The Effect of Teaching Genre-Based Activities on Iraqi EFL Learners' Speaking Performance

Saadiya Wudaa Alquraishy[a], Ali Abdulhussein Sagban[b], Hisham Adnan AlMumar[c], [a]University of Al-Qadisiyah, Iraq, [b]Al-Furat Al-Awst Technical University, Iraq, [c]University of Kufa,Iraq, Email: [a]saadiya.wydaa@qu.edu.iq, [b]dw.ali3@atu.edu.iq, [c]Hushama.jasim@uokufa.edu.iq

The current research investigated the impact of teaching genre- based activities on Iraqi EFL learners performance in speaking and examined to what extent these activities might help them to perform better on speaking tasks. To fulfil this aim, some generic based activities were taught to be used as the treatment procedures. For this reason an experiment was conducted and pre-post speaking tests were applied to 40 Iraqi EFL students at the university level. The results indicated that the genre-based activities significantly affected Iraqi EFL learners' performance in speaking. Such results can provide designers with guidelines to make use of the visions resulting from the genre-based teaching perspective.

Key words: *Genre-based activities, EFL learners, Speaking performance..*

Introduction

Speaking is considered as the most significant skill to be advanced and improved as a real communication means. Harmer (2007) cited in Leoing and Ahmadi (2017:35) that communication by human beings is a complicated process. People need communication as they desire to convey information. Similarly, Nasiri and Gilakjani (2016:57) show that communication is used by speakers with the intention to tell something to someone. Language is used to be consistent with speakers' goals. So for the effective communication speakers at the same time need to be listeners and speakers. One of the most difficult aspects of learning a foreign language is speaking. It is highly significant in learning a second language. In spite of speaking status, schools and universities have ignored it due to diverse causes such as highlighting on grammar and hostile proportions of teacher-student. Because speaking tests are difficult to be assessed objectively and they take time to be carried out, speaking has been lacking in testing (Clifford, 1987:233). Learning speaking skills is

significant when learning a language and the learners' capacity to do an exchange in the language is the centre of its success (Nunan, 1995:593). Rather than focusing on knowledge of the rules of grammar and semantics, speakers of a foreign language need also to gain the knowledge of how the language is used in the context of an interactive exchange by native speakers, in which there is an interaction of various factors. For this reason, it is hard for EFL speakers to speak fluently and properly in social exchanges. EFL learners are generally rather poor at spoken English and this might be related to the slight contact with the target language and absence of interaction with native speakers (Shumin, 1997:4). This problem could be also seen within the Iraqi learning system. For example, Jasim (2012: 286) debated that this absence of a target language milieu could lead to the lack of involvement in real-life situations and consequently they were unable to express themselves in simple English discourse. In this aspect, Dehham and Mohammed and Wiam (2010: 235) showed that in teaching speaking tasks, it is generally assumed that skills of spoken- language can be developed merely by extra emphasis on speaking skills at the micro level and teaching of bottom-up skills without paying attention to increasing the learners' awareness of the text as an entire unit. In other words, no adequate consideration is assumed to the features that hinder or facilitate the speaking genres production. The researchers in the current study see that Iraqi EFL learners require explicit instruction in speaking, which has to be learned and trained as any language skill. So, for the sake of offering assistance for getting skilled English language speakers, EFL teachers need to take into consideration the genre-based teaching as a crucial way by which EFL speakers can overcome their poor ability. Genre-based approaches as maintained by Derewianka (2003:142) start with the "whole text as the unit" in focus instead of focusing on the sentence. Thus, the meaning creation at the discourse level rather than the syntactical forms acquisition is the main concern. Bearing all this in mind, the present study investigated the impact of teaching genre-based activities on Iraqi EFL learners' performance in speaking.

Objective of the Study

The research question that is pursued by the researchers is the following:

Can genre-based activities affect the speaking performance of Iraqi EFL learners?

Based on this research question, the researchers formulated the following null hypothesis:

Genre-based activities do not affect the speaking performance of Iraqi EFL learners.

Limit of the Study

This study is limited to:

1.Using genre-based activities in teaching narrative texts only .

