

## Conference Paper

# Promoting Higher Order Thinking Skills in Storytelling for Teaching English to Young Adolescents in 21st Century

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### Abstract

This paper presents research findings focusing on: (1) how Higher Order Thinking Skills in storytelling is promoted to teach English to young adolescents; (2) how students can gain some benefits from their learning; and, (3) some challenges faced by English teachers and strategies to anticipate them. An ethnographic study with three instruments was applied to collect the data. Three classes of three different schools were selected as the participants. The analysis reveals that HOTS started to be promoted to teach English to young adolescents throughout all learning sessions through various strategies: questioning, mind-mapping, brainstorming, role-playing, questioning, discussing, and creating new ideas composed in storytelling. The students found this learning model to be enjoyable and interesting because they can deliver their ideas critically worry-free. They could also relate their prior knowledge and experience. However, the teachers faced some challenges in promoting this model due to their linguistic competence and lack of experience in implementing HOT. Therefore, to anticipate the challenges, the teachers are motivated to continue their study and join some teacher development programs (seminars, workshops, and teacher trainings) to promote HOTS. By doing so, the teachers may obtain sufficient teaching exposures in implementing this model.

**Keywords:** 21<sup>st</sup> learning, curriculum 2013, english teaching, higher order thinking skills, storytelling

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## 1. Introduction

There have been a lot of supports given to improve the education quality through supporting facilities; however, learning process, especially the language learning one, was given less attention. Based on researcher's observation of several English learning processes in Junior High Schools, the teachers remain utilizing conventional techniques during their teaching process: standing up in front of the class to talk, while students are listening to their explanations; and asking questions, while students are answering the

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questions. Furthermore, many were not aware that students started sleeping when they were talking (Setyarini, 2011).

From a learning activity, the students should be well-trained to be critical learners who are always aware with all goals and tendencies of the writers (Krathwohl, 2002). To realize the objectives of language learning, therefore, every language subject should be presented through the text which covers critical arguments of the writers, analogical reasoning of their ideas and some moral values that can be gained through their critical thinking (Cameron, 2001). Consequently, the earlier integration of HOT makes the readers, the learners, not only catch the information from the written sentences in the text, but also understand the implicit meanings behind the text by identifying, analyzing, and evaluating some tendencies of the writers (Krathwohl, 2001). In addition, Limbach and Waugh (2010) pointed out that those students with higher order thinking skills can manage their life well without making problem to others. This statement is supported by Ivvie (2008, cited in Yen and Halili 2015) who highlighted that the students with HOT could have different perspectives when facing obstacles in their social life. Furthermore, Nunan and Bailey (2009) underlined that HOT can create a meaningful learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Higher order thinking skills

In educational context, Higher Order Thinking Skills involve a complex judgmental thinking and other skills which are beyond the common thinking that require students to analyze, evaluate, and create. It has been one of the modern issues in 21<sup>st</sup> century of education around the world and was believed that to train decisive, open-minded individual with fragmental qualities referred as activities for critical thinkers (Elder & Paul, 2008).

This notion is supported by King, et al (2012) who claim that Higher Order Thinking Skills are grounded in lower order skills such as discriminations, simple application and analysis, and cognitive strategies which are then linked to the prior knowledge of subject matter contents (vocabulary, procedural knowledge, and reasoning patterns). Appropriate teaching strategies and learning environments facilitate the growth of Higher Order Thinking Skills as do student's persistence, self-monitoring, and open-minded, flexible attitudes. Higher Order Thinking Skills have been defined variously depending on the

subjects and contexts these terms are used. Some of them argue that HOTS deal with uncertainties, independencies, and flexibilities related to the context as quoted below:

The challenge of defining “thinking skills, reasoning, critical thought, and problem solving” has been referred to as a conceptual swamp in a study by Cuban (Lewis & Smith, 1993) and as “century old problem” for which there is no well-established taxonomy or typology. In addition, explanation of how learning occurs have been viewed as inadequate, with no single theory adequately explaining “how all learning takes place” (Crowl, Kaminsky & Podell, 1997, p.23)

Moreover, Lai (2011) mentions that HOTS have been identified as one of several skills necessary to prepare students for their secondary education. Higher Order Thinking Skills are also believed as a main tool for encountering education or daily lives. Meanwhile, Crowl et al. (1997) explain Higher Order Thinking Skills as part of the process of evaluating the evidence collected in problem solving or the results produced by thinking creatively.

