

# The use of shared reading books in Indonesian early childhood

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## The use of shared reading books in Indonesian early childhood

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### ABSTRACT

This article outlines the collective reading tasks using interactive book media. Due to the importance of stimulating aspects of child development, the writers attempt to report a qualitative case study research on the effectiveness of collective reading tasks via interactive book media to stimulate early childhood development in language, cognitive, and motor skills. Ten early childhood education teachers and 65 children (38 girls and 27 boys) from five private early childhood education institutions in Indonesia participated in the study. Data for this study were collected using interviews with teachers, classroom observation, and students documentation. Based upon our qualitative content analysis, the findings show that reading books together in Indonesia using interactive book media can stimulate children's language, cognitive, and motor development. This study provides an exciting opportunity to advance our knowledge of collective reading tasks with interactive book media encompassing various other activities that are very effective in stimulating children's development, particularly aspects of language, cognitive, and motor development.

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## Introduction

First and foremost, collective reading tasks is a beneficial activity for children's development. Furthermore, most of the early childhood education institutions in the world have conducted collective reading tasks, including in Canada (Kaefer 2018), Colombia (Chaparro-Moreno, Reali, and Maldonado-Carreño 2017), Pennsylvania (Toub et al. 2018), Norway (Grover et al. 2020) and England (Neumann 2020). Previous studies have suggested that collective reading tasks offers a naturalistic context to facilitate and support children's language development (Deshmukh et al. 2019). Lee (2017) has been argued that children can develop literacy development by participating in collective reading tasks. Thus, the earlier this activity is carried out, the children's vocabulary will increase, cognitive development, and social-emotional development of the child will be better in the future (O'Farrelly et al. 2018). The collective reading tasks can be done with various media. Previous studies have carried out collective reading tasks using picture books (Chaparro-Moreno, Reali, and Maldonado-Carreño 2017; Torr 2018), textbooks (Roy-Charland et al. 2016), digital books (Ozturk and Hill 2018), and using digital storytelling to engage children in the creation of digital stories and in learning to mean in a multimodal way (Lestariyana and Widodo 2018).

The number of literature only focuses on one or two media in carrying out collective reading tasks. If the activities are done with diverse reading media and designed with various kinds of tasks, it will provide more benefits for children's development. The recent research by Hassinger-Das et al. (2016) showed that combining vocabulary games with collective reading tasks can

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improve children's vocabulary. In this study, the tasks were also followed by a variety of other activities, so that not only children's reading skills developed, but other children's development such as cognitive, fine and gross motor skills, as well as receptive and expressive language development could also grow. Each page on interactive book media that is used for collective reading tasks is given several activities in it, such as lift the flap (open and close system), sticking, matching pictures, and practical practice pages, so that students can play an active role in these tasks. They are invited to do thought processes, including remembering, problem-solving, and making decisions about what is on the theme of collective reading tasks so that their cognitive abilities develop. Then, the students are asked to read according to reading figures to develop their expressive language skills and invited to do reading instructions so that receptive language skills can expand. Furthermore, the activity of practicing the instructions requested in the book manuscripts used in order to develop fine motor skills and gross motor skills of children. The major objective of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of collective reading tasks through interactive book media to engage early childhood abilities in language, cognitive, and motor development.

### Comprehension of collective reading tasks

Collective reading tasks is one of the most popular methods used by adults to improve children's language development and literacy (Gonzalez et al. 2014). Collective reading tasks is an interaction where adults read and discuss books with young children who cannot read (Barnes and Puccioni 2017). Collective reading tasks, on the other hand, involve three aspects including parents or teachers, children, and books (Bergman Deitcher, Aram, and Adar 2019). Also, through collective reading tasks, children can engage in conversations with adults and get new vocabulary that may not have been heard in previous conversations (Lorio and Woods 2020). Moreover, collective reading tasks is considered an effective practice to improve children's language development and literacy (Adesope et al. 2011; Fitton, McIlraith, and Wood 2018; Lonigan and Shanahan 2010). The collective reading tasks by adults and children enrich an opportunity to facilitate children's language development (Torr 2019).