2. EFL third year students at the College of Education, University of Al-Qadisiyah during the academic year 2017-2018.

Literature Review

Genre-based Approach

In an attempt to define genre, experts tried to present their own concepts on genre in a variety of ways. Christie (2005:233) claims that genre can be defined as "a technical term for a particular instance of a text type". Hyland (2008:544) describes it as "a term for grouping texts together, representing how writers typically use language to respond to recurring situations." Nunan (1999:309) similarly indicated that "genre is a purposeful, socially constructed oral or written communicative event, such as narrative, a casual conversation, a poem, a recipe, or a description. Different genres are characterised by a particular structure or stages, and grammatical forms that reflect the communicative purpose of the genre in question."

Knapp & Watkins (2009: 22) acknowledge that the word genre refers "to the language processes involved in doing things with language". Swales (1990: 33) says that genre is can be used to refer to any kind of discourse, "spoken or written, with or without literary aspirations". Thus, genre can be referred to as a term that represent the speakers' or writers' complicated oral/written responses or to a bid of a social context (Johns, 2002: 3). Furthermore, Hyland (2004: 26) asserts that "we cannot communicate without using genres, because genres provide the basis for what we expect to find in a text, contributing to what we see as its coherence and the options available to us for creating meaning". Regarding this, Martin and Rose (2008:120) signifies genre importance by admitting that genre theory in functional linguistics, is a theory of how language is used; it describes the ways by which language can be mobilised by us –"how out of all the things we might do with language, each culture chooses just a few, and enacts them over and over again-slowly adding to the repertoire as needs arise, and slowly dropping things that aren't much use".

Basically, genre theory can be considered as a language use theory. It inspires what is called 'genre-based' approaches. Australia was the first to develop the use of genre-based approach in language learning (Nugroho and Hafrizon, 2009:9). These approaches that adopt 'genre-

based activities' are being applied progressively in EFL educational systems and being so they are recognised as one of the modern age basic trends, "with discourse and genre analysis, schema theory, pragmatics and systemic functional linguistics rekindling an interest in functional-based approaches to language teaching (Rodgers, 2001:67)". In a similar way, Hyland (2002:115) believe that genre-based approaches possess an effect on how language is used by us and also on the "literacy education" anywhere. Swales (1990:34) believes that genre-based approach can be described as language teaching established on genre production results and that is the study of how we use language within a specific setting. It, as expressed by (Bhatia 1993:66), deals with the language use form in relation to meaning. Nugroho and Hafrizon (2009:9) believe that the genre-based approach is founded on three language learning conventions. First, language learning is considered as an activity that is social. This means that it is a consequence of cooperation between the lecturers together with their student and among the students themselves, student and other students in the group. Secondly, learning becomes more effective if lecturers are clear about "what is expected of students". The lecturer interferes when necessary to assist students in building knowledge as well as the skills that were negotiated in an explicit way. The genre-based approach should be a visible pedagogy in which knowledge about language is provided explicitly. Thirdly, the process of language learning is a sequence of steps that are based on scaffolding. Vygotsky suggests that collaboration between lecturers and students support learning. This involves using language as a dialogue between lecturers and students.

Phases of the Genre-based Approach

The genre-based approach has been applied with different stages according to different researchers. Callaghan and Rothery developed the earliest model (1988:39-47). According to that model the teaching /learning cycle consists of three stages: modelling the text, joint construction of the text, and independent construction of the text. In modelling, the teacher presents a model of the target genre discussing the purpose and social function. During the stage of joint construction, the teacher focuses on the linguistic characteristics of the text pointing out the stages that compose the text. The third stage of independent construction of the text, the teacher usually allows student to practice the genre independently (Hidayat, 2012:17).

Hammond et. al., (1992) cited in Depdiknas (2004:66) suggested four stages for the teaching/learning cycle: "building knowledge of the field, modelling of the text, joint construction of the text, and independent construction of the text". The first stage aims at focusing the learners' cognitive skills to the topic at hand. It relied on the notion that learners already had a previous knowledge and they can use it when they come upon new information. In modelling stage, teachers usually show text models that can be explored in front of the students. The Joint Construction stage purpose is to sustain cooperation between the teacher

and students. They share their concepts, and construct texts together through "discussion, negotiation, and communication". The last stage of independent construction of the text serves two purposes. Firstly, it allows students to practice what has been learnt and secondly it can assess the extent to which students can understand the material when they perform what is required from them independently.

