

## Dialogic Reading to Promote the Underprivileged Preschool Children's Expressive Language Ability

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### Abstract

**Background:**

Indonesia's children from low socioeconomic backgrounds have been facing challenges in terms of literacy and language development. One of the possible reasons is that they are not used to receiving meaningful early reading interventions such as shared reading during their preschool attendance. This phenomenon has brought to light the urgency of having an early intervention that can accommodate Indonesia's very diverse linguistic and cultural context- a multilingual and multicultural country.

**Methodology:**

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-method research design. The first phase was conducted in a quantitative one-group pre-experiment with pre-and post-test design. In the second phase, a qualitative case study involved classroom observation and informal interviews with the teacher and children.

**Findings:**

The MLU calculation showed that the pre-test mean score was 2.35, median score was 2.20, and the standard deviation was 0.53. The post-test mean was 3.72, median 3.18, and the standard deviation 1.38. The phase examined how teachers implemented dialogic reading and how children felt about it.

**Conclusion:**

This current study has offered insight that the teacher could implement the dialogic reading activity in a typical Indonesian preschool setting. The dialogic reading activity also contributed significantly to the development of children's expressive language ability.

**Originality:**

The findings of this study have indicated dialogic reading potentials in terms of promoting children's language development and, just as importantly, sparking children's joy of reading since their early years of formal education. Therefore, it is suggested that early childhood educators and parents collaborate to incorporate dialogic reading activities into their daily literacy practices at schools and at home.

**Keywords** : Dialogic reading; Preschool children

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the most critical language skills that learners should acquire in all school-based education. Ningsih et al. (2019) found that reading skills can assist students in thinking critically and solving problems. Without having adequate reading ability, learners would run into various problems in completing academic tasks because they hardly understand what they read (Qrquez & Rashid, 2017). They are found to frequently avoid reading and other assignments that require reading, too. They demonstrate low engagement and motivation in reading, and the number of students who experience it is large (OECD, 2017).

On the contrary, learners who started developing expressive language skills and reading in their very early years through receiving adequately stimulating literacy experiences before entering formal schooling appear to have advantages when it comes to vocabulary development, understanding the goals of reading, and developing an awareness of print and literacy concepts (Niklas et al., 2016). Arita & Zubaidah (2018) revealed that reading ability strongly influences vocabulary mastery. Alas, this problem with insufficient reading skills seems to be the case for a majority of learners in Indonesia. The recent results of international comparative studies such as TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) in 2015, PIRLS (Progress in International Literacy Study) in 2016 as well as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) in 2018 have revealed the fact that Indonesian students were at the bottom five in terms of their reading skills, both in the Reading for Purposes and Processes of Comprehension aspects. This fact is rather disheartening considering the importance of reading skills as one of the academic skills that learners must have.

In many cases, Layng et al. (2003) confirmed that teachers and schools are having problems finding the best method with its implementation and accommodating students' widely varying abilities and readiness in reading. Many studies have attempted to describe the importance of introducing reading to children. Leutzinger (2022) highlighted the teaching of phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and basic comprehension as five essential and interconnected sub-skills that all children must master to become proficient readers. Wang & Lee (2020) presented that critical phoneme awareness and the development of the alphabetic principle for the beginning reader are necessary to be taught through formal instruction to develop accurate and rapid word reading skills. Those studies have shown their

attention to the issue of basic reading comprehension that is teaching children to comprehend what they read with the help of adults.

In early childhood, shared reading is an interactive experience of reading in a dyad where an adult and child are reading together at home or in an early childhood setting, with the adult reading aloud and guiding questions (Hoyne & Egan, 2019). One type of shared reading that is deemed effective in promoting young learners' reading skills and positive attitudes toward reading is dialogic reading. However, teachers and parents have not frequently practiced this activity in our Indonesian context. To date, there is a rather limited body of literature and information on implementing this reading activity under the framework of reading instruction and literacy development. For instance, Suryati et al. (2017) study revealed the favorable effect of dialogic reading activities on low SES Primary School students' reading comprehension. Another more recent study by Ratminingsih et al. (2020) investigated the contribution of dialogic reading towards the children's involvement during the storybook reading. Considering that there are other crucial aspects of this matter, which include the significant effect of dialogic reading on the development of children's expressive language ability as the basis for promoting their future language skills, a further study would be deemed necessary to conduct.

