Benefits and Students' Perception on Role-Play Teaching Technique: Progressive & Fun Learning Experiences in Brunei Ethnic Language Course

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Benefits and Students' Perception on Role-Play Teaching Technique: Progressive & Fun Learning Experiences in Brunei

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Abstract

This paper presents a preliminary study on the teaching and learning of one of Brunei ethnic languages at The Language Centre, Universiti Brunei Darussalam (LCUBD henceforth). Dusun language is one of the ethnic languages still spoken in Brunei and is considered an endangered ethnic language. Research has shown that the usage of this language has been decreasing in recent decades due to factors such as migration and language choice. LCUBD has taken proactive measures by offering Dusun language as one of the elective courses at the center. This study aimed to identify the benefits of using role-play in learning Dusun language and identify students' perception of role-play activities in Dusun language class. Likert scale questionnaires and open-ended questions were employed to collect data on 71 students who were enrolled in the LY-1433 Dusun I (basic) course. The result of the study suggested that role-play activity was suitable for the students, fun and entertaining, and could increase their confidence Apart from that a positive student-teacher relationship also played a big role during the learning process of ethnic language. Overall, role-play can be recommended as one of the teaching techniques to teach minority ethnic language.

Keywords: fun learning, language teaching, progressive learning, role-play

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1. Introduction

Since 2009, the Language Centre, Universiti Brunei Darussalam (LCUBD henceforth) has introduced Brunei ethnic languages as a proactive measure to raise students' awareness and to preserve the local ethnic languages. In recent decades, the usage of Brunei ethnic languages has been declining due to the shift in language choices, socio-cultural factors, and the education system in Brunei (Noor Azam 2012; Fatimah & Najib, 2013; McLeelans 2014; McLeelans & Johns, 2015; Noor Azam & Siti Ajeerah, 2016). In the case of the Dusun language in Brunei, studies by Noor Azam and Siti Ajeerah (2016) found that young Dusun people had less vocabulary knowledge as compared to the elderly Dusun people, thus, suggesting that the usage of this language is declining

Teaching minority ethnic language is not an easy task as it requires effective and suitable teaching methods (Hinton, 2011). Language acquisition and learning is a complex process and there is no one standard teaching method that could satisfy all language learning needs (Liu, 2015). In Krashen's Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory, he argued that to acquire a new language, students need language 'input' and a positive attitude to drive their competencies up to a higher level (Krashen, 2009). In other words, educa-

tors need to choose a suitable teaching technique that could give the language input needed and could raise students' self-confidence for the language learning to be taken place effectively. This is why role play was chosen in this study as it could give the language input through its communicative activities (Adenan & Khairuddin, 2012) and it could give a positive impact on students attitude such as self-confidence in assisting language learning (Dohaney, Brogt, Wilson & Kennedy, 2017)

In this study, the focus will be on the teaching of the Brunei Dusun language which is categorized under the Austronesian language (Chong, 2010). According to Alas (2004), the Brunei Dusun language can be considered as one of the Dusunic language groups together with other Sabah ethnic languages such as Kimaragang, Rungus, Lotud, and Bisaya Limbang languages. However, the speakers of the Brunei Dusun language could not communicate with speakers of other Dusunic languages because there are significant linguistic differences between these languages and the Brunei Dusun language (Yusof & Saidatul, 2019; Saidatul, 2012). There is an urgency of research especially in the teaching aspect of this language as most of the research was focusing on linguistic aspects such as morphology, phonology, preposition, and pronoun (Yusof, 2016 & 2021). The studies on Brunei ethnic teaching are insufficient due of the language was offered only in LC UBD as an elective course.

This paper is a preliminary study on the use of role-play technique in teaching Brunei Dusun ethnic languages. Following are the two main objectives of this study (1) to identify the benefits of using role-play in learning the Dusun language; and (2) to identify students' perception of role-play activities in Dusun language class

Role-play is a type of communicative activity. "Role-play" comes from the word 'rotula' in Latin, which means a text that is written for an actor (Zagreb, 2017). In the context of education, it is considered as a technique that is often used to teach a second or foreign language (Atas, 2015; Lee, 2015; Lin, 2009). Many case studies confirmed the effectiveness of role-play activities in teaching and learning a language. For example, Alabsi (2016) reported that after students were exposed to role-play activities, their usage of new vocabulary had increased significantly. She found that using conventional techniques such as memorization would make students bored easily because of the repetitions.