Collective reading tasks is an important practice to stimulate the development of children's spoken language (Gillanders and Castro 2011; Walsh, Sánchez, and Burnham 2016). Gámez, González, and Urbin (2017) argued that shared reading experiences play an important role in stimulating children's spoken language (for instance vocabulary and letter knowledge) when teachers or parents ask children and provide feedback on their responses. Collective reading tasks can help the development of children's vocabulary (Lenhart et al. 2019) and improve children's vocabulary (Hassinger-Das et al. 2016), vocabulary mastery will be better if collective reading tasks start from the age of 1 year compared to 3 years of age (Jimenez et al. 2020). To stimulating language development, the quality of reading books is also related to children's math results (Barnes and Puccioni 2017).

### Benefits of collective reading tasks

Most importantly, collective reading tasks should be done from an early age. In the same vein, O'Farrelly et al. (2018) has argued that collective reading tasks in children aged six months can increase vocabulary, cognitive, and socio-emotional competencies at the age of 12 months. The results of research by Shahaeian et al. (2018) show that doing collective reading tasks from an early age is connected to children's early academic achievement. Besides, Chaparro-Moreno, Reali, and Maldonado-Carreño (2017) reported that one of the classroom activities that can foster interaction between teachers and children is collective reading tasks. Positive shared reading book experiences provide opportunities for children to learn new vocabulary, increase understanding of concepts, and develop literacy skills (Ozturk and Hill 2018). With this in mind, collective reading tasks also develops

children's receptive and expressive language skills as well as early literacy, which have an impact on children's school readiness (Saracho 2017).

### Interactive books as media in collective reading tasks

Books are a medium that is rich in vocabulary, the collective reading tasks provides a context for parents and children to discuss words (Dickinson and Poche 2011). One of the media that can be used in collective reading tasks is interactive book media. Interactive book media in early childhood education is a tool to stimulate knowledge of letters and spoken language of children (Mol, Bus, and De Jong 2009). This study applies an interactive book in printed form. Printed books are beneficial for children in many ways (Morgan 2013). Recent evidence by Ozturk and Hill (2018) has shown that reading printed books can involve children in a higher level of thinking compared to reading digital books. Gunawan (2018) has argued that language teachers may make use of drawings as a multi-semiotic resource for scaffolding young learners in learning second and foreign languages. The interactive book media in this study is a book that not only stimulates children's literacy and oral language knowledge but also children's cognitive and motor skills in one activity.

In line with that, reading interactive books can improve reading fluency and children's reading comprehension (Çetinkaya, Ates, and Yildirim 2019). Besides, reading interactive books are very effective in both teaching language and reading skills to children (Piasta et al. 2012; Wasik, Hindman, and Snell 2016) because it requires the attention of teachers and children to the stimulus provided. The quality of reading interactive books is also the most beneficial for children's letter knowledge (Cabello et al. 2019). Mol and Bus (2011) emphasized that reading interactive books with preschoolers appears to be an important initial experience that is significantly engaging in children's reading achievement. In short, reading interactive books is effective in improving children's vocabulary (Lowman, Stone, and Guo 2018).

## Method

### Participants

#### Teacher

Ten early childhood education teachers participated in this study. They were recruited from 5 early childhood education institutions in Indonesia, with an average age between 30 and 40 years old. Their teaching experience ranges from 10 to 20 years with different educational degrees and backgrounds. Six of them obtained a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and four of them were pre-service teachers who currently studied in the department of early childhood education.

#### Children

65 children participated in this study (38 females and 27 males). The ages of children ranged from 4 to 6 years. All children spoke Indonesian at school. After informing the participants with the goals of the study and obtaining their consent, observations were conducted.

### Case study

This interpretive qualitative case study explores various events in a linked system (Creswell et al. 2007) and in a specific setting (children's classrooms) focusing on a particular context (independent reading and teacher-guided reading). Participants were observed three times a week in class. This study lasted for one semester to get an accurate analysis of how teachers could facilitate the development of reading together using interactive books. The present research also aims to find out the reality beyond the phenomenon by observing the children's engagement in responding to certain

situations through reading books independently or while interacting with their friends (Dyson and Genishi 2005).