Furthermore, in our context of the study, it was anecdotally found that the typical preschool teachers here were not yet familiar with the activities of dialogic reading. Many of them are used to teaching their students to read the chunk of printed letters in the textbook as they perceive that those preschool children who cannot read yet are not ready for primary school enrolment. Even though the Government Regulation issued in 2010 forbids primary schools to administer an admission test on reading, writing, and calculating, the children are still required to do a series of cognitive tests, and as a result, it influences teachers' and parents' perspectives in preparing students' school readiness at the preschools level (Ratminingsih et al., 2020)

Dialogic reading itself was initially conceptualized by Whitehurst and his colleagues from the Stony Brook Reading and Language Project in 1988 (Whitehurst, 1992). It was defined as a particular set of shared reading techniques which fostered different oral language skills by encouraging children to participate actively during shared reading (Weadman et al., 2022). The theories underlying the conceptualization of this reading activity claimed that "language practices, feedback and adult-child interaction which are clearly defined in the context of picture book reading can facilitate the young learners' language development" and

as well based on the premise that "children learn the most from books when they are actively involved" (Whitehurst, 1992). During a dialogic reading activity, adults and children talk about a book (Whitehurst, 1992). The adults' role is to assist the children to tell the story.

Moreover, in implementing dialogic reading, there are four specific strategies or sequences namely "PEER", which signify the interaction or dialogues between adult and child in Dialogic Reading activity. "PEER" strategies consist of "Prompting, Evaluating, Expanding, Recalling" (Whitehurst, 1992)

Accompanying the 'PEER' strategies, some prompting techniques called 'CROWD' have been established. CROWD includes "Completion Prompt", "Recall Prompt", "Open-ended Prompt", "Wh- Prompt", and "Distancing prompt" (Zevenbergen & Whitehurst, 2003). "Completion prompt" is defined as a prompt in which adults use fill-in-the-blank questions. "Recall prompt" is prompt in which adults ask questions that require children to remember aspects that have been read from the books. Meanwhile, an "Open-ended prompt" refers to a prompt in which adults make statements that encourage children to respond to the story/ picture in the book by using their own words. Then, there is the "Wh- prompt," in which adults make use of what, where, and why questions to trigger the child to tell more about the story/ picture in the book being read. Finally, the last prompt is called a "Distancing prompt", in which adults ask questions that prompt children to relate the story or picture in the book to the aspects of life (Zevenbergen & Whitehurst, 2003).

In the later development of dialogic reading, the use of these particular strategies has been extensively researched concerning effectiveness in the US and European contexts. The findings of the empirical studies have thus far indicated that dialogic book reading brought about desirable effects on children's language development, more specifically in terms of enhancing children's early literacy outcomes, e.g., vocabulary and appropriate responses to questions (Coogle et al., 2020). These studies have also concluded that the interactional aspects of dialogic reading could create a potential context for young learners' language acquisition and learning (Ping, 2014). Additionally, when implemented for young learners with various socioeconomic statuses, dialogic reading activity significantly affected the language development of children from the lower middle socioeconomic class (Ping, 2014). Ultimately, some comparative studies have been done to further explore the effectiveness of dialogic reading compared to other types of book-reading activities for children, such as the ones conducted by Munzer et al. (2019) and Twait et al. (2019), which highlighted the superiority of dialogic reading. However, there is also a recent meta-analysis study done by

Noble et al. (2019) which cautiously implied the decreasing effect size of studies on shared reading effectiveness that should not be taken lightly by future researchers in this matter.