Another research on the impact of role-playing was done by a group of educators in a project called "Drama Improves Key Competencies in Education" or DICE (2010). This project's findings revealed that students who were introduced to role-play in the classroom had shown improvement in communicating using their mother tongue. However, role-play technique still needs to be assessed on a case-by-case basis, as it might not suit every student. Atas (2015), for instance, reported that even though this technique could generally boost students' confidence, some students felt that the activity was too much for them because they had to do many tasks, such as intonation, memorization, and role-play, simultaneously. Atas' findings, thus, reinforce the notion that studying and experimenting with a different technique for language teaching is important because it can produce empirical data for education institution and teachers. These data will help institutions and teachers decide on the techniques that suit their students best, especially on ethnic language teaching. The introduction contains the purpose of the arti-

cle/ research that is formulated and presented with adequate background.

2. Method

This study used a quantitative research design as its data collection method. In this regard, a survey by using an online questionnaire was conducted due to its strength in collecting data quantitatively and easier to manage data with a large number of students (Creswell, 2014; Fah & Hoon, 2016). There were eight items included in the questionnaire. Seven items used the 5-point Likert scale (1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Neither Disagree nor Agree, 4 – Agree, and 5 – Strongly Agree) and one item was an open-ended question asking for the students' comments regarding the course as a whole and suggestions if applicable.

In this research the 'Total Population Sampling' strategy was adapted which means all of the population were chosen as samples. In LY-1433 Dusun I (basic) course, there were a total of 71 students who took the class as their elective course for 1 semester (14 weeks). These students came from 4 different faculties which are the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS), School of Business and Economics (SBE), Faculty of Sciences (FOS) and Academy of Brunei Studies (APB). They had been divided into four different groups such as stated in Table 1. They had registered LY-1433 on their on their own free will and this course had became one of their elective courses outside their respective faculties. All of these students were chosen and permitted to join the LY-1433 course as they had stated in a survey (week 1) that they doesn't have any background or skills in Brunei Dusun language. As mentioned earlier all of the 71 students were chosen as samples and had answered the survey given at the end of the course (week 14).

The questionnaire was made anonymous which means no data and personal information were linked to the students. In addition, consent forms were distributed before they answered the questionnaire.

The data collected were analysed using descriptive and triangulation analysis. The likert data were arranged in a table to show the frequency of students tendency. Subsequently it was triangulated with data from item 8 (open ended questions) to find its convergence. With this method the data would be comprehensive and more reliable (Noble & Smith, 2015). Finally the analysis discussed the emergence data from the comments made by the students.

3. Result and Discussion

In this section the result of the research will be presented. It was started with the total number of respondents and the results of the survey. The discussion of the survey was divided into five subdomains which were: the suitability of the role-play technique in teaching the course, fun and entertaining, self confidence, students' interest and finally the students' perceptions. The data in the discussion was discussed based on the survey data frequencies and students' opinion.

Table 1. Respondents

Group	Male	Female	Total
1	9	9	18
2	9	9	18
3	9	9	18
4	9	8	17
TOTAL	36	35	71 respondents

Table 2. Survey Result

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I think the tasks and activities given in this course was suitable.	0 (0%)	5 (7%)	6 (8.5 %)	29 (40.8%)	31 (43.7%)
I feel doing role-play and writing script was a burden for us (Reversed)	30 (42.3%)	33% (46.5%)	2 (2.8%)	6 (8.5%)	0 (0%)
The learning environment was fun and I understand the content that was taught.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.4%)	25 (35.2%)	45 (63.4%)
There are many words that I couldn't use to build sentences (Reversed)	20 (28.2%)	32 (45.1%)	15 (21.1%)	3 (4.2%)	1 (1.4%)
I feel more confident in using the language in class after doing the dramatic activities.	0 (0%)	1 (1.4%)	11 (15.5%)	29 (40.8%)	30 (42.3%)
This course need to do research field trip on Dusun language and culture	0 (0%)	4 (5.6%)	8 (11.3%)	15 (21.1%)	44 (62%)
I will continue my course into higher level	0 (0%)	2 (2.8%)	32 (45.1%)	27 (38%)	10 (14.1%)

Table 1 shows the number of respondents in this research. Each of the group had almost the same amount of students between male and female students. All of the groups had 50% (9) male students and 50% (9) female students except in group 4 in which it had 53% (9) male students and 47% (8) female students. One of the students in the group had withdrawn from the group due to her timetable problem.

Table 2 shows the result of the survey. It was discussed according to its subdomain in the following sections.

a.   Suitable for Learning Ethnic Language.

