Internalization of Characters Through the Role Playing Method in Learning Short Stories (Case Study of SMPN 3 Cibatu Students)

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ABSTRACT

The low ability to tell short stories is one of the problems so that students tend to be rigid, lack confidence, and have difficulty expressing themselves emotionally. There is a gap between the demands of the curriculum that requires students to be skilled in communicative speaking and the reality in the field, showing that literary learning is still conventional and theoretical. This study aims to describe and analyze the internalization of characters through the Role Playing learning method in improving students' short story skills. The research paradigm used is qualitative with data collection methods in the form of non-participatory observations, limited interviews with teachers and students, and documentation. The findings of the study show that (1) The Role Playing Method is effective in building confidence so that it can create organic improvisation and natural gestures through the internalization of character characters; (2) Gestures and aspects of intonation, as well as articulation undergo changes through the process of imitation and creative sound experimentation; (3) Students no longer just memorize texts, but are able to bring the narrative to life through the synchronization of vocals and facial expressions. It was concluded that the Role Playing method succeeded in changing the storytelling learning paradigm from just an academic task to a creative form of self-actualization, improving the quality of storytelling, and successfully creating a supportive and appreciative classroom ecosystem.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking skills, especially storytelling skills, are one of the fundamental competencies in Indonesian learning that function as a means of self-expression and creative communication of ideas. According to Tarigan (2015), speaking is a language skill that develops in a child's life which is only

preceded by listening skills, and it is at that time that language skills are learned. However, in the context of literary learning at the junior high school level, storytelling skills are often considered a worrying task for students. Students are required to be able to process textual imagination into a lively oral narrative, but often they lose the essence of the beauty of the story because they are trapped in a rigid pattern of memorizing texts.

The reality in the field, especially at SMPN 3 Cibatu, shows that there is a significant gap between the expectations of the curriculum and the reality of students' abilities. Initial observations revealed that most of the students in grade VII experienced psychological obstacles in the form of communication anxiety. In line with the opinions of Haryadi and Zamzani (2000), non-linguistic factors such as courage, calmness, and loudness of voice are often the main obstacles to public speaking. Students tend to appear with flat expressions, monotonous intonation, and minimal gestures, which indicates that they have not been able to internalize the emotional values of the short stories presented.

This problem is exacerbated by the choice of learning methods that are still conventional and teacher-centered. Storytelling learning that relies only on theoretical instruction without interesting simulations makes students feel alienated from the literary work itself. Nurgiyantoro (2013) emphasized that literary learning should provide a pleasant experience of appreciation and involve students' emotions. Without emotional involvement, short stories will just be a pile of dead words. Therefore, a methodological innovation is needed that is able to dilute this rigidity and provide space for students to experiment with the identity of the characters in the story. The Role Playing method or role playing emerged as an alternative solution relevant to the psychological characteristics of early adolescent students. According to Joyce, Weil, and Calhoun (2011), the Role Playing method helps students find personal meaning in the social world and solve dilemmas with the help of groups.

 In the context of short storytelling, this method allows students to let go of their true identity for a moment and transform into a character in the story. Through this "identity protection", students become more courageous in exploring vocals, mimics, and body gestures. The role-playing process transforms storytelling activities from just a verbal task to a collaborative and immersive creative performance. Based on this background, this study aims to describe in depth how the application of the Role Playing method can improve the short story ability of grade VII students at SMPN 3 Cibatu. This qualitative research focuses on the process of changing students' communicative behavior and how they internalize characters to produce quality storytelling. With the application of this method, it is hoped that students will not only achieve academic completeness, but also have high confidence in expression. The results of this research are expected to make a practical contribution for teachers in creating a more lively, dynamic, and oriented literature classroom atmosphere that is oriented towards the development of students' creative potential as a whole.

The ability to tell stories in a qualitative perspective is seen as a process of identity construction and self-expression, not just a technical linguistic skill. According to Nurgiyantoro (2013), storytelling is the ability to express aesthetic experiences obtained from reading or listening into a form of oral communication that is able to arouse the listener's imagination. In the context of junior high school students in grade VII, storytelling is a bridge between textual understanding of the structure of short stories and public self-actualization. This skill involves the ability to interpret texts, manage emotions, and harmonize verbal and non-verbal elements to bring the message contained in a literary work to life. The main obstacle to storytelling skills is often rooted in psychological factors, especially in early adolescence. Haryadi and Zamzani (2000) explained that communication apprehension can cause vocal impasse and gesture stiffness.

