Author's Chair in Promoting Young Learners' Speaking Skills

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Abstract

The Author's Chair, a key component of the writer's workshop model, provides students with the opportunity to present their written work orally, thus promoting both speaking and writing skills This activity is widely recognized for its potential to build students' confidence and enhance their speaking abilities. The theoretical framework underlying the Author's Chair is socio-constructivism, which views learning as a social process where knowledge is co-constructed through interactions with others. Socio-constructivism emphasizes the importance of social interactions in learning, where thought evolves from societal exchanges to individual understanding. This study aimed to investigate the implementation of the Author's Chair in a kindergarten setting and to explore how this method contributes to improving young learners' speaking skills. The participants were K-2 (TK-8) students at a preschool in South Jakarta. The research employed three observation sessions, including video recordings, to examine the impact of the Author's Chair on the students' speaking abilities. Additionally, interviews were conducted with teachers to gather their feedback on the implementation and effectiveness of the Author's Chair in the classroom. The findings indicate that the Author's Chair is an effective instructional tool for enhancing young learners' English-speaking skills, as it provides a platform for students to express themselves and engage in peer interactions. However, it is also evident that successful implementation requires a significant investment of time and effort from educators. In conclusion, the study suggests that the Author's Chair can be a valuable approach in English language teaching, fostering improved speaking skills in young learners when used consistently and effectively.

Keywords: Author's Chair; Socio-Constructivism; Speaking Skills; Early Childhood Education; Language Learning; Teaching Methods.

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INTRODUCTION

The hypothesis that children acquire a second language more effectively than adults has long been discussed in the field of language acquisition. This theory, commonly referred to as the *critical period hypothesis*, suggests that young children have an innate advantage in learning languages, especially before puberty, due to their brain's heightened capacity to process and internalize new linguistic structures (Cameron, 2001). This has led to widespread support for early foreign language teaching. However, while this hypothesis emphasizes the potential of young learners, it also places a considerable responsibility on educators to find effective methods for language instruction that leverage this developmental window.

One key area of language development that demands attention is speaking skills. Speaking is essential for children to grow confidently as communicators and thinkers, yet it is often overshadowed by a focus on reading and writing in many language classrooms. The integration of speaking with other language skills, such as writing, provides a more holistic approach to language development, balancing students' proficiency across various domains. One promising method for achieving this balance is the use of the Author's Chair within the writer's workshop model. This approach not only facilitates language skills development but also encourages social interaction, as children present their work to peers, who in turn offer feedback and engage in discussions (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007, as cited in Reel, 2011).

While the Author's Chair has been recognized for its benefits in writing instruction, its impact on developing speaking skills in young learners remains underexplored. This research aims to fill this gap by investigating the implementation of the Author's Chair in teaching speaking skills to young learners, examining its effectiveness in promoting speaking fluency and confidence. Additionally, this study seeks to explore teachers' responses to the integration of Author's Chair in the classroom and its role in enhancing children's speaking abilities. By addressing these gaps, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how innovative teaching strategies can support young learners' language development.

METHTOD

This study employed a qualitative study method. This method can maintain close association with both participants and activities within the setting; so that the researcher gained an insider's view of the field (Burns, 1994).The setting was a class of six students in an Early Childhood Education Center for children in Jakarta. The students were ranged from 1.5 to 6 years old.

In this study, the researcher was also one of the teachers. The study was conducted in two periods. Before the study conducted, the researcher discussed with the teachers whether it should be based on a given topic or on their students' own interest. It was decided that students choose what they wanted to write within the weekly school theme.

In order for the students to be able to participate in Author's Chair and publish their work, they must go through the writing process of a Writer's Workshop. Due to the students' attention span and their age, the teacher decided to focus on students' willingness to write, have a student-teacher conference and publish their work. The steps included Pre-writing, Writing, Conferencing and Publishing. Editing and revising are not the main focus of the research because most of the students at this stage are still labeling their pictures and writing simple sentence. Thus, the research prioritizes students' abilities in publishing through participating in Author's Chair.

The data was collected through classroom observation, interview, and student's drawing and their interpretation on the Author's Chair(students' speaking performance on the author's chair). Classroom observation was conducted during 30 minutes writer's workshop activity where students' reaction to the lesson were recorded through journals and audio and video recordings. Interview with the students and teachers were conducted a her the workshop activity to inquire of their interest and progress during the writer's workshop. The final data collected were through students' drawings and performance in Author's Chair. Students' drawings revealed not only their drawings abilities but their attempt at writing words in labelling pictures and writing simple sentences. The researcher noted how students interpreted their drawings in the author's chair. How students related to the labelling in their pictures and their oral interpretation in the Author's Chair.

FINDINGS AND DISSCUSIONS
Findings

The study was conducted in three sessions. Each session was about 45 minutes in length that includes the mini-lessons based on Catkin's framework: pre-writing and planning, drafting, revising, editing and publishing (Karsbaek, 2011). The teacher chose a topic about Italy because the students were learning about Europe. The teacher presented her ideas by using teachers and students as the characters in the story. The story was created with iMovie and presented to the students.

