (1993, p. 129) asserts that stories have the uncanny ability to "encapsulate into one compact package, information, knowledge, context, and emotion". To actualize this package,

students produced stories based on the reading topic they have read. Thus, students are engaged well in the learning process. Engagement is needed to make the students actively involved so that they could get positive outcomes (Trowler & Trowler, 2010). The students' ability to speak well proves that critical thinking can be promoted through content familiarity and schemata (prior knowledge) because these aspects shape the range and depth of argumentation (Stapleton, 2001 as cited in Widodo, 2013). For those reasons, the authors get the students involved in the story reading since it has been suggested as a tool in learning not only to get knowledge but also to connect the context with their feeling that will engage them in responding the reading orally.

The story of personal experiences usually grabs students' attention. They become interested in not only what the story is about, but how it relates to them personally. It may give them a better opportunity to connect to a more personal kind of learning; it can be a fundamental way of making discussions more meaningful; and it may aid in helping students feel more confident in their understanding of the subject matter (Buffo, 2015). Hence, it is expected that after the students read the stories of personal experiences, they are stimulated to respond to the text orally, share related life experience, and discuss it. Through all the activities mentioned, their fluency and confidence in responding orally are improved gradually.

This study explores story-based reading as a means to cultivate students' oral responding which is not instantly obtained from an effortless process. It needs a method that encourages students to think openly but critically. This learning method is known as think aloud. Think aloud helps to enhance students' thinking process and to understand what they comprehend; it allows readers to connect meanings and understanding with the text (Ortlieb & Norris, 2012). Thus, think aloud is involved to make the students respond orally.

METHOD

This is an exploratory case study which identifies and explains the use of personal experience readings to the oral responding fluency and confidence. A case study helps to explain both the process and outcome of a phenomenon through complete observation, reconstruction and analysis of the cases under investigation (Tellis, 1997). The study was conducted in one meeting which was 100 minutes (two credit hours). One of the authors of this study was the teacher who applied this study in the class. So, he was an insider, while the other authors were outsiders. The participants were eleven out of forty first-year students of non-English Department, from a University in Indonesia. Their English proficiency is estimated to be at the pre-intermediate level. The activities conducted in the class were: the students got the reading about managing stress and discussed it; they wrote their own experience about stress in their study; the students' writings were exchanged with the writings of other students from other classes; the students who read then responded and gave solutions according to their own point of view toward the written problems orally.

FINDINGS

Learning Process

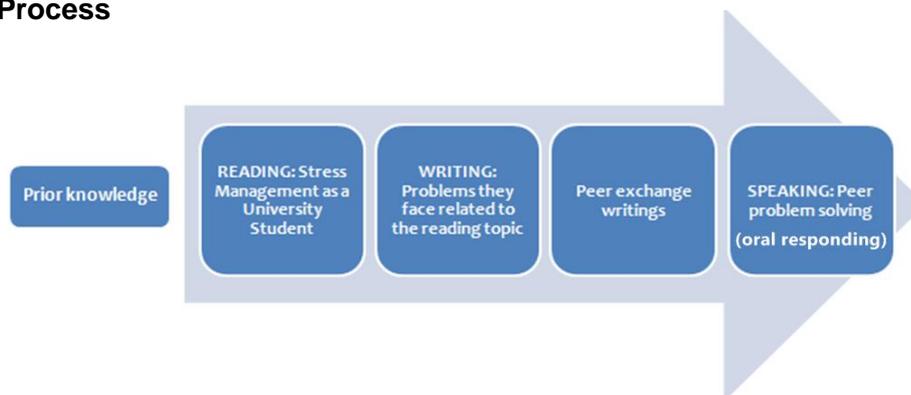


Figure 1. Learning process

The students were asked to read a text about stress management as a university student and discuss it with their friends. The insider author chose this topic both to engage students because this topic relates to their own life experience, and to make them realize that, as management students, they need to manage themselves first before managing others or their business. Then, they were asked to write about the problems they face in their study. At this stage, they engaged more because they lived in the story that they wrote. After that, they exchanged their writing in order to feel their friend's story and to give responses and solutions. This is the last stage of the activity. At this stage, the students tried to reconstruct their prior knowledge to give oral responses about the solutions of their friend's problem.

