Bolstering Reading Instruction for Young Learners Via Dialogic Reading

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Abstract
Given that learning English as a foreign language (EFL) poses more language problems to young children who already have problems concerning reading in their mother-tongue, this study aims to both exemplify and investigate the use of dialogic reading (DR) in an EFL class for elementary school children. The effectiveness of a shared reading activity adopting DR strategies on the reading comprehension of ten young EFL learners was tested employing a one group pretest-posttest research design. Adopting a mixed methods approach, the quantitative data were elicited through the pre and post-test results and the qualitative data from the pre and post intervention interviews with the teacher. Wilcoxon signed ranks test revealed a significant difference between the pre and post test results. The qualitative analysis of the data gathered from the post-intervention interviews with the teacher displayed the themes as positive attitudes towards English, improved comprehension, built self-esteem, better linguistic skills and developed social skills. Although this experimental study was a small scale study, it was suggested that DR had significant potential for enhancing young learners’ reading skills in English.

Keywords: Book Reading, EFL, Elementary School Students, Shared Reading.

1. Introduction
Book reading is a valuable experience for young learners to attain language skills (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Catts and Kamhi (2005) assert that there is a reciprocal relationship between reading and language development. Hence, desirable reading skills are predictive of effective language development. One way to improve reading skills is dialogic reading (DR) and it can be used to facilitate the reading development of children with reading difficulties. DR provides a situation in which the teacher engages in conversation with the child and the child with the teacher and his/her peers. Initially, the teacher models and expands on the child’s response producing a linguistically richer enhanced dialogue. The child is expected to practise this linguistically richer dialogue so that he/she can gain reading and language skills, vocabulary and ability to organize information.

Shared reading, interactive shared book reading and DR which are all adult-child book reading activities are essential for emergent literacy skills. Research indicates that children benefit from shared reading through gaining important literacy skills, such as metalinguistic knowledge and phonological awareness (Stephenson, 2011; Saracho & Spodek, 2010). In addition, vocabulary, listening comprehension and oral language can be fostered through adult-child book reading activities (Ezell & Justice, 2005; Penimonti & Justice, 2010).

To date, the majority of the research that has examined DR practices has focused on DR in mother-tongue (L1) with children in early childhood classrooms and produced favorable results (Huebner & Meltzoff, 2005; Yopp & Yopp, 2006; Chow & Mcbride-Chang, 2003; Kotaman, 2007; Hargrave & Senechal, 2000). As noted by Dynia & Justice (2015), adult-child book reading research has investigated children who develop either typically or who are at risk from disadvantaged backgrounds. Moreover, while a number of studies have researched DR practices to demonstrate favourable results concerning L1 development in typically developing children, it is not known, for instance, if DR strategies can be effectively used with elementary school children in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes. Further, most of the studies in the relevant literature have been conducted in home settings, which calls a need for studies in schools. Hence, there is a lack of research investigating how DR influences participants’ reading skills in a foreign language class for elementary school children. Aiming to fill this gap in literature, this study examines how the reading and comprehension related skills of elementary school children are affected through exposure to DR in an EFL class.
2. Literature Review

Adult-child book reading as an instructional technique is an interactive approach which employs a teacher and a group of children reading storybooks together (Whalon, Delano & Hanline, 2013). Dialogic reading is a form of adult-child book reading activity. DR can best be described as an adult-child reading technique with a special emphasis on adult-child interactions (Whitehurst, Fischel, Lonigan, Valdez-Menchaca, DeBaryshe & Caulfield, 1988). Although DR and shared reading activity are similar, they differ in terms of the role of children in both modes. Contrary to shared reading, DR encourages the child to be active during the activity so much so that the child becomes the story teller and initiates dialogues and the teacher turns into a listener changing the roles (Trivette & Dunst, 2007). Research shows that DR has a positive impact on young children’s language development (Huebner & Meltzoff, 2005). During adult-child book reading the teacher models reading the storybook and children read along the teacher. Since the teacher models strategies as well, such reading promotes children’s strategy adoption which in turn fosters reading comprehension (Parkes, 2000). Further, research also shows that DR can be effectively employed with children who have various disabilities (Fung, Wing-yin Chow, & Mcbride-Chang, 2005).