Qualitatively, this phenomenon is identified as the student's failure to bridge the distance between himself and the story text. When students feel alienated from the characters being told, they tend to appear mechanically. Therefore, an approach is needed that is able to bring the horizon of students' experience closer to the horizon of the text they are facing. The Role Playing method is a pedagogical strategy rooted in the theory of social interaction. Joyce, Weil, and Calhoun (2011) stated that Role Playing allows students to explore human relationships by demonstrating dilemmatic situations and trying out different roles. In storytelling learning, this method functions as a medium of "identity

experimentation". By becoming another figure, the psychological burden of students as individuals is reduced, so that they are more daring to explore vocals and expressions that they might not do when they were themselves.

The qualitative approach to Role Playing is closely related to Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism. In Slavin's (2011) view, learning happens through social interaction where students build knowledge through collaboration. When doing Role Playing, students at SMPN 3 Cibatu negotiated the meaning of the character with their peers. This dialectical process makes their understanding of the plot and conflict of the story more organic. Knowledge of how to tell stories is no longer given one-way by teachers, but is found through direct experience in role-playing. Character internalization is the core of successful storytelling through role-playing. According to Stanislavski in his acting theory adapted to the world of education, psychedelics arise when a person is able to answer the question "what would I do if I were in this character's situation?". Hamruni (2012) added that role play provides space for students to practice empathy skills. By empathizing with the short story characters, students will automatically adjust their intonation, voice volume, and facial expressions naturally without the need to force them, because these expressions are born from deep inner understanding.

Linguistically, Role Playing encourages the development of students' pragmatic competencies. Iskandarwassid and Dadang (2011) argue that the use of language in simulated situations makes students more sensitive to context. Students learn that the way a king speaks is different from the way a commoner speaks in a short story. This exploration of language registers enriches students' oral vocabulary and trains articulation flexibility. In qualitative research, this is seen as a form of growth in language awareness that arises through functional practice in the classroom. The use of media and properties in Role Playing is also seen as a semiotic tool that reinforces the narrative. According to Moleong (2017), the physical symbols used by students in qualitative research can represent the depth of their imagination. A simple property is not just an aid, but a psychological trigger that helps students make the transition into a fictional world. The existence of this property makes it easier for junior high school students in grade VII who are still in the transition stage of concrete to abstract thinking to visualize the stories they are telling.

Non-verbal aspects of storytelling, such as gestures and eye contact, are analyzed as part of literary performativity. Shafi'ie (1993) emphasizes that in storytelling, the body is the main instrument. The Role Playing method trains students to realize the potential of their bodies as a means of communication. Through qualitative observations, it was seen that students who were actively involved in role-playing had better motor coordination when telling stories, as they had become accustomed to using physical movements to support the meaning of the words spoken. The application of this method also has an impact on a more humanist classroom climate. Uno (2011) stated that learning that involves elements of play and role can increase students' intrinsic motivation. At SMPN 3 Cibatu, a supportive classroom atmosphere is an important variable in this qualitative research. When students feel safe to try and make mistakes in role-playing, they will be more open to receiving criticism and suggestions, which ultimately accelerates the improvement of their storytelling quality collectively.

2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative research type with a case study approach. This approach is based on the purpose of research, which is to explore in depth and detail the phenomenon or event that occurs naturally. Suharyanto H. Soro (2023) defines a case study as a scientific activity carried out consciously, both single and plural problems using observational data collection methods, interviews, questionnaires, and documentation or the like so that they can describe and exploit the findings comprehensively and in-depth. In line with Creswell's (2016) view, the case study is an in-depth inquiry into the bound system (research site) to fully understand the changes in student behavior under natural conditions. The researcher acts as a key instrument that makes in-depth observations of field facts

without manipulation, in order to capture the meaning behind the social interactions that occur during the learning process of short stories.