Analysing the Data

The data were collected in the form of audio-taped recording. Then, it was analysed by verbatim analysis. There was a 50 minute audio-taped recording which the authors analysed in this study. Having the transcription of the data, then it was closely observed whether it indicates the fluency or not. The authors used the term of speaking rate as the fluency indicator in this study. As Howes states, the use of 'words per minute' can be used as a measure of speech rate (as cited in Nadeau, 2000; Nation & Newton, 2009). Moreover, Howes adds that the normal speech rate (fluent) ranges from 100 to 175 words per minute (wpm) (as cited in Martins, 1991). Nation and Newton (2009) added that a fluent language involves pauses; they are filled pauses, like um, ah, er and unfilled ones.

Table 1. Speaking rate

Students/Gender	Speaking rate	
	(word per minute/wpm)	(syllable per minute/spm)
A/f	105.543	116.173
B/m	108.775	117.84
C/m	105.409	129.886
D/f	98.499	121.983
E/m	53.044	77.391
F/m	54.286	82.857

G/m	115.879	141.631
H/f	118.181	130.303
I/f	113.208	142.367
J/m	97.783	138.201
K/m	107.988	112.426
Mean	98.054	119.187
SD	22.843	21.8445

In addition, not only from wpm, but fluency can also be the ability to speak up without any hesitation, in coherent, creatively, and imaginatively (Fillmore, 1979, as cited in Brown 1995). Below are the examples of what they have spoken.

Excerpt 1

“The problem is he can’t do.. cause he doesn’t eh he can’t **mmm..** manage her daily activity, and for solution, first, maybe Dimas should clarify to his parents and he should ask and discuss it with his family what the causes that make his family doesn’t give any permission again **and...** Dimas has to be brave and don’t forget to pray to Allah. And second, for Dimas’ problem with his friend, he shouldn’t be afraid.... he just tell the reason that he can’t.. he can’t do his promise and Dimas doesn’t need to be afraid to apologize, to apologize. I’m sure Dimas’ friend will understand. And the last, for task problem, Dimas has to finish it when Dimas has time, and tries to make his daily schedule and..and... sets one hour or more time to do his task.”

Excerpt 2

“Assalamualaikum Warohmatullohi Wabarokatuh. My name is Robi Maulana Nugraha and I got the problem from Ferina Aulia Suparman. The problem comes from her family. The distance from her home to this campus is very really far. And she has to, **ummm**, have to help her parents to open the snack shop and have to sell out and serve the customer and also her parents quarrel every time. The problem implied to her score, **ummm**, got bad score in the campus. In my opinion about the distance from her home to her campus is not a big problem because everyone maybe has long distance too but they enjoy it so she can enjoy...**uhhh** so that is not a big problem if she can enjoy it and I can suggest her to ask her parents, like....one, say if you can’t help your parents in shop like before. Maybe you can help them, but not like before or maybe you can just help them for three hours. And two, ask your parents to understand you, ask her politely and so you have to understand them. You have to know why they quarrel. And she got a lot of tasks, about her time for rest is disturbed by her task but she can, she have time in weekend to vacation with her parents. That’s the point. You can talk to parents about their problem, so if the parents’ problem is over, you can enjoy the activity in university. So, the point is you just have to enjoy your activity and the activity will be simple.”

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our findings show that story-based reading to students’ fluency on oral responding impacts on the reduction of speaking anxiety and their speech rates show that most of them (63.64%) are in the fluent category. In line with Levelt’s proposition (1989, as cited in Goh

2016) that speech production involves three phases: conceptualization, formulation, and articulation. All participants have revealed that they were able to make a simple speech, personal responses as a proposed, regarding the problem their friends faced, in which it was passing three phases as what Levelt's conceptualized. Competent speakers express their ideas clearly and appropriately dealing with the context. They can organize what they have spoken effectively and also articulate the sounds produced while having a spoken activity intelligibly (Goh, 2016).