DR entails repeated readings of the same story. The main focus, during the initial reading experience, is on clarifying the plot, however, those of repeated exposures are on inferences and predictions (Mc Donough, 1989). DR encompasses multiple readings of the same story. It is just like children listening to fairytales or bed time stories. When students listen to these stories over and over again, they remember what happens next and when adults change or miss certain parts of the tales, children corrects adults. Due to this nature of DR, children are expected to be story tellers themselves in the end with the scaffolding assistance of the teacher.

Justice and Pullen (2003) argue that dialogic reading improves young children’s oral vocabulary skills. It is thought that developing oral skills leads to better reading comprehension. When applying DR, teachers prompt, evaluate, expand and repeat (PEER) and ask completion questions, recall questions, open-ended questions, wh-questions and distancing questions (CROWD) (Zevenbergen & Whitehurst, 2003). Morgan and Meier (2008) contend that via using the PEER and CROWD procedures oral vocabulary and listening comprehension can be developed. Due to its shared nature, DR is a social activity (Penimonti & Justice, 2010). DR is a social experience which involves student-teacher and student-student interaction. Further, DR makes way to active child participation through engaging in dialogues with their teacher and their peers about the storybook they are sharing. As Whalon et al. (2013) put, such dialogues enable children to benefit in terms of social initiations and responses. By answering teachers’ questions during DR, children develop their communication skills as well as their social reciprocity.

DR research conducted in participants’ L1 displays beneficial results. In a study with Egyptian kindergarteners Gregory and Cahill (2011) have found that DR affects preschoolers’ phonological awareness and meaning construction positively. Research also shows that DR develops preschoolers’ narrative skills (Lever & Senechal, 2011), toddlers’ and preschoolers’ literacy skills (Chow et al., 2008) and comprehension (Robb, 2010) and preschooler’s expressive and receptive vocabulary (Hargrave & Senechal, 2000).

Research demonstrates that DR strategies are implemented to reading programs for children with reading difficulties as well as to training programs for teachers who teach students with disabilities (Woolley & Hay, 2004). During DR the teacher presents students with questions about the story and expands their answers. DR develops oral skills and research indicates that oral language skills influence reading development directly (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002).

English is the mostly preferred foreign language worldwide and North Cyprus is no exception. Compared to state schools, private schools pay more attention to providing a variety of educational services for elementary school children to stand out and attract more students in North Cyprus. One of the reasons for choosing private primary schools is the English classes offered (Atamturk, 2018). All private schools are way more successful than state schools in English as a foreign language teaching. While some students who start learning English in kindergartens do not have any problems in their English classes in Grade 1, all those who do not start learning English in kindergartens are likely to lay behind their peers. Knowing that the quality of English language teaching informs parental school choice (Atamturk, 2018), school authorities feel the need to offer English support classes (ESC) for such students.

These classes are for children who can manage albeit rather slowly in a regular English class. While these children study together with typically developing children, they attend ESC during the hours allocated to English. They use the same coursebook as the one used in their regular classes in ESC. However, the delivery of instruction is rather slow with lots of repetition. They hold ESC with small numbers so that the teacher has time to attend every student’s individual needs. For instance, while the regular classes consist of between 20 to 23 students, an ESC consists of maximum 10 students.

Eligibility for ESC is determined by the teachers’ referral. Students are evaluated by their English teachers based on their performance in EFL classes for six weeks at the beginning of the term. When the English teacher recognizes no progress or low achievement levels, he/she informs the principal about such students. The principal holds a meeting with the English teacher and the regular class teacher to discuss such students. Then, the parents
of these children are called to inform them about the English support classes which would be offered free of charge. The children who are eligible for ESC can go back to their regular English classes when they make the desirable progress in ESC.

Transactional theory of reading and socio-cultural theory inform this research study. As Rosenblatt (2005) argues, reading makes way to reciprocal and recursive transactions between the reader, text and context. To illustrate, the reader’s meaning when reading a text is affected by similar experiences in his own routine. With regard to context, the reader’s meaning making when reading a text is influenced by whether he/she is reading the text for pleasure or as an academic requirement.