Considering several major concepts related to Higher Order Thinking Skills, overall there are three assumptions about thinking and learning. First, the levels of thinking cannot be unmeshed from the levels of learning; they involve interdependence, multiple components and levels. Second, whether thinking can be learned without subject matter content is only a theoretical point. In real life, students will learn content in both community and school experiences, no matter what theorists conclude, and the concepts and vocabulary they learn in the prior year will help them learn both Higher Order Thinking Skills and new content in the coming year. Third, Higher Order Thinking Skills involves a variety of thinking processes applied to complex situations and have multiple variables (King et al, 2012, p. 12).

### 3. Implementing Hots in Storytelling

The use of storytelling in teaching practices is also implemented by many practitioners due to some various and interesting activities that can be done (Wright 2003). Besides, some basic principles about developing Higher Order Thinking in classroom activities have been formulated by some experts; Limbach & Waugh (2010) considering the active learning environment, Puchta (2012) highlighting students’ characteristics and potential, and Yang, et al (2016) investigating retelling story effect on students’ HOTS. The activities of HOTS in storytelling can be classified into three phases: before, during and after the story with some considerations that underline activities to be performed in the classroom (Wright, 2003).

The first stage is pre-activity or activity before story. According to Wright (2003), the success of a storytelling depends on what a teacher does before he or she begins. It means that story enhances students' comprehension and participation towards storytelling performance (Yang, 2016). In this stage, the purpose is to make students familiar with the stories through activating student's prior knowledge and experience on the stories (Wright, 2003).

The next stage is activity during story which mainly involves activities aiming to engage the students, maintain their attention and assist them in understanding the story. These activities place the learners as active participants in the storytelling (or story reading) process (Georgiou and Verdugo, 2010 in Soleimani & Akbari, 2013). The intention during this stage is to gain students' attention and active participation on the story. It is in line with Yang et al. (2016) who believe that higher level of thinking can be gained through active-learning environment provided in the classroom in which the students are placed as the learning sources and the thinkers make the learning process run well. Yang et al (2016) further explain that storytelling has an important practical impact which requires active engagements and organizations of thoughts and provides motivation for students. Therefore, storytelling stimulates a higher level of thinking and also actively constructs students' comprehension skill.

The last activity is after the story phase. Activities in this stage, as Wright (1995) and Davis & Nesmith (2000) recommend, concerns the activities of showing understanding by asking comprehension questions. Some techniques such as shadowing, summarizing, retelling, action logging and news lettering increase students' comprehension, negotiation of meaning and feeling of community. These intensifying activities allow learners multiple opportunities to respond deeply to stories and experience shifts in their beliefs and attitudes. This leads to a more lively participation in the classroom. The stage after story is mostly dealing with higher level of thinking such as reflection, evaluation, decision making, problem solving, and creating (Bloom, 2001; Brookhart, 2010).

## 4. Research Methodology

Ethnographic study was applied as the research design of this study. According to Asher (2012), ethnographic study is a collection of qualitative methods that focus on the close observation of social practices and interactions. It involves a study of social interactions, behaviours, and perceptions that occur within groups, teams, organizations, and communities. Similarly, Angrosino (2007) elaborates ethnographers to search for predictable

patterns in the human experiences by carefully participating in the lives of the under-study. Three instruments were employed to collect data, namely: classroom observation, interview with the teachers and students, and document analysis in the forms of lesson plans and students' written works. This study was conducted in three state Junior High Schools in Northern Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. These schools were chosen for two reasons: (1) they are in the same area- Northern Bandung- that enables the researcher to conduct this study; and (2) the researcher has run some cooperation with those schools particularly in In-House Training programs and Teaching Practice Supervision.

## 5. Findings and Discussions

### 5.1. Strategies in promoting higher order thinking skills in storytelling for teaching english to young adolescents

Findings from the classroom observations reveal that some strategies were implemented by the teachers in promoting Higher Order Thinking Skills in storytelling for teaching English to young adolescents. Brief descriptions of the strategies' application would be divided into three phases, namely pre-activity, main activity, and post-activity. This is in line with the statement of Alkaaf (2017) who explains the three stages in implementing storytelling to students, namely pre-storytelling, during storytelling, and post-storytelling. In detail, the following table presents findings of strategies and activities done by the teachers in pre-activity/pre-storytelling.

TABLE 1: Strategies and Activities in Pre-Activity.

Learning Phase	Strategies	Activities	
Pre-Activity	Brainstorming	Using <i>open-</i> and <i>closed-ended questions</i>	
		Playing short video	
		Guessing game	
	Mind mapping	Drawing a mind-mapping tree	
		Making prediction	
	Modeling	Giving practical examples	
		Guessing games	
		Giving gesture and facial expression	
			Using words in sentences

From the table above, several strategies were used while opening the English lesson, such as: brainstorming, mind-mapping, and modelling. Brainstorming, one of the strategies employed by the teachers at School A and School C, gave positive impacts on the learning process. It was different from the results of the classroom observation

obtained from School B where the strategy was absent. Positive impact of brainstorming is explained by Al-khatib (2012) who states that brainstorming involves oral and pre-writing exercises for helping the learner to express their ideas. In addition, brainstorming is beneficial to give the students an overview about the story. It was done through collecting some ideas or clues related to the story and connecting it with students' knowledge to stimulate their engagement in the classroom activities (Unin and Bearing, 2016).

### 5.2. Benefits gained by the students from their learning

Several strategies were conducted to promote Higher Order Thinking Skills in storytelling for teaching English to young adolescents. The strategies have positive impacts on both their cognitive and affective skills. The benefits of promoting HOTS in storytelling for the students were also mentioned by the teachers during the interview (Table 4.6).

TABLE 2: Some Benefits Gained by the Students.

No.	Benefits Gained	Indicators
1	Developing ideas and creativity	They can share their ideas, opinions, and arguments freely.
2	Learning new vocabularies	Some new vocabularies are used to tell their stories, either in their written or oral forms.
3	Enjoyable learning	They show their enthusiasm and enjoyment in their learning.
4	Self-motivation	They are more active and curious in joining all learning activities.
5	Improving comprehension	They understand the text as a whole since they relate to their experiences.
6	Active learning involvement	They discuss either with the teachers or their friends. They are actively engaged in every learning stage.
7	Exploring new ideas	They can predict future events or happenings of the stories and connect with the contextual situations occurred in their life.
8	Self confidence	They are willing to deliver their ideas in front of the class without feeling worried to make mistakes.
9	Speaking opportunity	They attempt to state what they are thinking and maintain their communication to others.
10	Developing critical thinking	Their higher levels of thinking are promoted through applying, comparing, contrasting, evaluating, and creating the story given

All participants in the interview made different statements related to benefits of HOTS in storytelling in their English learning activity. However, based on the findings from the interview with the students, some similarities were found among students' perceptions toward the benefits indicated in the teachers' acknowledgment.

### 5.3. Challenges faced by the teacher in their learning and strategies to anticipate them

Referring to the analysis results from the interview with the teachers from three different Junior High Schools, they clearly admitted some challenges (see table 4.7), either internal or external, encountered in promoting Higher Order Thinking Skills in storytelling to teach English to their students. Internally, the teachers felt that they lack the knowledge and beliefs about the importance of teaching thinking skills integrated in English learning process. Furthermore, some external challenges include some school systems which are not optimum to support them in promoting thinking skill into instructional process. The curriculum is also another external challenge for them since there is no clear guidance given in implementing HOT in English Language Teaching.

