Proceeding Suswati Cek

by Suswati Hendrini

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON THEIR LANGUAGE SKILLS' IMPROVEMENT AFTER FOLLOWING POETRY-BASED GRAMMAR LESSON

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Abstract. Grammar lessons are usually perceived as unimportant by many students. As a result, they often consider that grammar is just for grammar itself (as an end) and not for communication (as a tool). The students seem to understand the grammar rules very well when learning the rules in the classroom. Unfortunately, they cannot apply those grammar rules in real-life communication. In fact, the grammar lessons do not contribute to their English skills. This might happen if the grammar lessons are not interesting and unmemorable for them. To create interesting, memorable grammar lessons, English teachers should use methods that can make the students able to use the grammar rules either in the classrooms or outside of the classrooms. Therefore, the writer and her colleague tried to create a new method called *Poetry-Based method*. The method was designed and developed through R & D after the researchers' deep analysis on their students' need of grammar lessons. The developed method was practiced in grammar classes for ten meetings. This method seems to improve the students' language skills based on the researchers' observation during the grammar lessons. To ensure the improvement of the students' language skills, based on the students' own perception, the data of the research were collected through an interview and a questionnaire. The research results show that the students' language skills are improved significantly.

Keywords: *Improvement; Language; Perception; Poetry-Based Method; Skill; Student*

Introduction

Grammar is usually perceived as unimportant by many students and is easily forgotten by them after they learned it. Many students learn it just for itself (as an end) and not for communication (as a tool). As a result, after entering a grammar lesson, the students will forget the learned grammar easily. The students seem to understand the grammar rules very well when learning the rules in the classroom. Unfortunately, they cannot apply those grammar rules in real-life communication. In fact, the grammar lessons do not contribute to their English skills. This might happen if the grammar lessons are not interesting and unmemorable for them. To create interesting, memorable grammar lessons, English teachers should use techniques or methods that can make the students able to use the grammar rules either in the classrooms or outside of the classrooms. Therefore, interesting and memorable techniques or methods should be found or created.

One possible method to create and to implement in language class rooms is *Poetry-Based method*. The method was developed based on the students' need of grammar lesson. The developed method was implemented in Grammar IV subject. To find out the students' opinion about the new method, the students of each class were interviewed. The students said that the new method was really interesting. The interesting characteristic of the new method is not enough without contributing to the students' grammar mastery and their ability to apply the grammar in their daily life. Since it takes time to know the true effect of the new method, a questionnaire was distributed to the students to find out the students' perception of their language skills' improvement after being taught through the method.

Therefore, this paper discusses students' perception on their language skills' improvement after following poetry-based grammar lesson.

Method
To collect the data of the research, a mixed-questionnaire was used. The questionnaire consisted of fifteen questions comprising thirteen closed-ended questions/items (questions 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13) and two open questions/items (question 4 and 15). The closed ended questions were used to find out the students' perception about their capability in English grammar (question 1), their level of interest in learning English grammar (question 2), their desire to improve English grammar ability (question 3), their level of interest in learning English grammar using poetry-based techniques, the positive effect of poetry-based techniques on their ways in learning English grammar (question 6), on their vocabulary mastery (question 7). In other words, the items of the questionnaire were used to get the data of the students' perception on language components and language skills before and after being taught through *Poetry-Based Method* (PBM) to find out whether it can improve the students' language skills based on their opinion. The data were analyzed by applying descriptive statistics.

Findings and Discussion
Findings
The data of the research show that the students perceive that they improve in several aspects. There are some positive effects of the use of the poetry-based methods on interest, their ways in learning English grammar, their vocabulary mastery, their listening, their speaking, their reading, their writing, their translating skills, and on other sides of the students. Even though there are several aspects that are perceived as improved, the focus of this paper is only on the students' perception on their language skills improvement.

Question 9 tries to find out whether the students perceive that their listening ability is improved after following poetry-based grammar lesson. The data show that 88.78% of the sample perceives that their listening skill is improved.