Drawing on socio-cultural theory, reading occurs in a social context where the child interacts with the teacher and the peers. From Vygotsky’s (1978) perspective, the child’s language and social development are shaped though interaction with more skilled ones. DR engages children with more skilled others, such as parents or teachers. Teachers, parents and more skilled peers provide scaffolding assistance through modelling, demonstrating and elaborating to expand children’s language skills. The ultimate aim is to enable the child to expand his/her zone of proximal development and take the role of the more skilled one.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

A total of ten Year 2 elementary school children from a private school in North Cyprus participated in the study. There was only one ESC for Year 2 students when this study was conducted and it consisted of ten students. All of these ten students studying in ESC participated in this study. The main reason for choosing this age group was that children with poor comprehension at the age of seven and eight continue to have reading and comprehension related problems at age eleven when these problems are not identified or addressed (Cain & Oakhill, 2005). For this reason, eight is a critical age for young learners in terms of reading comprehension and developing effective reading skills. Six of these participants were girls and four were boys. All participants were eight years old and they were recruited from the same private school and they all had similar socio-economic backgrounds. All participants took place in this study with pseudonyms.

3.2 Materials and Intervention

With regard to materials, two instructional videos (Colorado State Library, 2016; FPGUNC, 2012) were utilized. The principles of DR were delivered to the interventionist during a training session of one and a half hour. The notions of PEER and CROWD (Zevenbergen & Whitehurst, 2003) were introduced to the interventionist during this training session. The interventionist was presented with the strategies of DR and two videos downloaded from YouTube exemplifying how to implement DR effectively were watched together with her. The first video exemplified how to use DR strategies effectively. The teacher on the video (Colorado State Library, 2016) read The things I can do by Jeff Mack dialogically and illustrated how to use DR strategies. The second video (FPGUNC, 2012) demonstrated how to prepare a book for DR. Storybooks are great reading materials. The storybooks were selected from Read it yourself with Ladybird series for this study. These graded readers series are popular amongst young EFL learners. Six storybooks, namely The Ugly Duckling, Goldilocks and the Three Bears, Little Red Hen, I am a Doctor, Cinderella and Dinosaurs were utilized. These books are engaging due to the simple facts they covered, repeated words, images and picture glossary. In addition to videos and storybooks, realia were used. Realia refer to objects from real life. Realia can be used in teaching vocabulary since children associate between words and objects through employing realia to relate to real life. As posed by the transactional theory, relating to real life influences the reader’s meaning making of the text positively. Using realia can be an effective way to develop reading skills. Realia can be used to foster vocabulary development, which in turn enhances comprehension and hence academic success. Five rubber ducks, five teddy bears, five soft toy hens, doctor kits and five dinosaur toys were used.

In this study PEER and CROWD prompts were used together to foster oral and listening comprehension skills. In addition to these prompts, initiation and inference making were embedded to promote the teaching of social reciprocity, interaction and reading comprehension which were proposed by Whalon et al. (2013). With regard to initiation, research shows that when children take active parts in DR as in children’s taking over initiation, they develop better language skills (Stern, 2002; Zevenbergen & Whitehurst, 2003). Although the teacher models the initiation of conversation at the beginning, the child is expected to take over the initiation later on. In the meantime the teacher encourages the child to ask questions as well as to respond to the questions. Inference making is the ability to elicit information that is not explicitly stated in the text. The main reason for adding inference making to DR instruction is that there is a link between inference making and reading comprehension (Oakhill & Cain, 2007). While responding to inference making questions children develop the skills essential for future reading comprehension. When children get more skilled in inference making their reading comprehension gets bolstered. For all these reasons, the teacher asked inference based questions as well as fact-based questions.
Fact based questions included questions about the plot, the characters, the relationship between the characters and the setting in the storybooks read dialogically. She was taught to encourage silent children to respond, correct wrong answers and expand using a richer language in terms of vocabulary and sentence structure. Special emphasis was put on expanding since it was viewed as an effective strategy to develop language skills. In the meantime, the interventionist encouraged social relations so that the children could build social relations with their peers and the teacher. Child-interventionist interaction and child-child interaction help build effective social skills. By this way, the child was expected to feel safe and valued by the teacher and their peers. DR was used to teach such social skills as speaking one at a time in alternating turns and listening to others when they were speaking, waiting for his/her own turn, and not interrupting others, which were essential for orderly conversation. As argued by Blair (2002) targeting cognitive as well as physical and social domains were conducive to school success. A written informed consent form including information about the title and the nature research was sent to the parents with the help of the ESC teacher. The parents were assured that there was not an expected harm resulting from this research but that their children were expected to benefit in terms of English language proficiency and reading skills. The informed consent read all the participating students were to take place in the study with pseudonyms and if they signed the form and brought it back to the ESC teacher, it would mean they agreed to their children’s participation in the study.