How Students' Fluency is Cultivated

The non-English Department students were not afraid to speak up. Their fluency was cultivated because they were engaged well in the learning process started from the reading activity. The reading material about managing stress as a university student is a thing they often experience; thus, they understand it more. Learner-centered as learning determines that here students experience the topic of the learning material. It can also be seen that students knew more about the knowledge, and the teacher facilitated them although the teacher actually depended on them. To prevent speaking anxiety like *I'm afraid to speak and I do not know how to start it*, the teacher stimulated them by questioning them related to personal experiences with the aim to make them think critically and clearly. It is a strategy of instruction by teachers to model for students the thinking process (Dunston & Headley, 2002); this in turn can help promote comprehension (Block & Israel, 2004). It also helps to enhance students' abilities of the thinking process and understand what they comprehend, and it allows for the reader to connect meaning and understanding with the text (Ortlieb & Norris, 2012). This effective method is known as think aloud. It makes them enjoy the learning process. They do not feel like it is a formal question-answer as a test; it feels more like a daily conversation. Thus, students have a role as speakers and listeners in order that they are truly engaged. When students can speak up well, it proves that critical thinking can be promoted through content familiarity and schemata (prior knowledge) because these shape the range and depth of argumentation (Stapleton as cited in Widodo, 2013). Therefore, the teacher's task here is building students' experiences (Jacobs, Renandya, & Power, 2016). In addition, this learning process makes students reconstruct their prior knowledge about stress management. They learn not only from their own experience but also from their friends'. There is no 'display question' or for questions to which teachers already know the answers (Jacobs, Renandya, & Power, 2016) in this learning process but share experiences and ideas. Hence, students and teacher have new information. Especially the students, they have the new knowledge.

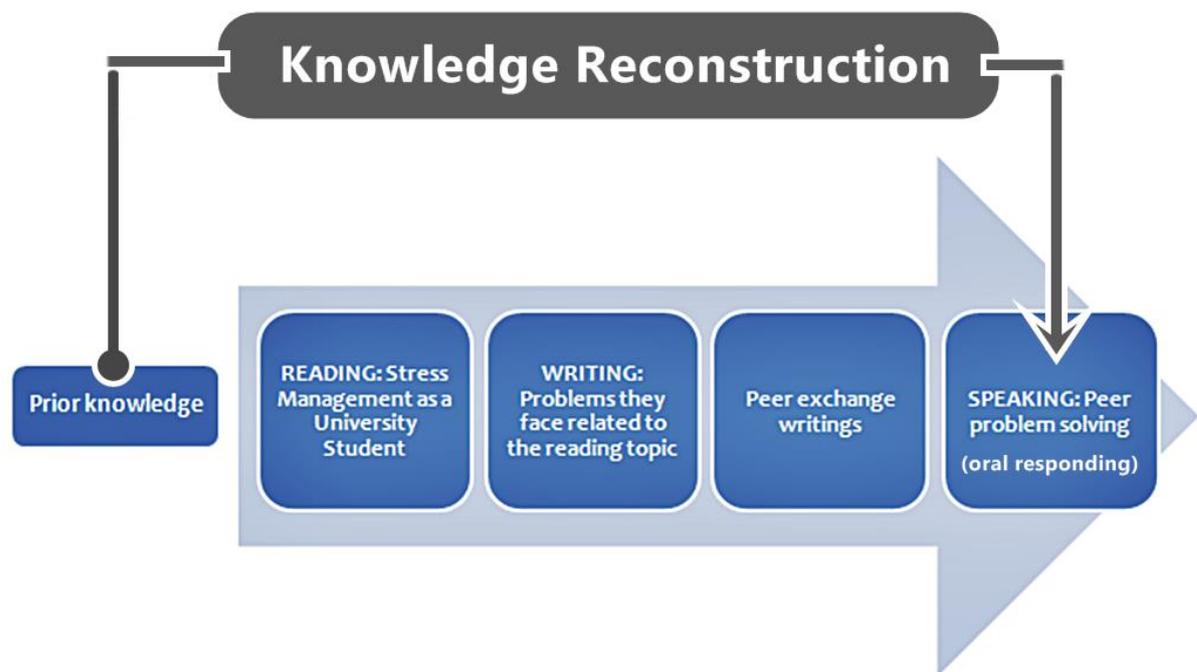


Figure 2. Knowledge reconstruction

Later, it ended up with a fact that the engagement in learning process involves such as cognitive, behavioral, and relational engagement can make students understand more that they are into it (Davis, Summers, & Miller, 2012). Teacher has a role not as a source of the learning but as a facilitator or a guide. Thus, students have a role as collaborators, not only as listeners but also speakers. Also, the assessment focuses on their performance not through a test evaluation.

As a suggestion to enrich the research data, students' responses as reflective writing or in the form of a questionnaire are required to reveal their feeling after the learning process. They can give their opinion about the learning process and any suggestion to improve the learning method. As the data are rich, we can also investigate the phenomenon which happened in this teaching-learning process.

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