Question10 finds out on the improvement on the students' speaking ability after following poetry-based grammar lesson. The finding is that 95.92% of the students perceive that their speaking is improved.

Question 11 finds out on the improvement on the students' reading ability after following poetry-based grammar lesson. The finding is that 93.88% of the students perceive that their reading skill is improved.

Question 12 tries to find out whether the students perceive that their writing ability is improved after following poetry-based grammar lesson. The data show that 97.99% of the sample perceives that their writing skill is improved.

Question 13 finds out on the improvement on the students' translating ability after following poetry-based grammar lesson. The finding is that 97.99% of the students perceive that their translating skill is improved.

The data of the perception of the students' language skills improvement can be seen in the following table:
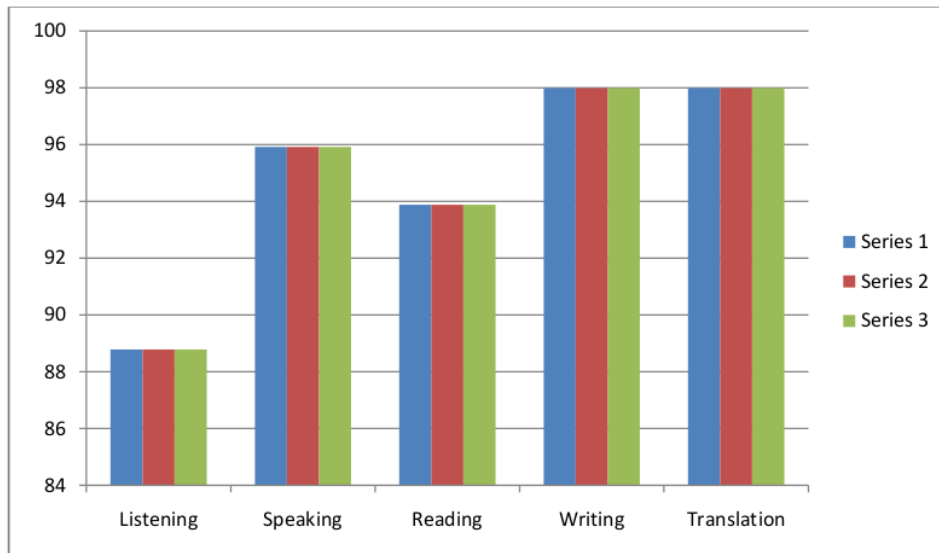
Discussion

According to Collie and Slater (1990:3), there are four main reasons which lead a language teacher to use literature in the classroom: valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement. Some other factors requiring the use of literature as a powerful resource in the classroom context in addition to the four main reasons: universality, non-triviality, personal relevance, variety, interest, economy and suggestive power and ambiguity.

Poetry is a kind of literature. Saraç (2003:17-20) explains the educational benefits of poetry as follows: (1) provides readers with a different viewpoint towards language use by going beyond the known usages and rules of grammar, syntax and vocabulary, (2) triggers unmotivated readers owing to being so open to explorations and different interpretations, (3) evokes feelings and thoughts in heart and in mind, and (4) makes students familiar with figures of speech (i.e. simile, metaphor, irony, personification, imagery, etc.) due to their being a part of daily language use.Poetry for teaching is helpful because it works well as a catalyst over mind. It is often called '**balm for soothing mind'**, similarly it's a versatility make learning motivating, memorable and involving the whole classroom (Mittal, 2014).

PBM is a method of teaching grammar using literature (poetry) as the basis of teaching learning process. The research findings above show that that the students perceive their language skills are improved by PBM. It can be seen that most of the students perceive that their language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating skills) are improved.

The first skill that is perceived to improve is the students' listening skill. Boyle (1984: 85) mentions some factors affecting listening comprehension: motivation, sense of purpose while listening, attitude, and level of interest, listener power attention, and concentration. The activities of PBM might have increased students motivation to learn, and have changed their attitude toward grammar. "As enjoyment plays an important factor in any learning process, literature is a potentially useful aid to the language teacher"(Short and Candlin, 1991: 91). The use of literature in teaching a foreign language can increase

students' enjoyment, and students' sense of achievement (Mishan, 2005:108). Several factors that can affect students' English achievement: motivation, attitude, interest, learning habit, and self concept (Djali, 2008: 101).