3.3 Research Design

The current study was designed as an experimental study. Ten 8 year old children studying in ESC underwent a DR intervention for over a period of six weeks. The DR intervention took place during the hours allocated to the big book reading activity of the ESC. The big book reading activity was a 20 minute typical reading activity with the teacher holding a big storybook and reading aloud to the children sitting on the floor. These children have two class hours of English every day and they have the big book activity during the last 20 minutes of the second hour. Hence, the interventionist who was also an English teacher employed in the same school took over during the last 20 minutes of the second hour and implemented DR. The teacher of ESC was also with them but she did not interfere. Thus, the students underwent the intervention for six weeks for a total of 10 hours. The impact of the intervention was assessed quantitatively through pre and post-tests and qualitatively through pre-intervention and post-intervention interviews with the teacher of ESC.

3.4 Data Analysis

After receiving the informed consent of the parents, the quantitative data were elicited through the results of the pre and post-tests administered by the school. Since the distribution of the outcome variables was not normal, Wilcoxon signed ranks test which is a non-parametric test was performed. The qualitative data were collected through in-depth pre and post-intervention interviews with the teacher of ESC. Before the start of the intervention the teacher was interviewed about each participant’s overall performance in ESC classes in general and reading performance in particular. The teacher had the opportunity to get to know each student well since the intervention took place in the second half of the semester. Semi structured interview questions were posed to the teacher during these pre-intervention interviews. Once the intervention was completed, the teacher was interviewed again about the performance of each participating student and the perceived changes and improvements each student demonstrated. The post-intervention interview questions were more structured in comparison to the pre-intervention interviews. Thematic analysis was performed to analyse the data gathered from the pre and post-intervention interviews. The data were coded and sorted under certain categories. A detailed examination of these categories revealed the emerging themes.

4. Results

The findings of this study suggested that DR had positive impacts on the participants’ overall reading skills and social development. More specifically, through DR, the participants who underwent a DR experience demonstrated improvements in their attitudes towards reading, and that their interest increased. It seemed that shared reading with the teacher and peers significantly affected the participants’ reading development.

The pre and post-test grades of the participants constituted the quantitative data which were compared to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the results of the two tests. The Wilcoxon signed ranks test displayed a statistically significant difference between the results of the pre and post-test grades in favour of the post-test results, z=2.49, p<.05 (See Table 1).
Table 1. Wilcoxon signed ranks test results for pre and post-tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>Sum of Ranks</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EPT–EpreT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative Ranks</td>
<td>2a</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>2.49*</td>
<td>.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Ranks</td>
<td>8b</td>
<td>6.78</td>
<td>61.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ties</td>
<td>0c</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

a. Based on negative ranks
b. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

When the mean rank and the sum of ranks were considered, the significant difference was found in favour of the positive ranks which were the post-test results. Based on the higher mean rank of the post-test, it was suggested that the participants scored better in the post-test than they did in the pre-test, which proved that the intervention improved English language proficiency in general and reading comprehension in particular considerably.

The analysis of the pre-intervention interview data revealed the profile of the participants prior to the intervention. It was found that the participants experienced certain linguistic, social and personal problems. Table 1 illustrated the themes emerged from the analysis of the data gathered prior to the intervention from the teacher of ESC (See Table 2).