The data collection method was carried out through non-participatory observation, limited interviews, and documentation. The researcher conducted systematic observations to observe the development of students' gestures, intonation, and confidence in field notes. Structured interviews were conducted with Indonesian teachers and a number of students to reveal subjective perceptions and psychological obstacles experienced. According to Sugiyono (2019), the use of these various techniques aims to obtain consistent and complementary data, including the use of documentation in the form of video recordings and draft role scenarios as authentic evidence to validate findings in the field.

The data analysis technique in this study follows the interactive model from Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. In the reduction stage, the researcher sorted and categorized the raw data to focus on indicators of character internalization that emerged through role-playing. Furthermore, the data is presented narratively in the form of an in-depth story description of the student transformation process in the context of the case at SMPN 3 Cibatu. In the final stage, the researcher conducted verification to find a pattern of relationship between the application of the Role Playing method and the improvement of the quality of storytelling and the appreciation of student character values qualitatively.

To ensure the validity of the data (trustworthiness), the researcher applies credibility standards through extended observation and increased diligence. The researcher did not only observe one meeting, but followed the entire series of processes from character introduction, role training, to final performance. In addition, a member check is carried out, as suggested by Moleong (2017), which is to re-discuss the research findings with the informant to ensure that the description prepared is in accordance with the reality experienced by the subject. This is important in case studies to ensure that the researcher's interpretation is aligned with the perspective of the participants at the research site.

The location of the research was determined at SMPN 3 Cibatu with a focus on grade VII students as a case analysis unit. The selection of respondents was carried out through purposive sampling, which is to select the class that has the most significant obstacles in speaking skills based on the recommendations of the subject teacher. As explained by Yin (2018), the strength of case studies lies in their ability to present a comprehensive picture of the subject's specific background and conditions. The data of this study is sourced from words, actions, and the atmosphere of the classroom during the Role Playing intervention process, where the researcher is directly involved in capturing the essence of the student's experience from the initial stage to the final stage of internalizing character values.

3. FINDINGS AND DISSOLUTION

The results of the research at SMPN 3 Cibatu show that the application of Role Playing in learning acts as a shield that protects students' self-esteem from embarrassment. The student, who in his daily life is known to be very quiet in the school environment, is suddenly able to show an extraordinary burst of emotion and vocal courage when he "hides" behind the mask of a character, especially when playing an antagonist or an extreme figure. From the linguistic aspect, this study found the emergence of the phenomenon of "organic improvisation". In contrast to the quantitative approach that measures the success of the number of vocabulary, this study looks at how students spontaneously choose the right diction to liven up the atmosphere of the story. The smoothness of storytelling that emerges is not due to the strong memorization of the script, but because of a deep situational understanding. Students show flexibility in language, where they are able to adjust the language register appropriately according to the demands of the role, both when being wise parents and cheerful children.

This improvement in pragmatic competence can also be seen from how students manage pauses and word emphasis in storytelling. Students begin to understand that the power of a story lies in how a word is spoken, not just what is spoken. They experiment with the speed of speech to build suspense or slow down the speech to emphasize the sad part. This vocal experiment happens naturally because

students really want the audience to understand the feelings of the character they are playing in front of the class. Researchers also found unique patterns in the use of body language or gestures during the Role Playing process. Gestures are no longer considered as awkward incremental movements, but rather are analyzed as non-verbal communication that reinforces the narrative. Students at SMPN 3 Cibatu began to use the classroom as a dynamic imaginary stage. They are no longer fixated on standing at one point, but rather dare to move, change positions, and use eye contact intensely to build a connection with the audience. This behavior indicates that students have reached the stage of stage presence which is a vital element in the art of storytelling.

In addition to gestures, the aspects of intonation and articulation undergo changes through the process of imitation and creative sound experimentation. In the reflection session, it was revealed that students often make observations of characters in the media to then adapt them into the characters of their short stories. This creative process shows that Role Playing triggers intrinsic motivation. Students seek to beautify their oral presentation not because of the coercion of academic grades from teachers, but because of a desire to achieve a performance aesthetic that satisfies themselves and their peers. The use of simple properties in the classroom is also analyzed as a semiotic tool that enriches the meaning of the story. Researchers observed how an upside-down chair or a simple wooden stick transformed its function into important symbols in the world of students' imaginations. From a qualitative perspective, this shows an increase in students' abstraction skills. In the midst of the limitations of school facilities, students are forced to rely on their imagination and narrative abilities to convince the audience. The ability to convince others through symbols and narratives is at the core of quality communication skills.