### ***Collective book reading activities in this context***

Collective reading activities referred to the enactment of reading tasks through which teachers used the interactive book as a media to engage students in several reading activities. The goals were to develop children's literacy and other psychological aspects such as cognitive development, fine and gross motor skills, as well as receptive and expressive language development. Each page on interactive book media for joint book reading activities provided students with several activities, such as lift the flap (open and close system), sticking, matching pictures, and practical practice pages, so that it could help them play an active role during the reading activities. They were invited to do thinking processes, including remembering, problem-solving, and decision-making related to the theme of collective book reading practices so that their cognitive abilities developed. They were also asked to imitate the voice of the characters in the story as shown by the teachers to develop their expressive language skills. And, they were also invited to do reading instructions so that their receptive language skills could develop. The activity of practicing the instructions requested in the book was used to develop fine and gross motor skills of children.

### ***Data collection***

To achieve data triangulation, the researchers collected data from various sources (Yin 2015), including interviews, observations, and learning artifacts.

### ***Interview***

To understand the context of reading activities carried out in early childhood education institutions, the authors interviewed the teacher for 45 min using a semi-structured interview protocol. The interviewers asked questions about the teacher's understanding of collective reading tasks and the enactment and the effectiveness of the tasks. The authors developed a semi-structured interview protocol from preliminary observation and document analysis to encourage teachers to report on children's daily activities and their daily pedagogical practices, study-related content and resources, their assessment on collective reading tasks, and children's development report. All interviews were conducted and voice-recorded in Indonesian with prior notification and consent of the participants.

### ***Observation***

Observation was conducted three times a week for four months in a natural setting focusing on (a) the context in which children read books alone or read books together and (b) interactions with friends while reading books together. The transition between collective reading tasks and time lunch usually lasted 15–20 min for one semester. The implementations of collective reading tasks were usually situated in class or on the playground. While the teacher held the book and read it facing the children, the other teachers sat together with the children. After reading books together, they continued to have lunch in the class. After lunchtime, the children were free either to read interactive books independently or to play around.

### ***Document***

The researchers used video cameras for data collection purposes to document group interactions, classroom studies and participant observation. Digital cameras were utilized to record the children's activities. Field notes were also taken for further analysis.

## Data analysis

The interview data were transcribed and then analyzed using open coding and axial coding (Corbin and Strauss 2014). Using Widodo (2014) guidelines for qualitative data analysis, the following procedures were carried out:

- (1) Preparing the template (design/transcript format): The researchers prepared a template containing several features of the transcript. It was designed based on data structure, data storage, and data retrieval.
- (2) Managing information (data management or compilation): After the researchers designed the template, the data were transferred and put in the template. Dialog line numbering was used to take a closer look at specific data.
- (3) Treating transcribed data (data grammar): Interview data were obtained naturally. Thus, the information must be presented in an interactional manner. Data were given a verbal notation or symbol (e.g. intonation, hesitation marker, interrupted speech). These symbols indicate the nature of verbal speech and the difference between spoken and written discourse.
- (4) Transcribing data ethically (ethical layout): Actors involved in interviews should be kept confidential unless they wish to have their names withheld identified in writing on the consent form. Researchers must communicate this issue to their participants to avoid ethical conflicts. The degree of confidentiality and anonymity varies according to the socio-institutional context to others.

To analyze the observational data, the authors first collected and organized the video data, photographs, and field notes. The data were interpreted and discussed using thematic analysis to find meaningful patterns related to the research objectives and develop theoretical relationships. Next, they were analyzed and compared to filter out general themes about children's approaches to collective reading tasks. To ensure data credibility, the researchers used the following techniques (Creswell 2014):

- (1) Member-checks: two participants (one principal and one teacher) from each early childhood education institutions were re-interviewed to check that their opinions were consistent with their responses in the initial interview and by the researcher's interpretation.
- (2) Peer-debriefing: this was conducted by a lecturer in the early childhood education department to check that the codes and themes accurately represented important parts of interviews, observations, and document analysis.
- (3) Inquiry audit: a senior researcher played a role as an auditor whose responsibility was to ensure that the data collection and analysis process was rigorous enough for multiple case studies.

## Finding and discussion

This present study was undertaken to examine the significance of interactive book-mediated collective reading tasks to nurture early childhood learners' language, cognitive, and motor development. In this study, data were garnered from in-depth interviews with 10 early childhood teachers. Drawing on qualitative data analysis, three major themes emerged in this study were teacher's understanding of collective reading tasks, the implementation of interactive book-based collective reading tasks, and the significance of interactive book-mediated collective reading tasks. The findings of this study show that interactive book-mediated collective reading tasks help early childhood students develop their language, cognitive and motor development.