When the movie was played, students became excited and started to point out the pictures:

Student A   : I see airplane
Student B   : Ms. Dewi
Student C   : That's a red car
Student D   : Pizza

Student A   : I love Pizza
Student E   : At the beach and pink tower

Once the idea was presented, students went in groups and started to write their stories. Once they finished, students volunteered to publish their work in the author's chair. The author chair "affected student's pride" (Edwards, 2006) because it is a validation of a child's thought and creation. Due to the fact that some students are shy or has limited vocabulary, teacher plays an important to boost students' confidence when they are in the author's chair.

Teacher   : Ok A, what do we say?
Student A   : Good morning, friends.
Class   : Good morning, Jared.
Student A   : Today, I want to tell you a story.
(He points at his drawings a flag).
Teacher   : Student A saw a flag ...
Student A   : A tower.
Teacher   : There is a tower ...
Student A   : Thank you, friends, for listening.
Class   : Thank you, A, for sharing
(Classmates gave a round of applause)

The transcript showed that Student A, who is four years old, knew what he drew. In fact, his drawing had all the elements in the movie. Although, he was naming the pictures in his drawing, by re-phrasing his statement, the teacher assisted in developing the story at the same time giving an example of how stories can be told. The applause given at the end of the story, allow "students to feel good about what they have done, when growth has occurred and learning has taken place" (Fisher, 1998 as cited in Edwards, 2006).

Discussion

Student Engagement and Excitement

The first finding highlights the significant impact of the teacher's use of an engaging visual aid, such as the iMovie, in capturing students' attention and stimulating their enthusiasm. As noted during the lesson, students became highly engaged and began commenting excitedly on the images presented. This interaction demonstrates the importance of visual stimuli in early language learning environments. Visual aids can serve as concrete representations of abstract ideas, making it easier for young learners to connect concepts with real-world objects or experiences. The students' responses, such as "I see airplane" or "That's a red car," reflect their active participation and eagerness to engage with the content. Such moments of excitement and involvement are vital in fostering a positive attitude toward learning, especially in young learners who may be new to language acquisition.

Collaborative Writing and Group Dynamics

Once the students moved into groups to begin writing their own stories, a sense of collaboration was clearly present. This finding aligns with Vygotsky's socio-constructivist theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in the learning process (Vygotsky, 1978). By writing together and discussing their ideas, students were able to negotiate meanings and reinforce their understanding of the topic. This collaborative aspect also helped to increase student confidence, as they could share ideas with peers in a supportive environment. Although the study did not provide detailed data on the specific group dynamics, it can be inferred that the interaction between students within the groups contributed to the development of their language skills and boosted their ability to work cooperatively.

The Role of Author's Chair in Building Confidence

A significant finding of the study is the positive impact of the Author's Chair in enhancing student confidence and promoting public speaking skills. The Author's

Chair provided a platform for students to share their work in front of their peers, which can be a nerve-wracking experience for young learners. However, as observed in the study, the presence of the teacher played a crucial role in alleviating anxiety. By guiding students through their presentation and offering encouragement, the teacher ensured that students felt supported in sharing their ideas. For example, in the case of Student A, who struggled with vocabulary, the teacher scaffolded the storytelling process by rephrasing the student's statements and assisting in developing the story. This type of teacher support can help students build confidence, enabling them to express themselves more freely and effectively.

Moreover, the applause at the end of each presentation was an important social validation for the students. It reinforced the idea that their contributions were valued and recognized by their peers, further boosting their self-esteem. As Edwards (2006) suggests, such validation is crucial for promoting a child's sense of accomplishment and reinforcing the learning process.

Teacher's Role in Scaffolding and Language Development

The teacher's role as a scaffold during the Author's Chair session was a key factor in facilitating the students' language development. As seen in the interaction with Student A, the teacher provided essential linguistic support by rephrasing and expanding the student's simple statements. This process is aligned with the concept of "scaffolding," where more knowledgeable individuals (in this case, the teacher) provide temporary assistance to help learners achieve tasks they cannot yet do independently (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). The teacher's intervention not only helped to expand the student's vocabulary but also modeled how to narrate stories, giving students the tools they need to express themselves more effectively in the future.

Impact on Learning Outcomes

In terms of learning outcomes, the study found that the use of the Author's Chair contributed positively to students' speaking skills. The teacher's support, along with peer feedback and applause, created a positive learning environment where students felt comfortable taking risks and using language in front of others. This type of authentic speaking practice is essential for developing fluency and confidence in young learners, particularly in a second language context. The study suggests that Author's Chair activities, when implemented thoughtfully with scaffolding from the teacher, can significantly enhance students' ability to communicate orally and build their public speaking skills.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the study's findings demonstrate the effectiveness of the Author's Chair as a tool for enhancing young learners' speaking skills. The use of visual aids to stimulate engagement, the collaborative writing process, the teacher's scaffolding, and the social validation through peer applause all played important roles in fostering language development. The findings underscore the importance of creating a supportive and interactive environment where students feel confident in sharing their thoughts and ideas. Future research could explore the long-term impact of Author's Chair on language development and its application across different age groups and language proficiency levels.

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