Shifting away from the western contexts, the clear gap concerning the numbers of research done concerning book reading practices can be found in the eastern counterparts, i.e., Asian countries. Wu (2019) conducted a bibliometric analysis to compare studies on picture books in Asia and the world within a period of two decades (from 1992 to 2017). Her findings have revealed the main concern that “only a few articles authored by Asian authors on this subject were published in the most cited journals.” (Wu, 2019). What’s more, specifically regarding shared book reading activities, only a few noteworthy studies in the Asian contexts could be found, including research on dialogic reading in the Chinese context by Chow et al. (2008), in Bangladesh by Opel et al. (2009), in Indonesia by Suryati et al. (2017) and Ratminingsih et al. (2020) as well as in Singapore by Sun et al. (2020). Wu (2019) did not specifically discuss the possible reasons for such a phenomenon. Yet, a few studies conducted in Indonesia could have shed light on the commonly shared conception of both parents and early childhood educators towards literacy and literacy activities as mainly to prepare children to learn to read (in terms of concepts of prints) and write as pre-requisites for primary school enrolment (Afnida & Suparno, 2020). It is not any wonder, then, that such an activity as shared book reading only comes second, regardless of the many reputable studies already done in favor of this activity.

Moreover, a typical normally-developed child will go through six stages of language development (Sohnata Hutaaruk, 2015), as follows:

The first is the pre-talking stage (0-6 months). Pre-talking or cooing is a vowel-like sound that responds more strongly to human sounds, turns head, eyes appear to look for the speaker, and occasionally makes chuckling sounds (Bolinger, 2002); The second is the babbling stage (6-8 months). Steinberg defines babbling as sounds produced by infants as consonant-vowel combinations. The sounds made by infants, but not all speech sounds, are similar in all languages around the globe, such as [ba-ba-ba] or [ma-ma-ma] (Steinberg, 2003); The third is the holophrastic stage (9-18 months). The children's first single word that represents a sentence is holophrastic. Children utilize a single word to demonstrate a specific emotional state. John's mother, for example, recorded the words she said during the eight months following the appearance of his first word at nine months; The fourth is two-word stage (18-24 months). This phase consists of mini sentences with simple semantic relationships. Toddlers begin to construct actual two-word sentences with definite syntactic

and semantic relations, and instead of being separated by a pause, the intonation contour of the two syllables spreads across the entire speech (Fromkin, 1983). The fifth is the telegraphic stage (24-30 months). Telegraph is only a descriptive term because children do not intentionally omit meaningless words, as adults do when telegraphing (Fromkin, 1983). The last is a multiword stage (30 months+). This stage is the fastest surge in vocabulary. Children enrich their vocabulary from their exposures every day without babbling at all. Utterances are intended to communicate (Bolinger, 2002). They make several variations. Within these stages, expressive language ability which refers to the ability to convey information, feelings, thoughts, and ideas. also in the forms of describing simple concepts- has already emerged during stages five and six. In these two final stages, the language produced by children is already filled with a rapid increase in terms of vocabulary (Bolinger, 2002). The sentences/ utterances the children formulate already contain communicative purposes, too.

Moreover, expressive language ability, including descriptive ability, is certainly one of the language milestones crucial for children, especially during their early years (Visser-Bochane et al., 2020). Therefore, a delay or a problem with children's acquiring expressive language skills in their early years, both in the first and second language contexts, might potentially lead to issues affecting their school readiness as well as learning achievement in the later years (Del Tufo et al., 2019).

Concerning measuring children's expressive language development within various stages, there is a widely used standard indicator called Mean Length of Utterance (MLU). According to Brown (1973), a sample of 100 utterances should be collected first to measure the average length of children's utterances. Then, the total number of morphemes in those utterances should be calculated. Finally, the MLU is obtained by dividing the number of morphemes by the number of utterances.

MLU has been divided into MLU-m (morpheme) and MLU-w (word), with the use of MLU-w, claimed as a more reliable measure for calculating the length of utterance as well as a more sensitive one to the child's language complexity (Nóro & Mota, 2019).

While there are relatively abundant studies done in the western context concerning the use and advantages of using MLU as an indicator for children's language development, especially in terms of diagnosing possible disorders, again in Indonesia- which is the context of the current study in this article- quite little has been known about this. Only a handful of locally conducted single case studies have reported MLUs of children from a specific

socioeconomic background, i.e., middle-high SES (Fitriani, 2019). One study reported multiple cases with no SES context mentioned (Marsis & Annisa, 2018). The studies' findings with a single child from middle-high SES (also accompanied by a relatively decent home literacy practice) have yielded a similar fashion that their MLUs were above the standard for their respective age groups. However, the findings of the study conducted by Marsis & Annisa (2018), with a sample of eight (8) children, illustrated a more varied trend. Out of the eight participating children, a couple was categorized in the standard threshold of their age groups, whereas three were above and the other three were below the standards. Unfortunately, the study's conclusion by Marsis & Annisa (2018) has yet to mention the possible reasons or factors as to why this variation could have resulted. Nevertheless, one potential explanation for the differences in children's language development might have been the difference in the children's family SES (Madya et al., 2019).