The support of the social environment in the classroom is a very strong determinant factor in the success of this method. The researchers noted that there is a culture of "collective appreciation" that grows organically among grade VII students. When a student manages to do a difficult scene or show an interesting improvisation, their peers give an instant positive response. This social support creates a "safe zone" that is indispensable for adolescent mental development. In this zone, students dare to take creative risks without fear of being ridiculed, which ultimately triggers the emergence of witty and dramatic dialogues that never appear in conventional learning. Phenomenologically, the kinesthetic experience of playing a character leads students to an understanding of the structure of the storyline that is much more settled in memory. Students reported that they had a much easier time remembering the sequence of events from orientation, complications, to resolution when they "walked in" and experienced the event for themselves in role-playing. This proves that simultaneous physical and emotional involvement can strengthen memory retention of narrative structures. As a result, when they were asked to retell their stories individually without the help of roles, the flow they conveyed became much more systematic.

However, this study also identified challenges in the form of "role dominance" by students who have naturally high confidence. The researchers observed that if not directed, dominant students tended to take more of the dialogue portion, while shy students remained in the shadows. This finding is an important note in this case study that the Role Playing method requires teacher mentoring management that is sensitive to power dynamics in the group. Teachers must ensure that each individual, regardless of their true personality, gets a balanced portion of the challenge.

Analysis of the results of in-depth interviews revealed that the main factor in improving students' abilities was the feeling of being "listened to" and "seen". For adolescents of the age of grade VII students, social recognition from peers is a fundamental psychological need. Success in short stories is finally interpreted as a form of self-actualization. There has been a very fundamental paradigm shift from originally considering speaking in front of the class as a scary thing, turning into a fun and proud activity. This change in perception is the true success of the process of internalizing the character. Interestingly, the relevance of local culture also appears spontaneously in this qualitative discussion. Students at SMPN 3 Cibatu often insert local dialects or idioms into their roles to give color to the characters. The researcher views this not as a deviation of language, but as a form of originality of storytelling. The use of local elements makes the story feel more honest, close, and emotional. The

power of emotions rooted in the students' own cultural background is what makes their storytelling abilities increase significantly, because they speak from the "heart" they know.

So, this study emphasizes that the transformation of storytelling skills at SMPN 3 Cibatu is not just the result of repeated technical training. This success is the fruit of the process of students' self-discovery through literary media and role-playing. The Role Playing method has succeeded in opening the door for students to explore their vocal, emotional, and expressive potentials that have been latent under a rigid learning system. The impact of this method is also sustainable, where the courage to speak that students gain begins to penetrate into other subjects, creating comprehensive communicative competence for students.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of data analysis and field findings at SMPN 3 Cibatu, it can be concluded that the application of the Role Playing method qualitatively has transformed the short story ability of grade VII students from mechanical activities to an expressive and meaningful performance. Psychologically, the Role Playing method functions as an instrument of "decrystallization of fear". Students who originally experienced barriers to verbal communication due to shyness managed to overcome these limitations through the use of character identities. The researchers found that the courage to speak up arises not because of technical coercion, but because of the existence of a "role shield" that makes students feel safe to explore emotions without fear of being judged as themselves.

In terms of competence, there has been an improvement in the quality of organic storytelling. Students no longer just memorize text sequences, but are able to improvise dialogues and the use of meaningful gestures. This shows that the student has reached a stage of deep character internalization, where linguistic elements such as intonation and articulation appear naturally as a consequence of the character's soulfulness in the short story. Pedagogically, this method succeeds in creating a supportive and appreciative classroom ecosystem. Storytelling learning goes from a stressful individual task to a fun collaborative process. These findings confirm that a qualitative approach to literary learning, which emphasizes hands-on experience and emotional engagement, is much more effective in building students' oral literacy than one-way lecture or oral practice methods.

Theoretically, improving the ability to tell short stories through Role Playing is a comprehensive transformation process that includes cognitive, linguistic, and emotional dimensions. This method transforms static short story texts into dynamic life experiences. Through a qualitative approach, this phenomenon is understood as the success of education in humanizing students, giving them a voice, and equipping them with communicative skills rooted in a deep and meaningful understanding of literature.

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