### Teachers' understanding of collective reading tasks

Drawing on interview data analysis with 10 early childhood teachers, findings show that all teachers have recognized collective reading tasks. A variety of understanding of collective reading tasks among teachers was identified. Collective reading tasks are viewed as a collaborative book reading activity that can be performed by children with parents, children with their peer, and children with teachers. Collective reading tasks is believed to be closely related to children's development and their academic ability in the future. In this study, all teachers coincided regarding this view. This can be seen in the following interview result:

Collective reading tasks is an activity that utters or spells a piece of writing collectively between parents or teachers with children and children with their peer. Furthermore, collective reading tasks provide a two-way communication interaction and question-answer opportunity so as to give a positive influence on children's developing brain, as well as to contribute positively to children's academic skills in the future

In the same vein, other participants also rationalized that collective reading tasks not only stimulate aspects of children's language development but also provoke various development aspects of children:

Collective reading task is an activity where children have the opportunity to select a book they favor and read it with their friends or teachers read it for them, to expand knowledge and enhance children's vocabulary as well as develop their cognitive development aspects of logical thinking and train their emotional ability to be patient while listening to teachers who tell stories.

Another participant also confirms that collective reading task is an activity that can foster fun communication for children:

Collective reading tasks between teachers or parents with children potentially lead to interaction between teachers or parents and children in that teachers or parents can build comforting communication with children. They can also stimulate other aspects of children's development at the same time.

It is visible that collective reading tasks associate with several aspects of children's development. Meta-analytical study conducted by Dowdall et al. (2020) reported that collective reading tasks can intensify and accelerate children's language development. Moreover, Saracho (2017) documented that reading storybooks together can enhance children's development in the form of receptive and expressive language skills and literacy skills, as well as the impact on children's successful language learning at schools. Moreover, Kohm et al. (2016) reported that children's experience in collective reading tasks is related positively to social, cognitive, and emotional development of children. Another study undertaken by Shahaeian et al. (2018) showed that collective reading tasks associated (in)directly with children's academic achievement through receptive vocabulary and early academic skills. To this end, Hendrix, Hojnoski, and Missall (2019) chronicled that collective reading tasks can facilitate meaningful mathematical interactions. The study provides guidance to utilize collective reading tasks to boost children's engagement in mathematical interactions.

### The implementation of collective reading tasks

All participants performed collective reading tasks in their schools, however, the quantity of the implementation of collective reading tasks differ from each school, some schools frequently implemented collective reading tasks and vice versa. In the same vein, teachers implemented collective reading tasks differently, but all teachers used interactive book media in collective reading tasks. Interactive book media is a book which not only stimulates children's letters and spoken language knowledge, but also nurtures children's cognitive and motor skill in a single activity. Collective reading tasks comprises three aspects, namely adults, children and books (Bergman Deitcher, Aram, and Adar 2019). The report also supports the following interview result:

In collective reading tasks, the first thing I did is to invite children to choose the theme of the story they like from the book, then read the book in an interesting way. In addition, I also provided a comfortable room as well as additional accessories such as dolls. When reading books together, it is usually equipped with other activities such as sticking and matching pictures so that children did not feel saturated in participating in the activity. At the end of the activity, children were usually asked about topics that the teacher read before.

Other participants also explained that collective reading tasks should be integrated with other activities that make children more interested in participating in the activity:

In implementing collective reading tasks, I firstly prepared many interactive book media that can be seen clearly by the children and also the book which contains stories and other activities that are interesting for children. Other activities performed in the book are attaching pictures and matching images because children love pictures, especially if the picture has never been seen before. The purpose of integrating other activities in collective reading tasks is to get children not bored during the activities. In addition, aspects of development are stimulated not only aspects of children's language development, but the children's motor and cognitive can also be tested where the child practices book instructions