Taking this fact into consideration, this study would particularly aim at 1) exploring how dialogic reading activities could be implemented as an alternative to what the teachers have practiced for years at the typical Indonesian early childhood education classroom context; and 2) gaining fresh insight into the teacher and children's perspectives towards doing a dialogic reading.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-method research design. This particular design was chosen because it focused primarily on a quantitative procedure to be followed up by a qualitative procedure that would help "explain or build upon initial quantitative results" (Creswell, 2013). The first phase was a quantitative one-group pre-experiment with pre-and post-test design. The treatment given in the pre-experiment was the implementation of dialogic reading for a total duration of eight weeks, based on the schedule and permission given by the school and the teacher. The intervention/ treatment first began with the teacher's training, particularly focusing on how to deliver the PEER sequence and CROWD strategies (Zevenbergen & Whitehurst, 2003) by using a module prepared by the research team. Afterward, the teacher practiced implementing dialogic reading with the children in the classroom.

Meanwhile, the second phase of this research was carried out in a qualitative case study through classroom observation and informal interviews with the teacher and the

children. Both the classroom observation and interviews were videotaped with the consent given by each participating child's parents or caregivers.

The participants of this research consisted of one teacher and nine preschool children at one of the typical Islamic preschools in the province of East Kalimantan, Indonesia. The teacher graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education and has been teaching at a preschool since 2008. Meanwhile, the participating children were at the ages of 4-6 years old, and most of them came from a lower- middle Socioeconomic background with a rather lack of home literacy experience with their parents or caregivers.

The quantitative data for this research were collected to measure an aspect of children's expressive language, namely describing skills, by using a picture description test. Picture description or picture-telling was chosen in the first place because it was one of the most familiar modes that young learners enjoy (Nikolov, 2016). The researchers constructed the picture description test based on the themes discussed in the preschool curriculum, which included family, school, animals, things, places, and daily activities. The children should describe four pictures in the test, as illustrated by Picture 1 (attached). Each child had to describe the four pictures in a maximum of 10 minutes. The results of the children's picture descriptions would be assessed in terms of the mean length of utterance (MLU) as a general quantitative indicator of their expressive language ability. Furthermore, the test results would also depict two specific qualitative aspects of the children's expressive language: vocabulary knowledge and sentence structure.

In addition to the quantitative data, the qualitative data were obtained from classroom observation and informal interviews by employing an observation guide and interview protocols. The classroom observation was done to evaluate the implementation of dialogic reading activities by the teacher as well as to see, in particular, the occurrences of various possible interactions and dialogic aspects between the teacher- children and among the children themselves (peer interaction). Furthermore, informal interviews were also carried out to determine the teacher's and children's voices toward implementing dialogic reading activities. Eventually, the processes were videotaped and transcribed for further analysis phases to ensure that all of the data were obtained properly.

The data analysis techniques employed for the quantitative data were Descriptive Statistics procedures (mean, median, SD) and a non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test. Non-parametric statistics were chosen because the procedure allowed the exploration of effects despite the rather small sample size (N=9) with no distribution assumption to be made



(Phakiti, 2014). More specifically, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test was employed in this study since only one group of samples in the pre-experiment would be measured repeatedly on the same dependent variable. Furthermore, to analyze the qualitative data from the classroom observation and interview, inductive content analysis was done to categorize the responses of the participating teacher and children.

### 3. FINDINGS

#### 3.1. Implementation of Dialogic Reading Activity

The findings of the first phase, namely the quantitative pre-experiment, were obtained from the calculation of MLU in the pre-test and post-test, as well as the descriptive and inferential statistical tests. Specifically, the descriptive statistics were calculated to find the mean scores, medians, and standard deviations for the MLU of both pre-and post-test whereas the inferential statistics procedure employed was the non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test.