In an updated model of the teaching/learning cycle, Feez and Joyce (1998) cited in Feez (2002:66) proposed five stages for the cycle, namely building the context, modelling / deconstructing, joint construction, independent construction, and comparing texts. In the first step, the teacher explains the social as well as cultural function of the text. In the second step, the teacher explores various models for the target text indicating all the structural and schematic features of the presented models. The phase of joint-construction is achieved through the teacher's guidance when he and his students share the practice of constructing the text. The teacher starts reducing his scaffolding throughout this stage. In the independent-construction phase, the teacher gives up scaffolding with the aim of granting the students with chances to construct their texts independently. Later on, students begin comparing and contrasting different samples of the text.

The present study adopts the model developed by Hammond et. al., (1992). Accordingly, a four - stage model of the genre-based approach is going to be used to teach speaking: "building Knowledge of the field, modelling / deconstructing of the text , joint construction of the text, and independent construction of the text".

Speaking Skill

Speaking can be defined as delivering a message through the mouth, it occurs orally between speaker and listener. The key point of the speaking activity is that communication occurs between speakers and listeners. In order for communication to occur, the speaker and listener should understand each other. In any communication there is an information to be exchanged between two people (Brown ,1987: 2). For this reason, Luoma (2004:2) defined speaking as process through which meaning is constructed by means of an interaction which may involve "producing, receiving and processing information". Speaking form and meaning are relying mainly upon the situation where it arises, participants, the physical setting, and the speaking purposes.

English teaching frequently gives speaking skill the primacy. In this sense, Danielson et al (2014: 123) stated " the scientifically valid procedure in language learning involves listening first, to be followed by speaking than comes reading and finally the writing of the language". In other words, in English instruction particularly in its initial stages, priority need to be given to the improvement of the skills of listening and speaking.

Moreover, when speaking occurs, learners express their opinions and feel confidence to speak up when matters of high interest arise. Besides, learners may develop a group of skills, strategies and behaviours that help them to control the difficult learning situations. Fielding and Ruddock (2002: 44) clarified that speaking incidents facilitate a greater sense of involvement, respect and self-value, and learning controlling (Ranson, 2000:262).

The speaking skill consists of several components. According to Hormaililis (2003 : 6), the speaking components are: "pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension". Vocabulary is an important aspect that plays a major role in supporting the speaking activity. It is concerned with choosing the words that are right and suitable. Concerning the second component which is grammar, it is believed that interaction cannot run in a smooth way unless its grammar is understood. Consequently, speakers need to pay attention to the grammar they use when speaking. Communicating massages with meaningful language cannot occur and be comprehensible without rules of grammar. Fluency, on the other hand, is the activity of orally reproducing words, namely exchanging ideas between interlocutors. Being fluent is the state in which the speakers use the language with confidence deprived of pauses and reluctance. Kelly (2000: 11) ensures that pronunciation is speech sound production for communication. He adds that the inaccurate use of stress and intonation may lead to problems. The last component of speaking is comprehension and refers to understanding what the speaker says is a condition for the communication to occur.

The Narrative Text

A text can be called narrative if it is concerned with storytelling with the aim of offering a world vision that might interests or notifies the listener or reader (Nugroho and Hafrezon,2009:17). Another purpose is to provide meaning to an incident or a sequence of incidents by the means of narrating a story. It can be assumed that such texts are concerned with presenting a story which contains various events to entertain readers / listeners (Permana and Zuhri,2013:2). So, it can be said the story which is presented through a narrative text contains events that are ordered in a chronological way (Augusta,2015: 23).

Joyce & Feez (2000:65) maintain that the linguistic features that a narrative text has are the following:

 1) It has specific characters with definite identities. These characters can be with human or animal   characteristics.
2) Action verbs are used to describe what is happening.
3) The use of past tense
4) It involves the use of dialogue with the use of verbs like " said, asked, and replied". The tense of these verbs might be shifted from the past tense to the present tense or future.

5) For the story to be enhanced and developed, descriptions are used for an image to be created in the mind of the readers.
 6) First person and third person narration can be used.

