

THE EFFECTS OF DIALOGIC READING STRATEGY ON EFL YOUNG LEARNERS' READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS

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Abstract: The Effects of Dialogic Reading Strategy on Efl Young Learners' Reading Comprehension Skills. This paper reports the study of the effectiveness of the dialogic reading instruction which was implemented in a primary school with low social economic background. The study employed quasi experiment research design. Forty students of the fourth grade participated in the study. They were assigned into two groups: control and experimental groups. The control group received traditional reading instruction, while the experimental group was treated with 8 meetings of dialogic reading instruction. A reading comprehension test was used to measure the effectiveness of the treatment. The results seem to favor the dialogic reading instruction.

Keywords: *dialogic reading, reading comprehension, young learners*

Abstrak: Pengaruh Strategi Membaca Dialogis terhadap Kemampuan Membaca Pelajar Pemula Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing. Di Indonesia, karena kurangnya budaya membaca dan rendahnya kemampuan guru dalam mengajar membaca teks bahasa Inggris kepada siswa SD telah mengakibatkan rendahnya kemampuan siswa SD membaca bahasa Inggris. Artikel ini melaporkan hasil penelitian tentang efektifitas pembelajaran membaca teks bahasa Inggris dengan menggunakan strategi membaca dialogis pada siswa SD. Penelitian ini menggunakan rancangan quasi experiment. Sebanyak 2 kelas masing-masing terdiri dari 20 siswa SD kelas IV berpartisipasi pada penelitian ini. Satu kelas dijadikan kelompok percobaan dan satu kelas lainnya dijadikan kelompok kontrol. Kelompok eksperimen diberi pembelajaran dengan menggunakan strategi membaca dialogis sebanyak 8 kali pertemuan, sedangkan kelompok kontrol diberi pembelajaran membaca secara tradisional. Pada akhir eksperimen, semua siswa diberi tes pemahaman untuk mengukur efektifitas pembelajaran membaca. Hasilnya menunjukkan adanya perbedaan yang signifikan yang menunjukkan keunggulan kelompok siswa yang diberi pembelajaran membaca dialogis.

Kata kunci: membaca dialogis, pemahaman membaca, Bahasa Inggris untuk anak-anak

Reading is a highly complicated act that students have to master. Reading is not solely a single skill but a combination of many skills and processes in which the students interact with printed words and texts for comprehending the content and for pleasure. The basic goals of reading are to enable students to gain an understanding of a text, to develop appreciation and interests, and to find solutions to their daily life problems. Being able to read enables students to express themselves more communicatively, which is the main goal of language learning. Being able to read also enables students to function effectively in this literate world.

EFL students normally experience many challenges with reading English texts, more specifically they face difficulties with vocabulary and comprehension (Hickman, Pollard-Durodola, & Vaughn, 2004). In EFL context, in which the students' mother tongue is not English, numerous studies have been conducted to search for effective instructional strategies that support these students' English literacy skill acquisition. Research has identified that an important element in promoting the development of EFL students' vocabulary and overall literacy skills is for adults to read aloud picture books to the students where the adult prompted the students into

dialogue about the book, which is referred to as dialogic reading. (Valdez-Menchaca & Whitehurst, 1992; Collin, 2009).

Dialogic reading refers to a strategy where an adult, in this case - a teacher, reading to the students, then having the students engaged in a dialogue about a book through five specific prompting techniques – completion, recall, open-ended, wh (what, who, when, where, and why), and distancing questioning (Zevenbergen and Whitehurst, 2003). During the reading experience with the students, the teacher (or adult) may ask the students to complete the blanks at the end of the sentence orally, to recall about the content of the book the student has read, to ask open-ended questions such as to tell what is happening in a picture, to ask “wh” questions about the pictures in the books (i.e. what, where, who, when, why), and to ask students to interpret of what he or she is seeing and understanding and relate them to their context.

The benefits of dialogic reading have been demonstrated by many researchers. Gold and Gibson (2001) mention that in dialogic reading students develop a close relationship between the printed word and meaning and prompt the students as listeners into a conversation with the author. Students can listen on a higher language level than they can read, so dialogic reading makes complex ideas more accessible and exposes students to vocabulary and language patterns that are not part of everyday speech. This, in turn, helps them understand the structure of books when they read independently. Mooney (1990) claims that dialogic reading motivates students to develop the interests in books and desire to be a reader. Moreover, Trelease (1994) says that dialogic reading encourages students to become independent readers. Finally, Harste et al. (1988) maintain that dialogic reading enables students to develop interest to grow as readers and broadens the types of literature they choose to read. Thus, it is an important activity for building the foundation for success in reading.

Many studies have indicated positive results when implementing, dialogic reading strategy. Valdez-Menchaca and Whitehurst (1992) find that posing open-ended questions during storybook readings evidenced gains in students' language development. According to Dickinson et al. (1992), dialogic reading book experiences in L1 context during students' early years support literacy learning to become a mature reader. The reasons for these are because dialogic reading (a) provides opportunities for students to focus on units of language – phonemes, words, syntax; (b) it introduces students

with language used in the books; (c) it exposes students to meaning found in books; (d) it increase students' vocabulary development; (e) it models complex, text, structure; (f) it acquaints students with knowledge about print; and (g) it introduces students to dialoguing about books that they would read in school. Robbins & Ehri (1994) and Senechal (1997) claim that: (a) students who receive instructive guides by adults have developed stronger language abilities; (b) students who are given explanations about word meanings during the reading session made gains in vocabulary knowledge; and (c) students who dialogue and answer questions about targeted words during the dialogic reading instruction make greater gains in comprehending and producing new vocabulary words.

More recent studies have also documented positive results. In her study, Huennekens (2013) inserted alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness skills in dialogic reading instruction. The participants were American school students with Spanish background. Their L1 was Spanish and their L2 was English. Students' alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness skills were measured and recorded daily. The overall results indicate that the intervention improved students' emergent literacy skills in L1 and also have positive implications for the acquisition of L2. Gains in both languages for participants were equivalent (Huennekens, 2013).

Rodriguez's study (2013) explored whether the vocabulary and reading comprehension mean scores of Hispanic Kindergarten English learners whose teachers were trained to utilize dialogic reading instruction were higher than the mean scores of Hispanic English learners whose teachers were not trained to utilize dialogic reading instruction. Sixty-three self-identified Hispanic, English Language Kindergarten students and four teachers participated in the study. The results of the study demonstrate a significant increase in the vocabulary and reading comprehension mean scores for the students whose teachers had been trained in utilizing Dialogic reading strategy.

In Germany, a study was conducted on group interactions created as a result of implementing dialogic reading strategy in preschool. Five native-German speaking preschool teachers were observed and videotaped whilst reading a picture book to several 3–6 year old immigrant students in a small group reading situation. The data analysis method employed was qualitative content analysis. The findings reveal that group interactions varied considerably but could provide opportunities for preschool children to learn language. In addition, the preschool

teachers employed various questioning strategies at different linguistic and cognitive levels as learning input to the children. The study adds to our understanding of dialogic reading instruction can promote language development in preschool settings. (Ping, 2014).

In Malaysian context, it is revealed that if dialogic reading strategy is used appropriately, it may increase students' language development. Ismail's study (2012) reveal that there is a high frequency of young students who answered to questions prompted by the teachers. Their responses, whether in English or Malay, showed that they had obtained sufficient comprehension on what they had read. Although their responses in oral forms were not yet in complete sentences when posed with questions by the teachers, their correct responses reflected that they comprehended the reading texts and the questions given to them.

In a nutshell, previous studies clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of dialogic reading in improving children's first language and literacy skills when used in L1 setting and in English as a second language context. However, there is not much research to support its effectiveness when used in primary EFL classrooms. In fact, studies on the effects of dialogic reading strategy in Indonesian EFL setting are very rare. Dialogic reading strategy can also be used to teach EFL novice learners since it stimulates learners to engage in a dialogue between the teacher and the students in English language learning.

Thus, the present study focused on the investigation of dialogic reading strategy adopted from Zevenberger and Whitehurst (2003) to determine its effect on young children's reading comprehension. This study is directed at exploring this topic in the elementary school level in Malang, Indonesia.

METHOD

The current study utilized a quasi-experimental design involving two intact groups to determine and compare the effect of teacher-implemented dialogic reading strategy on the reading comprehension of EFL students in an elementary school in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. The study included a total of two teachers and 2 classes of fourth grade of Karang Besuki 1 Elementary School in Malang. The selection of Karang Besuki 1 Elementary as the site for the current study was based on several factors. First, it is an urban public elementary school located in a low socioeconomic community. Next, the school is a state school. Finally, it should

also be noted that this is the school where the researchers can easily get access to.

Two English teachers (T1 and T2) of Karang Besuki Elementary School who participated in the study were all female and had a bachelor degree in English Language Teaching. T1 was not trained on dialogic strategy and she was assigned to teach the control group using the traditional reading instruction. T2 was trained intensively by the researchers on how to implement dialogic reading strategy and she was assigned to teach the experimental group using this reading dialogic instruction.

Forty students of the fourth grade were involved in the study. One class was assigned to experimental, and the other class was assigned as a control group. Table 1 displays the student participants.

Table 1. Student Participants

Treatment	N	Grade	Age
Experimental Group	20	4	9-10
Control Group	20	4	9-10

The experiment group was exposed to dialogic reading instruction for 8-weeks. The instruction involved interactive picture book reading session designed to develop the students' reading comprehension. Dialogic reading interventions were designed to have the teacher read to the students, followed by the students engaging in a dialogue about the book with the teacher, through five specific prompting techniques in: (a) completion, (b) recall, (c) open-ended, (d) wh (what, who, when, where, and why), and (e) distancing questioning (Zevenbergen and Whitehurst, 2003). These prompts are better defined as the following:

- Completion: students complete endings of a sentence.
- Recall: The teacher asks questions about the book the students have read.
- Open-ended: the teacher encourages the students to tell what is happening in a picture.
- Wh-: The teacher asks "wh" questions about the pictures in the books (i.e., what, where, who, when, why).
- Distancing: the teacher relates pictures and works in the book to the students' interpretation of what they are seeing and understanding, linking to the child's world.

The specific books were chosen based on these criteria: colorful, including potentially new vocabulary text, story length, and audience age range

(Hargrave & Senechal, 2000). The vocabulary used for instructional purpose in the experimental group was selected. These vocabulary words totaled ten words per week, per story. The rationale for using the words in the story is so that students could become familiar with the language and possibly be able to dialogue utilizing the presented vocabulary. Table 2 displays the materials or the books used in this study.

Table 2. Title of Books Used in This Study

Time	Title of book	Total new vocabulary items selected
Week 1	Rabbit's Birthday	10 words, e.g invite, gift
Week 2	The Lazy Grass-hopper	10 words e.g lazy, collect
Week 3	The Missing Binocular	10 words, e.g binoculars,
Week 4	The Ugly Duckling	10 words, e.g. hatch, swan
Week 5	The Three Little Pigs	10 words, e.g. straw, huff
Week 6	Chicken Licken	10 words, e.g. king, tell
Week 7	Cinderella	10 words, e.g. stepmother
Week 8	Goldiluck and the Bears	10 word, e.g. porridge

To maintain the fidelity of the implementation of the dialogic reading strategy, the Dialogic Reading Observation Form was the tool utilized to monitor the application of the teacher in the implementation of dialogic reading strategy. Specifically, direct observations were made on a weekly basis over the eight week intervention period. The researchers filled in the Dialogic Reading Observation Form.

In the control group, dialogic reading strategy was not utilized and no guidance was given on how to conduct vocabulary instruction in the read-aloud and class reading sessions. The activities in this group were observed on a weekly basis in order to document the type of instructional process initiated by the untrained teacher during the reading instruction. The observation form was also utilized to document classroom language initiated by teachers during the shared storybook reading sessions.

The researchers developed a 30-item-multiple choice test on reading comprehension which consisted of finding characters, main ideas, word use, explicit and implicit meaning and lesson learnt. Test items had four choices only one of which is correct. The students were instructed to read the reading passages, one at a time, answer the questions by circling the correct choice. In scoring, student achievement was computed out of 100 allot-

ting (two) points for each correct answer and (zero) for each wrong answer. The time interval between the pretest and the posttest was 8 week, a period long enough to minimize the effects of the pretest on the results and the conclusions of the experiment. The test was designed and administered by the researchers.

The usability of the test was tested through a pilot study of 20 students who were not from the research participant groups. The reliability coefficient of the test calculated using Cronbach-Alpha and found 0.78. The test was also given to a jury of two English language teachers to elicit their views as to the accuracy, clarity, and appropriateness of the instrument. Then the test was reviewed and modified according to their recommendations. The content material (8 stories) was also given to the same jury to make sure that it suits the level of the students

T-test was used because the groups were equal in the beginning of the experiment. Table 3 displays the timeframe of the study.

Table 3. Timeframe of The Study

August	August - October 2017	October 2017	November 2017
Pre-test	Intervention	Post-test	Delayed Post-Test
	8 Week Dialogic Reading Instruction	Reading Comprehension Test	Reading Comprehension Test

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to investigate whether the reading comprehension score of elementary EFL students was higher for students receiving dialogic reading instruction than the reading comprehension score of students who received traditional instruction. In order to accurately answer the homogeneity between the control group and the experimental group, a reading comprehension pre-test was administered. The results indicated a non-significant difference between control and experimental group as displayed in Table 4.

Table 4. Groups' Homogeneity

	Treatment	N	Levene Statistics	Sig.	Results
Compre pretest	Control	20	0,329	0,570	Homogenous
	Experiment	20			

The homogeneity test result reveals that there is no significant different between the comprehension test scores of students in the control and the experimental group. It can be concluded that both groups have similar level of reading English ability.

After the exposure to 8 dialogic reading instruction a post-test was administered. The results reveal that the mean for the experimental group was 9.69. This suggests that the experimental group outperformed those in the control group whose mean score was 7.5. These results appear to suggest children in the dialogic reading group outperformed the children in the control group. Descriptive statistics for reading comprehension for both groups are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Posttest Means and Standard Deviations of Reading Comprehension of Students Receiving Dialogic Reading Instruction from versus Traditional Reading Instruction.

Treatment	N	Reading Comprehension Score	
		Mean	Standard Deviation
Experimental Group	20	9,69	0,67
Control Group	20	7,5	1,78

Independent sample T- test was conducted to determine the effects of the dialogic reading post treatment intervention on reading comprehension scores. The results show that significant differences were found for the main effect of reading comprehension for children who received dialogic reading treatment. The results indicate significant effects of the treatment in the area of reading comprehension.

Delayed Test

The Reading comprehension test was administered again three weeks after the post-test. The results are presented in the following table.

The results of the delayed tests further suggest that being part of the dialogic reading group made a difference for students’ reading comprehension overall gains. This study has demonstrated that the difference in the achievement of the students was attributed to using dialogic reading strategy in English language instruction. The experimental group subjects managed to significantly improve the reading comprehension ability in a period of 8 weeks. The improvement achieved by the control group subjects, however, was not statistically significant. By comparing the results achieved by the two groups, it can be concluded that the improvement achieved by the experimental group may have been attributed to the way they received instruction.

The differences between the two groups may be attributed to many reasons. First, using dialogic reading strategy in reading English language instruction is a novelty. The dialogic reading strategy accompanied with colorful big books may have motivated the students to participate in this teaching process eagerly, for examples by answering teacher questions, completing endings of a sentence, recalling their knowledge, telling what they see in the big books, interpreting the book with their experiences. Although their responses were mixed in English and Bahasa Indonesia, this active participation may have been reflected in better achievement.

Second, through continuous exposure of interesting reading texts, student comprehension skills are cultivated. Students are trained to read and listen to the texts and this condition lead to undivided attention and at the same time paved the way to promoting comprehension.

Third, dialogic reading strategy provided the students with elements necessary for the development of reading comprehension. The teacher of dialogic reading strategy allowed the students to recognize aspects of reading comprehension, such as vocabulary, story contexts, etc. With the continuous exposure to the stories, students learned to gradually realize that they could achieve a higher level of

Tabel 6. Independent Sample T-test for Reading Comprehension

Variable	Treatment	N	Mean	T	Df	Sig.	Results
reading comprehension posttest	Control	20	7,50	-5,154	38	0,000	Significant
	Experiment	20	9,69				

Tabel 7. Independent Sample t Test for Delayed Test

Variable	Treatment	N	Mean	T	db	Sig.	Results
Compre delayed	Control	20	5,73	-	38	0,000	Significant difference
	Experiment	20	8,65	7,437			

comprehension by listening to larger meaningful units rather than individual words. By closely reading and dialoging with the teacher's language behavior in the classroom helped the students realize the feelings, mood and emotion of the characters in the texts, which helped enhance their overall comprehension of the text.

Finally, reading aloud to students using dialogic strategy allows students to be active participants in the reading process and enhance the other skills such listening and speaking. Vygotsky (1978) states that children construct knowledge through social interactions. Dialogic discourses within a shared reading experience can be conducive to the development of reading skills in young EFL because language, Vygotsky asserted, is the tool which mediates the manner and ways that these social interactions occur. Through modeling and scaffolding the teacher would expand on words used by the children. The questioning and prompting was a mediating tool to develop the children's listening and oral expression. Gradually, it was noticeable in their interactions that students were becoming more confidence in their responses and in understanding the texts. They demonstrated a stronger control in language use and they were expressing themselves more clearly. It was through this support and total engagement that these students seemed to outperform the children in the control group.

Based on this current research, it is evidenced that dialogic reading instruction facilitates students' comprehension of texts, the development of vocabulary and development of oral language. These findings are in line with Ping (2014); Ismail (2012), Rodriguez (2013) and Ellen and Huenneken (2013).

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If the strategy is used properly, it will create conducive language learning experience for students to respond orally to questions prompted by teachers.

CONCLUSION

In this study, the effects of dialogic reading strategy on students' comprehension skill were explored. Although the strategy has been implemented in international context for a few decades, the implementation in Indonesia is still rare. The results of the study have confirmed previous studies that with proper training on how to conduct dialogic reading strategy in teaching students to read English texts, the learning process will become more dynamic and more interesting. It will also promote higher reading comprehension.

The current study adds to the body of knowledge about EFL reading instruction for young learners. The results can be used to guide literacy instruction of young learners. Practitioners who are working with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) children in Indonesia who need instructional support may use the current intervention to support for young children's English language instruction in their classes. Shared-reading using dialogic reading strategy is an easy and effective means of engaging young children in literacy activities. The strategies can be used by practitioners and even parents with sufficient training and resources.

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