Collective reading tasks can be combined with various other activities (see [Figures 1 and 2](#)) to stimulate all aspects of children's development. Teachers as educators can guide and direct children in implementing all activities provided in interactive book media. When doing collective reading tasks, what I did is setting a small circle so that the child focuses, then attracted children's attention by showing the book cover, then the duration of reading is not short and usually the preparation in doing collective reading tasks is prepared the day before the activity. I selected a book that is interesting and in relevant to the theme of learning in that week. The process of reading books together, children do not only listen to the teacher telling stories, usually I asked children to remember the characters, time, place, and other elements contained in the story and then asked the children again at the end of the story. In addition, children are also asked to read according to reading figures which aim to develop children's expressive language skills. This collective reading tasks



**Figure 1.** Children read a book collectively with expression relevant to reading figure in an interactive book media.



**Figure 2.** Children classify pictures in interactive book media into collective reading task.

can develop children's receptive and expressive language skills as well as their cognitive ability. The process of collective reading tasks is performed in teacher-centered and students-centered ways:

Firstly, we prepared interactive book media then asked children to choose the theme of the story they liked. After choosing the theme they like, we implemented collective reading tasks. We read together and asked children to read the book then we sometimes helped children when they have difficulties. In this activity, children were also invited to do reading instructions so that their receptive language skills can develop. Practicing the instructions activity requested in the book script aimed to develop fine and gross motor skills of children.

The results of interviews showed that the implementation of collective reading tasks can be integrated with other activities that are of interest to children such as sticking, matching images, and working on the practicing pages available in the book so that children actively engage at the time of the activity. Children are invited to do thinking processes which involves remembering, problem-solving, and decision-making based on theme of collective reading tasks so that their cognitive abilities develop. The children were also instructed to read a reading figure to develop children's expressive language skills. They were also invited to do reading instructions so that their receptive language skills can develop, the activity of practicing the instructions requested in the book script aimed to develop fine and gross motor skills of children. The results of this study are supported by the findings of Hassinger-Das et al. (2016) which show that combining vocabulary games with collective reading tasks improves children's vocabulary learning compared to control groups. The result of the research by Neuman and Kaefer (2018) also reported that explicit and systematic collective reading tasks increase children's general knowledge and vocabulary.

A study conducted by Barnes and Puccioni (2017) revealed that the quality of collective reading tasks was associated with children's math and reading outcomes. The frequency of collective reading tasks is also related to reading behavior, narrative understanding, and children's reading interests (Anderson et al. 2019). Takacs and Bus (2018) reported that a narrated image contributes greatly to a child's ability to retell a story heard rather than an image that does not fit the narrative. Children explore images in such a way that they can integrate narratives and images to the maximum. Furthermore, Shahaieian et al. (2018) reported that collective reading tasks provides an opportunity for adults to teach children new words and concepts. Moreover, Bergman Deitcher, Aram, and Adar (2019) documented that parents pay attention to the reasons they read and aspects of the book used in reading activities, such as content and appearance. Parents are also aware of and consider their children's level of development when choosing a book to use.

### **Effectiveness of reading books together**

Interactive book-mediated collective reading tasks can develop various aspects of children's development. The teacher viewed that collective reading tasks not only develop children's language skills but also build cognitive and motor abilities can also be stimulated by using interactive books as a

medium in reading books together, because interactive book media contains several activities. The selection of interactive book media in reading books together not only aims to stimulate children's development optimally, but also aims to encourage children to be interested and passionate in participating in collective reading tasks and not easily bored of these activities. As the participants said in the following interview:

Yes, usually children are eager to read books together if they use interactive book media, because besides children can choose the theme they like, children can also play with the interactive book media, because interactive book media does not only contains writings and pictures, but also contains various games that children like, so that children do not feel easily bored of the activity.

Interesting media can increase children's attention and curiosity about something. Children become focused in listening to stories and also ask a lot of questions about something conveyed by the teacher, so that their understanding of a story also increases. Combining several activities in an interactive book medium is also effective in developing various abilities of children. As said in the following interview:

Combining book reading activities together with other activities can increase children's reading interest, and can also develop various abilities of children such as language, motor, and cognitive skill because children can know more knowledge when reading books, plus combining them with other activities so that aspects of children's development can develop optimally.

Other participants also confirmed that reading books together is very effective to develop expressive children by modeling the activities carried out by story characters:

Collective reading tasks equipped with other activities that are interesting and integrated in one interactive book media can develop children's abilities optimally. Reading a book can provide children with a variety of knowledge, information, and life values and give them an understanding of the responsibilities and risks of an act or behavior. