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## Using Reader's Theatre Strategy in Learning English Poetry: How Effective it Could be?

Irene Elena Khing  
Islamic College University of Perlis (KUIPs)  
suzienkss@gmail.com  
**Corresponding email:** suzienkss@gmail.com

### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether using Reader's Theatre strategy could improve students' comprehension level or not and explore students' perception about the implementation of Reader's Theatre in learning English poetry. A total of eight participants from the same program in Kolej University Islam Perlis (KUIPs), Perlis were involved in the research. This study used Embedded Mixed Method in which preexperimental research was conducted in the quantitative stage of data collection, where the quantitative data were gained from students' pre-test and posttest. Meanwhile the qualitative data were gained from the interview conducted at the end of experimental study. The data collected from the results of students' pretest and posttest were analyzed by using paired sample T-Test, while thematic analysis was used to analyse the responses from interviews. The results of the analysis showed that 1) Reader's Theatre strategy was able to enhance students' comprehension level and 2) students showed positive perception that the learning activities with the implementation of Reader's Theatre strategy brought three benefits; first, the activity was interesting and enjoyable, secondly, the activity made it easy to comprehend English literatures and thirdly, the activity made students work collaboratively in groups.

**Keywords:** comprehension level; English Poetry; Reader's Theater strategy

### Introduction

Over a decade, literacy skills of young learners still remain a concern especially in English as Second language (ESL) and English as Foreign Language (EFL) countries. Teachers often focus on teaching the content of the subject matter rather than look back into teaching basic needs of literacy skills because they assume that learners have already acquired the skills successfully in elementary school level. In fact, Pressley (2002) and Syafryadin (2020) found that adolescents often lacked fluency, interpretation, comprehension, writing, and speaking skills. Although

educators agreed that students lacked these skills, they did little to actually teach the skills that students needed to cope with advanced texts, nothing that students should have “already learned this in elementary school” (p. 421).

Therefore, few strategies have been introduced as to help teachers make the reading class look “lively”. One of the most famous strategies is Reader's Theater (RT). RT is an effective method to teach literacy skill especially toward beginners and low- achiever's learner (Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Hsu, 2009; Keehn, 2003; Lengeling, Malarcher & Mills, 1995; Tsai, 2009; Tsou & Hsu, 2009).

In Malaysia education context, the lack of interests and motivation in English Language learning has become a major concern among planner, curriculum developers and especially teachers. Lack of interest and motivation in acquiring English was attributed to the fact that texts used in lower and upper secondary are either too high or too structural especially literature text. Thus, the developer felt there were needs to introduce changes in classroom pedagogy and the need for more interesting and meaningful materials.

Literature in English has made its coming back with implementation of Integrated Curriculum for Secondary School in 1988. Literature must be taught by the teacher to introduce the readings or literature itself (Febriani, Satinem, Nurnaningsih, Haryani, Syafryadin, Noermanzah, 2020; Noermanzah, Syafryadin, Sari, Juwita, Martina, 2020). The new program aims to develop student's skill reading and analyze literacy work besides the reading habit and promoting literary appreciation and moral values. It is a challenging task for teacher to inculcate reading habit among students. Most of students particularly those who are low proficiency in English, struggling to understand English language reading materials.

Therefore, Reader's Theater was introduced among Malaysian English teacher few years ago as an alternative to promote interest in reading among student and participate actively in classroom. The reader's theatre could be implemented When students could not participate actively in the teaching and learning process, the students tend to lose their focus and only wait for the teacher to feed them up with all the information especially in learning English literature component.

From the preliminary, it was revealed that students read literature materials only in order to pass the exam. In the learning activities, the students were only asked to memorize the technical elements of the literature components. At the end of the meeting, they were asked to find the answers of the question given. As the result, the students were not enjoying reading the materials and not aware with the gist in the content.

Eventhough there were many research which focused to find out the effectiveness of using Reader's Theatre in teaching reading, but there were no studies that aimed to see the effect of the implementation of Reader's Theatre in learning English poetry as well as there were no studies that assess students' deeply perceptions about the activity. Therefore in this research, Reader's Theater was conducted to examine the effectiveness of this strategy and investigate the students' perception while involving in this activity.

### **Research Methodology**

This study required the use of both qualitative and quantitative data. It required the quantitative method to discover the effect of the implementation of Reader's Theatre strategy toward the students' comprehension level in learning poetry as one of literary products. Then, the qualitative method was needed to support the quantitative data to discover students' perception toward learning activities. Accordingly, the mixed methods approach, was utilized in this study. (Bogdan & Biklan, 1992; Creswell, 2012; Harwel, 2011; Heigham & Croker, 2009).

Among the designs of mixed methods, the writer used the "Embedded Design" (Creswell, 2012; Heigham & Croker, 2009). Embedded design is one of the types of mixed method which used qualitative and quantitative data, where the writer could insert qualitative data in quantitative one or in vice versa. The reason why the writer employed the embedded design was because the writer determined that quantitative data is not enough, instead collected quantitative and qualitative data sequentially to have one form of data play a supportive role to the other form of data. Thus, collecting the second form of data was to augment or support the

primary form of data. In this research, the employed embedded design of mixed methods by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data during a single study, i.e. an experiment in the form of preexperimental design.

This research was conducted at Kolej Universiti Islam Perlis (KUIPs). KUIPS is one of the Private Higher Education Institutions owned by Islamic religious (MAIPs). A group of students from Foundation of Islamic Programme was invited to participate in this research. All of the participants were Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) leaver and were accepted to enrol in Foundation Programme. They were chosen because they were enrolled in intensive class programme. There were eight participants, three males and five females.

In this research, the quantitative data were collected before and after the treatments to the students by using Reader's Theatre strategy in teaching poetry. Before the treatments, the students were given the pretest to see the comprehension level of the students prior the treatment. Then, after the treatments, the students were given posttest. The standardized comprehension questions in pre-test and post-test were distributed to examine participants' comprehension level. The tests were scored based on The rubric score adapted from the Malaysian English University Test (MUET) listed in Table 1

Table 1. The Rubric for Comprehension Scores description.

Score	Band	Comprehension
15-20	4	Very good understanding of language and context
11-14	3	Satisfactory understanding of language and context
6-10	2	Fair understanding of language and context
Below 5	1	Very limited understanding of language and context

( adapted from MUET reading comprehension scores)

The treatments were conducted in 8 meetings, where the students were taught by using Reader's Theatre strategy in literature class. In the final meeting, the oneto one interview was conducted to gain qualitative data.

The data from pretest and posttest were analyzed by using paired sample T-test to see whether the students' comprehension level was improved or not. Meanwhile the qualitative data gained from the interview were analyzed by using Thematic Analysis (Creswell, 2012)

## Findings

### The improvement of students' comprehension level

After analyzing the data gained from the scores of students' pretest and posttest by using paired sample T-test, the result of data analysis were displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. The result of paired sample T-Test

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	pretest - posttest	-1,62500	,51755	,18298	-2,05768	-1,19232	-8,881	7	,000

From the data listed in Table 2. It was revealed that the significancy value is 0.000 which is lower than 0.05. Meanwhile T obtained 8.881 is bigger than T Table 2.365. In other words, there was significant improvement on students' comprehension level after they were treated by using Reader's Theatre strategy in learning poetry appreciation.

Based on the result of the observation, it was clear that by implementing Reader's Theatre strategy, it was easier for students to comprehend the message contained in the poem. They understand the content by performing such kind of play which involved dramatic elements.

### **Students' perceptions toward learning activities**

Based on the results of thematic analysis from the data gained from the interview. It was found three themes reflected students' perceptions toward the implementation of Reader's Theatre strategy in learning poetry appreciation. ; first, the activity was interesting and enjoyable, secondly, the activity made it easy to comprehend English literatures and thirdly, the activity made students work collaboratively in groups.

### **The activity was interesting and enjoyable**

Based on the result of thematic analysis it was found that all of the participants perceived that the activities in the process of the implementation of Reader's theatre strategy. The students were having fun while getting involved in Reader's Theater activities. Most of students admitted that it was their first time getting involved in Reader's Theater activities. However, all of the participants seemed to agree that Reader's Theater strategy provides interesting and fun activities in learning poetry. Some students clarified;

P1 : *yes, we don't really have enough time for practice but still it fun to get a new activity and learn about the activity as well.*

P2 : *Yes, because of the existence Reader's theatre I can know detail story in the poem and understand stories in poetry.*

P3 : *Yes, because is a new experience for me.*

P4 : *Yes, I enjoy this Reader's theatre activity. Because before this I never join this kind of activity. This is my first experience in Reader's theatre activity. So that I can learn a bit experience from this assignment.*

P5 : *Yes, I very enjoy this readers theatre because this activity make me fun and not stress. I like it.*

P6 : *Yes, I really enjoy this activity because I can expose my hidden talent.*

P7 : *Yes, because this Reader's theatre activity was enjoyable*

P8 : *Yes, because this activity is very useful for students and its fun.*

Then, those students admitted that what made them fun during the activities was that in understanding poetry, the role play was involved. This is inline to Park, Hae ok and Hur, Mi-sun (2015) who described that Reader's Theatre combines the two different activities in reading aloud and dramatic performance. That was why, the activity became interesting. Some students mentioned that

P1 : *yes. because reading poem will be more bored if no acting out*

P2 : *Yes, the lesson very interesting because with acting students better understand the real storyline presented in the poem.*

P3 : *Yes, because scripts are an easy way to listen and act out.*

P4 : *yes. We can see more lesson from the activity. Like, we can get input from the lesson that people should not be a cruel to goose. They should get the place too for survive their life.*

P5 : *Yes, because acting without script will be more fun to do activities.*

P6 : *Yes I do because I able to understand better what's the poem is all about and what the main point that the author wants to tell us.*

P7 : *yes. Because the actor will be easier to do without scripting and there will be a spontaneous agenda that can entertain the audience.*

P8 : *Yes, it is very interesting because it is easy to do but it also requires more understanding.*

### **The activity made it easy to comprehend English literatures**

Based on the results, It can be noticed that the implementation of Reader's Theater could help students to interpret the message in the poetry. Student could figure out not only the literally meaning but they could interpret the meaning deeply. As a result, Reader's theatre could trigger students' creative thinking and imagination. Then, by understanding the deeper interpretation of the poem, students were able to create the script for their performance. In the interview, the participants mentioned that:

P2 : *Yes, this activity made more difference and make student more interesting and understanding with lesson because we can know what poem want to tell compared to just reading the text, we don't know the implied story to be submitted.*

P3 : *Yes, because this activity gives a lot more understanding and a clear picture than just reading the text.*

P7 : *Through this Reader's theatre, I better understand what is presented than just read it because I can't imagine how the situation*

P8 : *Yes, because it's very easy to do and it's easy to remember it when the acting is performed repeatedly. It also requires good appreciation in carrying out this activity.*

Referring to the interview transcript, students were very exciting to learn poem and had better understanding about the lesson. Therefore, the activity made them easy to comprehend the literatures.