The findings of MLU calculation showed that for the pre-test, the mean score was 2.35, the median was 2.20, and the standard deviation was 0.53. Meanwhile, for the post-test, the mean score was 3.72, the median was 3.18, and the standard deviation was 1.38. These results can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Children's MLU

	N	Mean	Min	Max	Median	Std Deviation
Pre-test	9	2.35	1.81	3.38	2.20	0.53
Post-test	9	2.35	2.22	7.00	3.18	1.38

There was an increase in both the mean and median scores of children's MLU after the treatment, i.e., the implementation of dialogic reading activities. However, the dispersion of the post-test results was rather bigger than that of the pre-test. This was caused by an outlier, one student who improved quite impressively in the post-test by producing longer utterances, providing more morphemes. Furthermore, after obtaining the results of the descriptive statistics, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test procedure was employed to investigate whether there was a significant difference in the MLU calculations before and after the treatment. The results of the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test are presented in the following Table 2.

Table 2: Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test

Test statistics <sup>a</sup>	Post-test MLU
	Pre-test MLU
Z	-2.666 <sup>b</sup>
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.008

**a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranked Test**

**b. Based on negative ranks**

Based on the statistics results, the obtained p-value was 0.008, which was smaller than  $\alpha = 0.05$ ; therefore, it could be argued that there was a significant difference between the median of MLUs of the pre-test and the post-test, which reflected the descriptive ability of the children. Moreover, the median for the pre-test was 2.20 whereas the median for the post-test was 3.18. Thus, H<sub>0</sub> was rejected, and H<sub>A</sub> was accepted. Additionally, the effect size was measured to see the magnitude of the effect of the dialogic reading intervention on the children's descriptive ability, as follows: Eta squared ( $\eta^2$ ) = 0.79, converted to dCohen = 3.876; The dCohen value above could be categorized as a "large effect" (Cohen, 2013).

**3.2. Fresh Insight into the Teacher and Children's Perspectives towards Doing a Dialogic Reading**

The findings of the qualitative phase explored two main aspects, namely the teacher and teacher's implementation of dialogic reading activity and children's opinions regarding the activity. About the overall implementation of dialogic reading, the teacher was observed to follow the P-E-E-R Sequence and C-R-O-W-D strategies under the procedures that she had learned from the tutorial (Zevenbergen & Whitehurst, 2003) embedded in the classic three-staged reading activity, namely pre-reading, whilst-reading and post-reading. Overall, the whole reading activity was done in 15-20 minutes. However, from the observed dialogic episodes, the teacher still focused mainly on simple sentences as well as low-order cognitive/thinking skills (LOTS) prompts and questions such as labeling the pictures, which the following transcript excerpt can illustrate:

Teacher (T): *'Ini gambar apa?'*

What picture is it?

Children (C): *'Ini gambar...'*

It's a picture of ...

(Excerpt 1, Transcript 1, Observation 1)

Nonetheless, there were also a few interaction episodes in which the teacher, in this case, had shown instances of employing rather more complex prompts, which could trigger a longer response from the children as well as categorized into the Medium Cognitive Level utterances (Moschovaki & Meadows, 2005). This phenomenon is depicted in the following transcript excerpt:

Teacher (T): *'Trus dia ngapain?'*

Then, what did he do?

(Excerpt 2, Transcript 1, Observation 1)

This instance, though rarely found, indicates that the teacher could make use of medium-high cognitive level strategies during the reading session since the specific CROWD prompts used in dialogic reading encompass the three levels of questions: level 1 or the simple wh-questions, level 2 or the open-ended questions and level 3, the more complex and advanced text-to-life questions (Flynn, 2011).