Rustipa (2011: 17) believes that the schematic structure of any narrative text consists of "orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution, and coda". Orientation is an introduction about the characters and the time and place setting. The clauses used are in simple past, "temporal conjunctions, individualized participants, material processes are used in this stage". Complication is the major part of a narrative. It includes the story events that might inspire guessing what is happening by the reader. It is recognised by using simple past conceptual processes and contributors that can be individualised. Evaluation offers the crisis's appraisal. It is often recognised in lexis that are attitudinal. Resolution offers the crisis's resolution. Coda represents the closing stage in order to form a viewpoint about the whole text. It perhaps involves a narrator comment to show the narrative significance.

Method

Research Design

The research design followed in this present study is a quantitative one where two different speaking tests were applied before and after the experiment on two groups: the treatment and the control group. Then, the scoring values of the pre-administrated test were compared with those of the post-administrated test for both groups. If the post-test scoring values of the treatment group are higher than those of the control one, it can be said that the increase in the values is attributed to the treatment procedures followed in teaching the treatment group. Accordingly, the two groups were selected in a random way The treatment group was given treatment procedures to experience teaching the speaking skill by using genre-based activities. The control group, in turn, was taught by teaching speaking according to the prescribed method of teaching speaking.

Participants

The participants of this study were 40 third year students at the English language Department, College of Education, University of Al-Qadisiyah, for the academic year 2017-2018. The third year stage consists of four sections. Two of them were chosen in a random way to constitute the sample of the study, each with 20 students. The equivalence of the two groups was checked according to their age and level in speaking performance. It was found that the average of their age is between 21-23. Table 1 indicates that the two groups are equivalent in speaking performance before the application of the experiment.

Table 1: The Pre-test Statistics for Control and Treatment GroupsLevel in Speaking Performance

Variable	Control group		Treatment Group		t- value	Level of sig.	Levene's Test	Level of sig.
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.				
Speaking Performance	9.300	2.577	9.450	2.781	0.177	0.861	0.407	0.527

Instruments of the Study

In order to test the participants' spoken performance, a pretest as well as post test was administered in an interview. They were applied orally by asking the participants to present a narrative text. The participants were asked to tell a story on "My first time abroad" in the pretest, while in the posttest they were asked to tell a story on "Losing a close friend". Both tests were recorded and the data of the tests were obtained by scoring the participants answers according to the scoring scheme suggested by Brown (2001: 407). Following that scheme the participants' oral proficiency is assessed by considering "grammar, fluency, pronunciation, and comprehension". However, this scoring scheme consists of four components to be scored on a series of scores which have numerical values. Each component has been given 5 scores. For this reason, the highest score achieved is 20, whereas the lowest score is 4 (see Table 2 below).

Other instruments used were recorded extracts, videos, pictures as well as maps. Those instruments played a major role in the teaching- learning cycle. The reason behind their importance might be related to the role they played in constructing the participants' background knowledge as a first step when applying the genre-based approach in teaching speaking.

Table 2: The Test Scoring Categories for Speaking Brown (2001:407)

scores	Fluency	Pronunciation	Grammar	Comprehension
1	(No Specific fluency description. Refer to other to four language areas for implied level of fluency.)	Errors in pronunciation are frequent, but can be understood by a native speaker, used to dealing with for engineers attempting to speak his language.	Errors in grammar are frequent, but speaker can be understood by a native speaker used to dealing with foreigners attempting to speak his language.	Within the scope of his very limited language experience, can understand simple questions and statements if delivered with slowed speech, repetition, or paraphrase.
2	Can handle with confidence but not with facility most social situations, including introductions and casual conversations about current events, as well as work, family, and autobiographical information.	Accent is intelligible though often faulty.	Can usually handle elementary constructions quite accurately but does not have thorough or confident control of the grammar.	Can get the gist of most conversations of non-technical subjects (i.e., topics that require no specialized knowledge).
3	Can discuss particular interests of competence with reasonable ease. Rarely has to grope for words.	Errors never interfere with understanding and rarely disturb the native speaker. Accent may be obviously foreign.	Control of grammar is good. Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics.	Comprehension is quite complete at a normal rate of speech.
4	Able to use language fluently on all levels normally pertinent to professional needs. Can participate in any conversation within the range oh this experience with a high degree of fluency	Errors in pronunciation are quite rare.	Able to use the language accurately on all levels normally pertinent to professional needs. Errors in grammar are quite rare.	Can understand any conversation within the range of his experience.
5	Has complete fluency in the language such that his speech is fully accepted by educated native speakers.	Equivalent to and fully accepted by educated native speakers.	Equivalent to that of an educated native speaker.	Equivalent to that of an educated native speaker.