### **The activity made students work collaboratively in groups**

This study showed that the implementation of Reader's Theater strategy involved teamwork and collaboration. Fortunately, based on the data found in the interview, there were no negative teamwork issues such as conflicts, faced by the participants. It was found that the participants managed to handle if any issues arise during the preparation of Reader's theatre. All of the participants were able to show their respect and tolerance with each other to achieve a successful performance. This can be observed from the following extracts:

P2 : *Yes, but it can be controlled by the discussions and ideas given by each student.*

P3 : *No, because all members of the group cooperate and carry out their respective duties.*

P4 : *No, because they give commitment with each other's and also work in group.*

P5 : *No, we all give teamwork perfectly.*

P6 : *Yes, but it is not a critical conflict, even though we had a conflict, we just settled it as soon as possible so that everyone can work out together happily.*

Thus, it can be noticed that the participants had a great teamwork and collaboration among them. The participants were committed to make the performance succeed.

### **Discussion**



Based on the results of research, it was revealed that the students earned benefits from the implementation of Reader's Theater strategy. It is as highlighted by Tanner, (1993) Who elaborated five values that emerge as intrinsic benefits of Reader's Theater that for the students. Firstly, the students are exposed to dramatic quality such as in plays. Poem, short stories and other literary products can be used as materials to implement Reader's Theater. All of the materials can be used to bring out to real life. So that the students will not only learn through decoding the literal meaning of it but also will gain deeper interpretation. Secondly, the students could appreciate more to literature, When students involve in writing and rehearsing their scripts, students must ferret into the literature and figure out the story element and the author's purpose. Through the interpretation of the literature, it showed that the students were portraying the comprehension of the literature. Thirdly, students will be able to gain benefits for personal development. Reader's Theater will give opportunities for the student to gain confidence and learn to be a part of the team. Fourthly, by implementing Reader's Theatre will make the students build active collaboration among the team because it was a shared participatory event where the performers and audience are attached into the story. Lastly, the activity is conducted for pleasure. Reader's Theatre creates a happy atmosphere in the classroom setting. Students felt encouraged and motivated to express their imagination. It will be enjoyable moment for both performers and the audience.

Teachers have to try this model of strategy to implement during English literature class especially for ESL and EFL classroom setting. There are many forms of Reader's Theater. Shepard (1993) had distinguished between "traditional" and "the developed" model of Reader's Theater. In the traditional model, reading literary works always happens in the fix order and very minimal props are used in their performance. Whereas in the "developed model" of Reader's Theater, students are still reading aloud but they are allowed to move around.

Reader's Theater involved all of Four English skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing. It is an effective strategy of teaching English literature especially in ESL and EFL classroom setting. It suits to any level of English proficiency level from the

elementary to advance level. Most importantly, in this study Reader's Theater was able to improve and develop student's comprehension skill and trigger their creative thinking and imagery. By implementing Reader's Theater in English literature lesson, it helped encourage the students to participate actively and at the same time, it will help teachers to create a learner centered classroom setting. This findings were in line with the previous studies that found the Reader's theatre could assist the teachers to increase the participation of students in the classroom (Tsai, 2009; Tsou & Hsu, 2009). Furthermore, by using Reader's Theater activity, it will reduce time consuming and cost compared to real drama or theater performance. Reader's Theater can be done and performed in any places because in the implementation of the model, the students were asked to read aloud and at the same time they are allowed to move around, which similar to the ordinary role plays. Their movements portrayed the action based on the script as a strengthening towards the reading. In addition, the students were also allowed to produce or create additional ideas into the original scripts as to make the Reader's Theater performance more interesting and meaningful.

In the process of the imlementation of reading's Theatre strategy, the lighting, stages, microphone, or any other technical instruments are not necessarily needed. In Reader's Theater, the props and costumes were minimally used. It depends on the team's creativity and therefore the role of teacher to accept students' ideas. The duration of Reader's Theatre performance is less than duration of drama. Hence, it is suitable to be conducted in daily class lesson.

## **Conclusion**

It can be concluded that Reader's Theatre is a plausible and successfully improved students' greater comprehension level. Besides, Reader's Theatre gave positive experience and valuable memories for the students as they manage to participate actively in the teaching and learning process. Therefore, the students

could change their perception of English language literature into more positive mind set and attitude.

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