Table 2. Frequency distribution of the themes emerged from pre-intervention interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Total number of participants</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor linguistic skills</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor social skills</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of interest</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal problems</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negativity towards English</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 2 illustrated, all participants exhibited difficulties and weaknesses concerning linguistic and social skills. Similarly, they were all disinterested, had personal problems and a great majority demonstrated negativity towards English. With regard to poor linguistic skills, the teacher told that these students had difficulty in learning words, recognizing letters accurately, spelling, reading aloud, comprehension and naming objects in English. To illustrate, she said, ‘Ali does not seem to understand at all. When asked a question he just looks away failing to respond’. Ali’s problem was not restricted to comprehension but he could not read aloud. He had difficulty in reading words and he could not write words at all. She added that Aleyna and Melisa had similar problems and they were silent all the time. As the teacher reported, ‘Aleyna is rather quiet. It is impossible to have her say a word in English. She has not shown any progress over a period of one and a half months’. Esra’s problems were similar. The teacher stated ‘Esra tries hard but she fails to read words correctly and she is willing to reply but her answers do not make sense most of the time’. Cansu and Meryem were frustrated with English. As noted by the teacher ‘Cansu tries to read when asked but she is not happy with her own performance. Especially when she makes mistakes or misses some words her classmates make fun of her and she looks at me feeling helpless’. Mehmet and Yigit had difficulty in reading words and naming objects. They could not remember words most of the time.

With regard to social skills, all participants were reported to have poor social skills. The common profile of these children in terms of social skills was that they could not make friends easily and they failed to socialize with other classmates. They were reported to be alone most of the time and they were not willing to interact with their peers. Cansu and Aleyna’s interactions with their classmates were not at desirable standards although they were communicating with their teachers and trying to keep close. More specifically, as mentioned by the teacher ‘Cansu tries to set up an emotional bond with me coming up to me, hugging me and at one time she complained that her classmates do not like her’.

Disinterestedness was one of the frequently raised issues during the pre-intervention interview. Analysis of the interview data revealed that none of the participants was able to follow what was going on in the classroom and that they had broken concentration. Further, most of them were neither willing to participate nor cooperate and hence looked bored all the time.

Personal problems was another theme emerged from the pre-intervention interview data. The teacher believed these students had series personal problems due to the fact that they could not fit into the class. The teacher stated ‘Ali finds English very difficult and he believes he is stupid and incompetent’. She believed Aleyna had similar problems. To illustrate, she told ‘Aleyna is shy and depressive. She thinks she does everything wrong’.
The teacher reported ‘Esra feels unfit and complains that she is not as intelligent as her classmates’. She noted ‘Cansu is an introvert. She has a low opinion of herself and blames herself’. She added ‘Mehmet is aggressive. When he makes a mistake and his classmates make fun of him, he gets crazy and shouts in Turkish like “look at them they make fun of me”. At one time, closing his ears with his hands he yelled at me saying “speak Turkish, I do not know English” in Turkish. At another time, he said in Turkish ‘you keep talking but I do not understand you’.

Negativity towards English was an apparent theme in the analysis of the pre-intervention data. As noted by the teacher, most participants disliked English. She said ‘Ali said he found English too complex’. Similarly, ‘Aleyna did not like English’. She believed ‘Esra is frustrated with English’. She added ‘Cansu is not happy in English classes’. She noted ‘Mehmet is always angry in English classes and kept murmuring ‘I hate it’.

Compared to the findings elicited from the pre-intervention interviews, the themes emerged from the post-intervention interviews were more positive (See Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Total number of participants</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive attitudes towards English</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved comprehension</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built self-esteem</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better linguistic skills</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed social skills</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 3, all participants demonstrated positive behaviours towards English. Analysis of the post-intervention data with Ali’s teacher highlighted a number of changes in Ali’s behaviour towards English for the better. Similarly, significant improvements were seen in Aleyna’s attitude towards English. The teacher revealed Esra ‘looks happy in English classes’. According to the teacher, ‘Cansu enjoys English now’. She noticed a number of changes in Mehmet’s attitude towards English. She told ‘Mehmet seems to listen to me more and looks happy in my class’.

Improved comprehension was another theme emerged. The teacher noticed significant improvements in Ali’s and Aleyna’s listening and reading comprehension skills. She said ‘Ali can understand the meaning of words he hears now and Aleyna can perform what she is told to do in English after a few repetitions’. The teacher stated that ‘significant improvements in Esra’s and Arda’s listening comprehension skills were evident’. She noted ‘Cansu demonstrates great gains in terms of listening and reading comprehension’. The teacher noticed significant gains in his listening comprehension skills, however, a minimal change for the better in his reading comprehension skills.