The next skills that are perceived to improve are the students' speaking and reading skills. The improvement in the two language skills might be caused by one of the activities in PBM, namely poetry citation. This is done in a relaxed manner (pleasure reading). There is good evidence that pleasure reading has a powerful effect language acquisition (Krashen, 1989). Several factors that influence reading ability: prior knowledge, interest in reading and the strategy used (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990).

The improvement of the students' language skills might be caused by the activities conducted during grammar lesson using PBM that can increase students' motivation. According to Harmer (2001:51) motivation in learning is essential to success, without such motivation we will almost certainly fail to make the necessary effort. Therefore, teachers must try to influence their students' continuing participation. Harmer (2001:53) points out three areas where the teachers' behavior can directly influence their students' continuing participation: goals and goal setting, learning environment, and interesting classes. In PBM, the lessons are conducted interestingly. To introduce new grammar points, the teacher uses poems that can invite students' curiosity, creativity, and high-order thinking skills. All of the poems-- *How Green I Was, A Randesvous, Do you Miss Me?, I Need You Badly, Know Your Idol, and Stop Your Jealousy*-- which were composed by the researcher herself seem to be interesting, and meet their needs and expectation. Besides, the relaxed teaching-learning process of English grammar seems to change their attitude toward grammar learning.

In this method, the teacher assigns the students to do several tasks like reciting a poem, comprehending the poem, listening to the poem recitation, translating the poem line-by-line individually, composing a new poem either in unison or individually, and criticizing other groups' poems. Those activities are run in a relaxed situation and full of enjoyment. Content-based activities is intrinsically motivating (Brown, 1994:44). Therefore, teachers might strive to focus their students on interesting, relevant subject matter content that gets them linguistically involved with meanings and purposes. Content-based activities is intrinsically motivating (Brown, 1994:44). Therefore, teachers might strive to focus their students on interesting, relevant subject matter content that gets them linguistically involved with meanings and purposes. Furthermore, Elliot, Kratochwill, Littlefield, and Travers (1996: 342) state that students' motivation is affected by anxiety, attitudes, curiosity, locus of control, learned helplessness, self-efficacy, and cooperative learning. McInerney and McInerney (1998:174) explain "curiosity is stimulated by situations that are surprising, incongruous, or out of keeping with a student's existing beliefs and ideas.

The used texts (the poetries) have also increased the students' curiosity, creativity, and high-order thinking skills. These all contributed to motivation to learn (APA Task Force on Psychology in Education in McInerney & McInerney, 1998: 172). Moreover, in the teaching-learning process of English grammar through poetry-based techniques, they are provided with optimal condition of learning to make the students pay attention. All of the students use their optimum effort to finish the assigned tasks based on the teacher's blank-poem. All the activities are in line with the basic principles that Thornburry (1999: 25-27) suggests: (1) the E-Factor or efficiency, and (2) the A-Factor or appropriacy of any classroom activity.

The improvement of their language skills might also be caused by the presentation of grammar points using three ways: teaching grammar from rules, from examples and through texts (Thornburry, 1999). Besides, in the teacher-made poems, the level and the age of the students, next the theme and the length of the poem, and its appropriateness to the classroom objectives were also considered (Saricoban, 2000).

Conclusion and Suggestion

Based on the previous explanation, it can be concluded that the students perceive that their language skills are improved after being taught through Poetry-based Method. This indicates that the students have positive perception on the grammar lesson that they have experienced. The positive perception that the students have after following the poetry-based grammar lesson proves that they have changed their attitude on grammar lesson toward a positive direction.

Since the results of this research is positive, it is appropriate to suggest that English teachers or English lecturers who teach grammar to use poetry-based method for teaching grammar. It is expected that the same results will also be yielded.

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