Procedures

The lecturer (one of the researcher) started their experiment on 1st of April, 2018 and ended on 1st June, 2018. It lasted for two months. Both groups were taught by the same lecturer. The lectures were given for both groups as two lectures per week. As far as the control group is concerned, the lecturer taught them according to the conventional way of teaching speaking skills. The steps that followed in teaching the narrative spoken text for the treatment group were adopting the teaching-learning cycle suggested by (Hammond et. al., 1992)(see Appendix 1), the phases were as follows:

A. Building Knowledge

In this phase, the lecturer asks the students to look at a set of pictures before they listen to the extract of the narrative text recorded with the aim of brainstorming their ideas about the topic. Then they begin listening to the narrative text. The lecturer asks them several questions that

helped them to understand the content of the target text. Part of this phase, the lecturer also explained the common words that reoccur in any narrative text.

B. Modelling of the Text

In this phase modelling, the students listened to another an extract of a narrative text recorded by a native speaker of English. After they listened to the extract, the lecturer began to explore the text that the students listened to and pointed out all the basic linguistic and grammatical features as well as the purpose and social function of the text.

C. Joint Construction

The lecturer divides the students into groups and gives each one of them a topic to speak about. Students in each group scaffold each other to brainstorm their ideas. The lecturer guides them by presenting the verbs that can be used and help them to pronounce words correctly. This phase involved the participation of the lecturer with the whole students in constructing a narrative text similar to the ones they have listened to. The lecturer began to decrease her scaffolding at this phase so that the students can develop a degree of independence to construct narrative texts by themselves in the last phase.

D. Independent Construction of the Text

The objective of this phase is to enable the students to speak independently. Therefore, they need to apply what they have learnt from the previous phases about constructing a narrative text. Consequently, each student was asked to present a narrative text in front of the class while the lecturer's role was just to provide advice if needed.

Results

The results of the current study question is as follows:

Can genre-based activities affect the speaking performance of Iraqi EFL learners?

To investigate the aim of the present study, "t-test formula" for two groups that has been used (see Table 3).

Table 3: The Participants' Speaking Performance in the Post-test for the Treatment and Control Groups

Variable	Control group		Treatment Group		t- value	Computed value	D.F.	Level of sig.
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.				
Speaking Performance	10.750	1.803	12.450	1.669	2.024	3.094	38	0.004

Table (3) shows that the treatment group mean score is (12.450) and it is (10.750) for the control group, the t-value (2.024) is lower than the computed value (3.094) at level of significance 0.004 and (38) degrees of freedom. Thus it can be said that there is a statistical difference between the treatment group and the control one in the post-test of speaking performance in favour for the treatment group (see Graphic 1 below).

Graphic 1. The Post-Test Mean of the Treatment and Control Groups in Speaking Performance
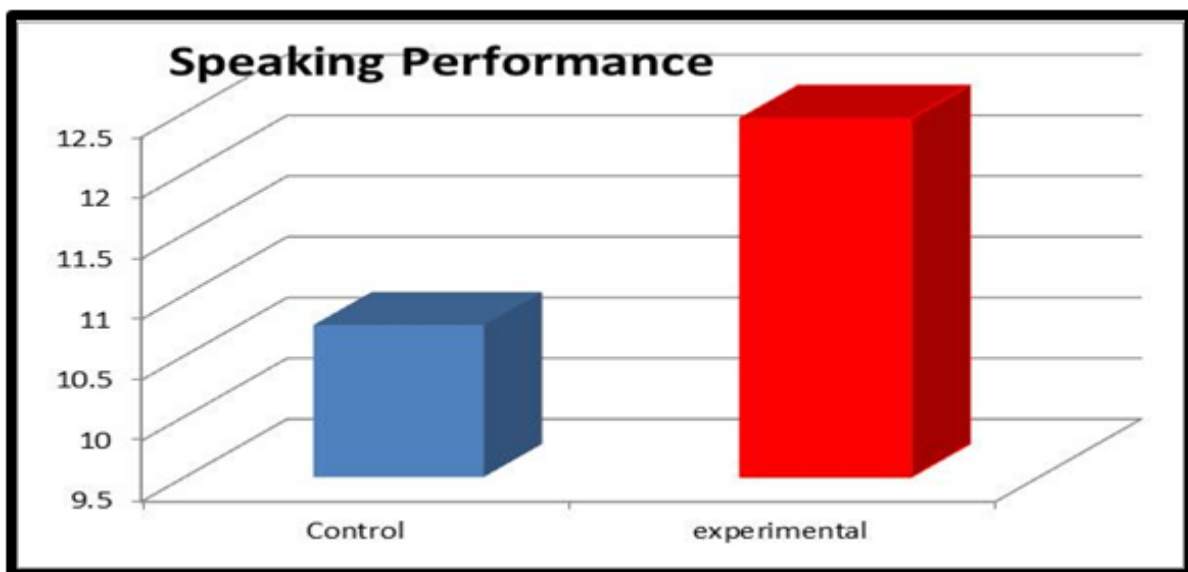
Discussion