TABLE 3: Challenges faced by the Teachers and Strategies to Anticipate Those Challenges.

No.	Types of Challenges	Challenges Faced by the Teachers	Solutions/ Strategies
1	Internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of teachers' experiences</li> <li>• Linguistic and pedagogical problems</li> <li>• Less confident of teaching HOTs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher's development program</li> <li>• Attending conferences, workshops, and seminar</li> <li>• Continuing their higher education</li> <li>• Actively join teacher association (MGMP)</li> </ul>
2	External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irrelevant teaching materials and learning sources</li> <li>• Limited time</li> <li>• Overloaded classes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Searching and selecting learning materials from websites</li> <li>• Providing <i>scaffolding</i> appropriately</li> <li>• Improve classroom management</li> <li>• Give more learning autonomy to the students</li> </ul>

To anticipate these challenges, the teachers from the selected schools applied several strategies involving external parties, namely joining the professional development programs and working with small groups of teachers with sufficient knowledge and experience in promoting Higher Order Thinking. The professional development programs are believed by the teacher as one of the strategies to overcome the internal challenges they are facing. This view is supported by Barber and Mourshed (2007, cited in Archibald 2011) who explained that ongoing learning is an essential component of continuous improvement for teachers as well as a key element in any clinical teaching practice profession. Therefore, the demands on teachers are increasing, as evidenced in the 2010 draft revisions to the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) Model Core Teaching Standards (Barber and Mourshed, 2007 cited in Archibald, 2011). This improvement is needed for the characteristics of professional development programs that they have joined before. According to the Blank and De Las Alas (2009, cited in Archibald 2011), there are some characteristics of good

professional development programs, namely: (1) alignment with schools goals, state, and district standards and assessments, and other professional learning activities including formative teacher evaluation; (2) focus on core content and modeling of teaching strategies for content; (3) inclusion of opportunities for active learning of new teaching strategies; (4) provision of opportunities and for collaboration among teachers; and (5) inclusion of embedded follow-up and continuous feedback.

## 6. Conclusions

Based on the results of data analysis answering the research questions, some points can be concluded. Firstly, the investigation of promoting Higher Order Thinking Skills in storytelling to teach English to young adolescents were divided into three learning phases (opening phase, whilst learning, and closing phase). In the opening phase, the teacher employed some strategies through brainstorming and mind-mapping by using pictures and playing video as the learning media. These strategies aim to stimulate students to think critically to the story delivered which was supported by their experiences and prior knowledge. Secondly, the results of data analysis also reveal that the students got some benefits from their learning through participating in classroom activities. They also claimed that they were excited and motivated to learn English through HOTS in storytelling. Their enjoyment in learning was gained due to their engagement in classroom activity with various interesting strategies.

Thirdly, some challenges faced by the teachers deal with teachers' lack of knowledge and experience in promoting HOTS in their learning. They admitted that they have insufficient experiences and lack the needed exposures to promote students' HOTS; they also have some problems to communicate in English. The teachers' lack of experience was identified from a variety of classroom activities conducted and their struggles to formulate open-ended questions.

As a result, the teacher preferred to keep teaching as what they usually do, e.g. standing in front of the class while the students are listening to their explanation. Promoting HOTS in storytelling requires a good commitment from the teachers through preparing the lesson well, starting from designing a lesson plan to assessing the students' Higher Order Thinking skills. Thus, to anticipate the challenges, the teachers are required to take safeguards by joining some teachers' development programs such as continuing their higher education, attending trainings, seminars and workshops as well as enrolling themselves as a member of teacher' professional associations. In addition,

promoting HOTS in English language learning needs all support from education stakeholders. Teachers, policy makers and parents must together scrutinize the appropriate ways to improve students' Higher Order Thinking Skills, which is believed to establish students' social awareness, in their language learning (Nunan & Bailey, 2009).

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