Another theme emerged was built self-esteem. Significant improvements were seen in terms of built self-esteem and self-confidence. The teacher reported ‘Ali seems to be more confident’ and she added ‘Aleyna’s confidence got boosted’. She told ‘Esra believes in herself more’. The teacher stated ‘Cansu is still shy and she thinks she cannot learn English’. She noticed that ‘Mehmet believes he can learn English and he has experienced a burst of self-esteem’.

Except for one student all participants demonstrated notable improvements with regard to linguistic skills. As noted by the teacher ‘Ali and Meltem have acquired basic vocabulary, which is something very good for them’. She added ‘Aleyna demonstrates significant gains in linguistic skills. She can follow directions’. The teacher stated ‘When asked, Esra can name objects and colours accurately’. On the other hand, she reported ‘Cansu still struggles to name objects and she has difficulty in retrieving words’. She revealed ‘Mehmet demonstrated certain gains in terms of vocabulary and oral skills and that there is a remarkable increase in his English language use’.

With regard to developed social skills, the teacher reported ‘some changes for the better in both Ali’s and Aleyna’s relations with their peers’. As noted by her, ‘Mehmet’s relations with his class mates have improved. He has already made two friends. At one time he helped one of his friends with the meaning of a word. He has a dominant personality. For this reason, he adopts the teacher’s role sometimes and explains to his class mates’. The teacher did not raise anything about these students’ social skills.

5. Discussion

The present study examined the effectiveness of a DR experience of primary school EFL learners. The findings indicated significant improvements in students’ reading behaviours, linguistic and social skills and attitudes towards English due to the DR experience. This finding goes in line with that of Cunningham and Zibulsky (2011) that DR benefits young learners. Further, this finding concurs with Stern’s (2002) finding that DR has cognitive and affective benefits. The result that DR develops participants’ linguistic skills is consistent with that of Hargrave and Senechal’s (2000). That participants’ social skills developed is one of the major findings. Targeting social domains is especially important since developed social domains are conducive to school.
success (Blair, 2002). The results indicated that the intervention was effective in terms of enhancing oral skills and vocabulary. This finding goes in line with Morgan and Meier’s (2008) results that DR has positive effects on the oral vocabulary skills of children. The results indicated that language skills of the participants improved albeit below desirable standards. This was due to the fact that the intervention has lasted six weeks only and language skills develop in time and rather slowly (Kennedy, 2005). The participants demonstrated improvements in their attitudes towards English and that their interest increased. This finding corroborates the result of previous research (Whalon et al., 2013) that DR stimulates interest and enthusiasm. It is assumed that when reading occurs in a supportive social context with the teacher and peers as in this study, the reader will build confidence, enjoy reading and participate more. The results indicated that the DR intervention fostered most participants’ self-esteem so much that they initiated dialogues, which was consistent with previous research findings (Christ & Wang, 2012) that during joint reading when a reader has expertise, she/he explains it to other readers usually adopting the teacher’s social interaction style. From theoretical perspectives, this result verifies Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development. As posed by the transactional theory, the reader’s meaning making when reading a text is influenced by whether he/she is reading the text for pleasure or as an academic requirement. Although it was an academic requirement taking place at school, the participants of this study read in a supportive and caring environment free from judgements targeting reading for pleasure and aiming to boost the readers’ meaning making of the text.

6. Conclusions

Attempting to investigate the impact of DR on language and reading skills of elementary school children learning English as a foreign language, this experimental study reveals that DR benefits young EFL learners in terms of attitudes towards English, listening and reading comprehension, self-esteem, linguistic and social skills. Reading is an essential skill in academic success. Effective reading skills are associated with terms of content understanding and reading comprehension, self-esteem, linguistic and social skills.

Reading is an essential skill in academic success. Effective reading skills are associated with academic success (Hall, Gee & Mills, 2016; Clark & Douglas, 2011). Since reading is an important skill affecting learners’ academic success, this skill as well as other skills should be developed at earlier stages. To cater for the needs of young EFL learners, teachers should be in search for effective strategies. In the light of the results of this study, DR is proposed as an instructional strategy that can be used with young learners in EFL classes.

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