In this study, students perceived that the role-play technique was suitable for learning the Brunei Dusun language. Based on the questionnaire, item 1, 7% (5 students) disagreed, 8.5% (6 students) were neutral, and 84.5% (60 students) agreed or strongly agre-

ed that the tasks and activities given in this course were suitable. For item 2, 88.7% (63 students) strongly disagreed or disagreed, 2.8% (2 students) were neutral, and 8.5% (6 students) agreed that doing role-play and writing script for the class activities was a burden for them. The responses to these two items showed that the majority of the students agreed that the role-play activities given to them were suitable for the class and not a burden for them. These data are supported by the students' comments such as the following:

> "As a whole this course is interesting. The activities given made me want to do role-play in the class" (R6).
> "I feel that activities given had increased my fluency to speak in the (Dusun) language with my cousins. It has allowed us to try new words that had not been learned before" (R11).
> "The activities were interactive and fun" (R26).

Language learning cannot be separated from communication activities (Yusof, 2012). This is why the majority of the students agreed that the role-play was suitable for language learning. Role-play technique can be improvised by the teachers in which it could become a platform where the students could practice the language that is being taught. The role-play activity could stimulate students to think about what to speak and how to react in a fun and interactive situation. According to Norul, Nurhidayah, Ng, Wan & Mohamad (2012) when the language learning activities are suitable, the learning of the target language will be favorable and conducive for the students. This would be suitable and ideal in helping the students to increase their proficiency in the target language.

b. Fun and Entertaining

Role-play can help the students to learn the ethnic language in a fun and entertaining environment. Based on the questionnaire, item 3, 0% (no student) strongly disagreed or disagreed, 1.4% (1 student) were neutral, and 98.6% (70 students) agreed or strongly agreed that the class environment was fun and they could understand the content of the lesson. For item 4, 73.2% (52 students) strongly disagreed or disagreed, 21.1% (15 students) were neutral, and 5.6% (4 students) agreed that there were many words that they don't understand. The responses to these two items showed that the majority of the students felt that the learning environment was fun and they could understand the lesson. These data are supported by the comments made by the students in the survey:

> "This course had caught my interest. Activities and the lecturer had helped us to make the content easy to learn and understand" (R8).
> "This course was fun. With activities and lecturer, it makes it more interesting and easy to understand" (R11).
> "As a whole this course was fun and the lesson is easy to understand" (R25).

Students normally enjoy the role-play activities as they could have fun while learning the language (Dice, 2010). When they imagine becoming someone else in a different situation and they could use and improvise the language using their creativity. Situations given in role-playing were realistic yet challenging for example in one of the lessons they were told to do role-play in which they are going to meet their old friend in a fruit market. They talked about stuff they bought in the market and eventually talking about their life such as their job and inviting the friend to their wedding ceremo-

ny. The response of the students was encouraging as their friends laughed watching the performance and the students had tried to improvised the performance.

If compared to passive language teaching techniques such as memorization, the students will feel bored because they have to do a lot of memorization (Alabsi, 2016). This will indirectly affect their learning as there are too many repetitions which would make them forget what they had memorized (Haq, 2014). Thus implementing role-play technique could help teachers creating an active learning environment that eventually makes the language class fun and entertaining for students (Atas, 2015: Yusof, 2021).

This is suggesting that incorporating role-play in ethnic language teaching could be fun and entertaining. This would indirectly encourage the students to use and practice the target language. According to Krashen (2009), the teaching technique should be fun as it could help in the process of language learning. This is why the students in this study had positive experiences towards the role-play technique used in the class.

c. Help to Increase Self Confidence

Role-play activities also could help students to be more confident. Based on the questionnaire item 5, 1.4% (1 student) disagreed, 15.5% (11 students) were neutral, and 83.1% (59 students) agreed or strongly agreed that they felt confident in using the language in class after doing the dramatic activities. This result showed that the majority of the students believed that the class activities could help them increase their confidence. These data are supported by the comment made by a student in the survey:

> "The activities were fun. I learned many new vocabularies and it increased my confidence in using the language

and presenting in front of my friends" (R19).

When students enjoy the process of learning, it will increase their confidence in using the language (Norul et al., 2012). In this study, the role-play technique had helped the students to think on their own and express themselves less anxiously. During the role-play, they were imagining themselves as different people and they can say whatever they want according to their role. Even though they were making mistakes, their friends and the teacher were not allowed to interrupt the performance. This had greatly helped them in using the language confidently as they knew it was just a play and it was not real. Similarly, a study by Atas (2015) found that students who were exposed to role-play technique displayed more confidence because they could imagine being someone else. (O'Toole, 2009). As emphasized by Krashen (2009) in his theory, confidence in using a language is important since it could empower the students to use the language and acquire the knowledge.

d. Increase in Students' Interests

Apart from a fun learning experience, the role-play technique could help in increasing the interest of students in learning an ethnic language. Based on the questionnaire item 6 recorded, 5.6% (4 students) disagreed, 11.3% (8 students) were neutral, and 83.1% (59 students) agreed or strongly agreed that they need to do a field trip to learn more about the Dusun language and culture. For item 7, 2.8% (2 students) disagreed, 45.1% (35 students) were neutral, and 52.1% (57 students) agreed or strongly agreed that they will continue studying the Dusun language at a higher level.

These data indicated that the interest of the students in learning an ethnic language

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had increased. The students felt that they need to do field trip and learn the language outside the class. Furthermore, they wanted to learn not just the language but the culture of the Dusun ethnic too shows how important the active teaching technique such as role-play is to be implemented.

A study by Wasli (2013) had shown that the number of students who had taken ethnic language courses in Sabah had decreased dramatically due to many factors in which among them was a poor teaching technique. She argued that the teaching technique and learning activities need to be fun and entertaining. A suitable teaching technique such as role-play could help teachers and learning institutions to increase their students' interest and the number of students who wish to learn an ethnic language. In other words, when students have a good learning experience, their interest in learning the ethnic language will be increasing too. This was supported by the response of more than half of the cohorts who wanted to continue their studies to a higher level.

e. Students Perceptions

Last but not least the role-play technique was well-received by the majority of the students, as apparent in the interest and the comments of the students at the end of the course. Item 8 showed the overall comments on the perceptions of the students towards the teaching and learning in class. The majority of the students reacted positively to the activities, the contents, the teacher, and the environment of the class. Their positive responses are evident in their comments such as the following:

> "Overall this class was interesting. It always made me want to participate in the activities" (R6).
> "At first I never thought that I would learn this language. When I was in

class, I found the stories and history of the ethnic interesting" (R16).
> "I enjoyed it! Keep it up!" (R20).
> "It was fun. The teacher was open minded and friendly with the students" (R48).

Students' positive perceptions indicate that the teaching technique used is suitable and effective for students to learn the language. This study also found that a good student-teacher relationship also played a big role in learning an ethnic language. Johnny (2014) in her study concluded that the student-teacher relationship during teaching and learning can greatly help students to learn and lessens their pressure. If the student-teacher has negative relationship, there are possibilities that their achievement would be lower compared to those who have a positive relationship (Hussain, Nawaz, Nasir, Kiani & Hussain, 2013). A case study conducted by Yusof (2012 & 2021) also showed similar results whereby the role-play technique and student-teacher relationship had left a positive impact on the students' perceptions and their learning experience. A positive environment and good relationship enable students to enjoy the learning process throughout the course

Even though the majority of the students responded positively, a few of the students felt dissatisfied during the class. This sentiment is evident in their responses such as the following:

> "Two classes in a week were not enough for us" (R1).
> "Please give more homework and exercises" (R2).
> "I didn't like the class activities as some of my friends didn't cooperate with us" (R3).
> "The class was fun but it was hard to understand" (R34).

This reaction is normal as role-play activities could sometimes become a difficult task for some students due to various reasons. Atas (2015) in his study mentioned that some students might find that role-play is difficult, as it needs them to do many language tasks, such as intonation, memorisation and body language, simultaneously. Apart from that, some might feel that the role-play activity alone is not enough and they need to do more language activity and two classes per week are not enough for them. It shows that role-play cannot become a stand-alone technique in language teaching and learning (Yusof, 2012 & 2016).

4.   Conclusion

Teaching minority ethnic language is not an easy task, as students need suitable learning activities. This study has discussed some of the benefits of role-play teaching technique and the students' positive perception of role-play activities in learning one of Brunei's unwritten ethnic languages. Although the majority of the students benefit from the positive impacts of the role-play technique, there are a few who showed dissatisfaction during the class. This shows that there is no one ideal teaching technique in language teaching. Therefore, the benefits of role-play technique should be maximized by combining it with other teaching techniques. It is hoped that more research can be done especially on teaching techniques as they could help in the learning of unwritten ethnic languages (McLeelans, 2014). As more research data is needed to gather empirical evidence for researchers and educational institutions in the future, teachers and educators need to be bold to try different teaching approaches with different ethnic languages.

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