In addition to the classroom observation, a brief informal interview was done with both the teacher and the children concerning their opinions on dialogic reading experiences. The teacher stated that she was happy to implement the dialogic reading activity, which can be seen in the following excerpt:

Teacher (T): *'Kalau guru sih senang karena anak-anak yang bercerita'*

The teacher is happy (to do this activity) because (it's) the children (who) tell the story

(Excerpt 3, Transcript 2, Interview 1)

When asked about her overall impression of implementing this reading activity, the teacher admitted that it was not difficult to do for her. Moreover, she thought that it was a useful reading technique because there were pictures available to help, as follows:

Teacher (T): *'Tidak susah sih untuk guru. Tekniknya berguna, digunakan dengan gambar untuk membuat anak-anak tertarik membaca'*

(It's not difficult for the teacher. The technique is conveyed through pictures to make the children interested in reading)

(Excerpt 4, Transcript 2, Interview 1)

Moreover, with the challenges faced by the teacher during the implementation of dialogic reading, she pointed out specifically the nature of the children's personality, as mentioned in the following statement:

Teacher (T): *'Kendalanya dengan anak yang pendiam, tidak aktif bicara harus dipancing-pancing dulu'*

(The challenge comes from dealing with the passive and shy children, who have to be encouraged to participate in the first place)

(Excerpt 5, Transcript 2, Interview 1)

Along with the practical challenges in the classroom, the teacher in this case also acknowledged another substantial problem that might hinder the sustainable practices of dialogic reading in the future, namely the parents' expectation for their children to learn basic reading, writing and calculation as prerequisite skills for primary school enrolment instead of doing activities like book reading or storytelling. The teacher stated as follows:

Teacher (T): *'Gitu kan orang tua murid maunya anak itu bisa membaca bukan bisa bercerita'*

(Parents want their children to be able to read instead of telling stories)

(Excerpt 6, Transcript 2, Interview 1)

Also, she brought into attention the fact that during her years of pre-service teacher education, she did not receive special training related to literacy activities such as dialogic reading or other types of shared book reading, as displayed by her following remark:

Teacher (T): *'(waktu) kuliah belum pernah mendapatkan (pelatihan membaca seperti ini) memang tidak pernah dikasih sama sekali'*

(I never got this kind of book-reading training. We never got any training like this at all during our pre-service teacher education years.)

(Excerpt 7, Transcript 2, Interview 1)

This answer has somewhat illustrated a possible reason, among others, as to why dialogic reading and other types of shared book reading has not been popular activity until recently.

In regard to the participating children, a couple of simple yet important questions were addressed to them. How did the children respond to the dialogic reading activity? What did they think about it? Similarly to their teacher, they showed a positive attitude towards their first experience of dialogic reading activity during the classroom observation, as illustrated in picture 2 (attached). It was observed that the children paid attention to the reading activities and also took an active role, as dialogic reading's main principle is for them to be the storyteller. Additionally, during the informal group interview at the end of the

reading session, they stated that they liked the reading activity, as indicated by the following short excerpt:

Interviewer (I): *'Apakah suka dengan membacanya dengan bu guru tadi?'*  
(Did you like this book-reading activity with your teacher?)

Child 1 (C1): *'Suka, karena ada gambar'*  
(I like it because there were pictures)

(Excerpt 7, Transcript 3, Interview 2)

Then, when they were asked whether they would like to do dialogic book reading activity with their teacher again in the future, they stated as follows:

Interviewer (I): *'Apakah mau kalau nanti membaca buku dengan bu guru seperti ini lagi?'*  
(Do you want to read books with your teacher like this again later?)

Child 2 (C2): *'Mau, kalau membaca buku seperti ini lagi'*  
(I want to read the book like this again)

(Excerpt 8, Transcript 3, Interview 2)

These responses illustrate that the children were enthusiastic about their first dialogic book reading experience. They seemed to enjoy it genuinely; thus, when asked whether they would like to read different books in the future with their teachers, the majority of them said they wanted to do so.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Discussing further, the quantitative findings of this current research have confirmed the results of notable previous studies in terms of the effectiveness of dialogic reading, particularly for children with middle-lower socioeconomic status (Suryati et al., 2017). In line with what these previous studies have indicated, the implementation of dialogic reading activity in this current research showed a statistically significant effect of dialogic reading intervention, more specifically on children's expressive language, which was reflected by the increase in their MLU.

However, despite the statistically significant increase, the MLU for the post-test of the children who participated in this study (i.e., 3.72) was found to be still below the average for their age group, as the normal average score according to Brown (1973) would be 4.5. The first possible reason for this result was due to the children's baseline condition, which was already far below standard. The MLU for the pre-test was 2.35, which placed them to the age categories below their current age. The inevitable existence of a covariate might have influenced this prior condition in terms of children's family socioeconomic

contexts (Madya et al., 2019). The children participating in this current study come from families with mid to low socioeconomic status, where their parents were mostly workers with less or even no time to accompany their children to study or to read books at home, as opposed to their counterparts from mid-high SES (Simanjuntak, 2018).