The speaking post-test results indicated in the previous section show that the treatment group outperformed the control one. This indicates that the speaking performance taught by the use of generic activities is clearly more effective in enhancing Iraqi EFL learners' speaking performance than teaching them by the use the conventional method of teaching speaking. The reason for that improvement might be owed to the explicit teaching given by lecturer about the linguistic and schematic genres of the spoken text taught. In addition to that, the lecturer's guidance throughout the first three stages of the teaching/learning cycles played a great role in that improvement. The lecturer was a facilitator helping the students beginning

with brainstorming their ideas, moving to modelling and deconstructing and to joint construction of the text. Such a role in these previous cycles helped them a great deal in moving to the last cycle of independent construction. Moreover, the generic model followed in this study is recursive by its nature. In other words the lecturer didn't move from one cycle to another unless certain improvement is noticed by her in the students' speaking level.

Conclusions

The four phases of the genre- based approach applied in this paper reveal that there is a significant effect on the speaking performance of Iraqi EFL learners. Most of these learners were able to understand the main features of the narrative text being taught. To successfully apply this approach, university lecturers are required to provide as many as speaking samples as they can in their classes. The reason for that is to focus on the target text features to be taught. Iraqi EFL learners faced many difficulties in learning according to the genre approach and the reason might be attributed to the lack or absence of knowledge concerning the generic features of the spoken texts particularly the narrative ones. The role of the lecturer as a facilitator helped them a great deal in overcoming these difficulties. In other words, lecturers must not be too stiff when teaching the students the genre- based activities. Moreover, the genre-based approach is a one that balances the emphasis on form and meaning. Being so, it is hoped that this study might give insights for lecturers and syllabus designers in Iraqi educational institutions to follow the genre based approach in teaching the four skills which might increase efficiency of the English language.

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Appendix 1

Sample of a Typical Lesson Plan

A. Pre-Activities
- The lecturer welcomes students and checks their presence in the class.
- The lecturer explores some pictures about the narrative text they are going to listen to.
- What predict from these pictures?
- The lecturer tells her students about subject matter and the learning goals of the lecture.

B. While Activities
" Building Knowledge of the Field"
- The lecturer switch on the recorder and the students listen to a sample of a narrative text.
- The lecturer and her students discuss the content of the narrative text.
- Students detect words, verbs, or phrases that reoccurred in the text.

"Modelling"
- The lecturer presents a sample of a narrative text on the data show and began explaining the social purpose ,benefits and objective of the text in addition to pointing out its linguistic feature.
- The lecturer clarifies the stages of the narrative texts "schematic structure" and the role of these stages.
- The lecturer presents another sample of narrative text.
- Students detect the elements in the text, such as Orientation, complication and resolutions.

"Joint Construction"
- The lecturer divide her students into four/five groups and assign each group a topic to speak about.
- The lecturer gives them the verbs that they can use on when they speak.
- The lecturer corrects her student' mistakes in pronunciation.

"Independent Construction"
- The lecturer asks students to present narrative texts individually keeping the organizational structure of the narrative texts in mind.
- Student take turn to tell their narrative texts.
- The lecturer offers feedback on the presentation of her students.

C. Post Activities

- The lecturer together with her students conclude the learning outcomes.
- The lecturer evaluates the students' performance.