Another possible reason for this result regarding children's MLU might be as well related to the methodological limitation of this research, i.e., the time constraint. The implementation of dialogic reading activity in this research was only done within the total duration of eight weeks. An on-point criticism towards the effect size of existing shared reading studies stated in a previous meta-analysis study done by Noble et al. (2019) pointed out that one of the possible weaknesses of these studies would lie in the 'low-dose' intervention duration (normally within six weeks). They recommended that future interventions use a 'higher dosage', for instance, within 6-12 months, to enable a more 'realistic' test of the hypothesis regarding the positive effect on language outcomes (Noble et al., 2019).

Concerning the qualitative observational findings, the implementation of dialogic reading by the teacher participating in this study was conducted under the training module following the original concepts and strategies prescribed by Whitehurst (1992), Zevenbergen & Whitehurst (2003) which had been translated and modified into the Indonesian version by the current research team. The teacher generally employed low cognitive level questions and simple language regarding her questioning/ prompting strategies during the dialogic book reading implementation. This phenomenon was in line with previous research conducted by Ping (2014), which found that the preschool teachers in Germany that she observed tended to use low cognitive utterances during their dialogic-oriented shared reading sessions. This result also conformed to what has been found recently by Sun et al. (2020), that most teachers in Singaporean preschools who participated in their study generally used low cognitive level questions during shared book reading. In their attempt to explain this phenomenon, Sun et al. (2020) further referred to a previous assumption by (Gillam et al., 2012) that teachers' greater use of lower cognitive questions during book reading activity might happen because "the more contextualized low- and medium-level instructional strategies would be easier to fit into the flow of ongoing academic instruction than more decontextualized high-level strategies".

Moreover, as mentioned in the earlier section of this article, the qualitative findings of this study were intended to bring about a fresh addition to the existing body of empirical studies by voicing out both the teacher's and children's opinions regarding their first experience of dialogic reading. While both the teacher and the children in this study exhibited a positive reception for a dialogic reading activity, the teacher also brought into attention a very important message concerning the sustainability of future dialogic reading implementation in the typical Indonesian preschool context. She raised the issue of parental expectation towards the teaching and learning activity at preschools, which resounded the

findings of several related studies done in the other parts of Indonesia (Afnida & Suparno, 2020) as well as the lack of inclusion of shared reading activity into the existing curriculum for Early Childhood Education. Unfortunately, to date, none of the existing studies concerning shared book reading activities in the Indonesian context have discussed these evident challenges more specifically.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This current study has offered insight that the teacher could well implement dialogic reading activities in a typical Indonesian preschool setting. The dialogic reading activity also contributed significantly to the development of children's expressive language ability, as indicated by the increase in their Mean Length of Utterance after the intervention ( $Z = -2.666$ ,  $p = 0.008$ ). Moreover, the participating teacher and the children in this research showed positive responses towards implementing dialogic reading activity despite experiencing it for the first time. This looks like a promising start for implementing dialogic reading in Indonesian preschool contexts.

Furthermore, the positive findings and limitations of this study foresee several theoretical and practical implications for early childhood educators, parents, and future researchers. It has been mentioned earlier that children's language development in the early years could predict their later reading ability as well as academic achievement. The findings of this study have indicated dialogic reading potentials in terms of promoting children's language development and, just as importantly, sparking children's joy of reading since their early years of formal education. Therefore, it is suggested that early childhood educators and parents collaborate to incorporate dialogic reading activities into their daily literacy practices at schools and at home.

On the other hand, considering this study's limitations, it is recommended that future researchers plan and conduct more comprehensive and larger-scale research. This includes involving a comparison group (with various family SES backgrounds, home literacy experiences, native languages, etc.), giving a 'higher dosage' of treatment (as suggested also by Noble, et.al, 2019) as well as exploring in detail the teacher and children's personal experiences, to be able to grasp and explain the effectiveness of dialogic reading more optimally.

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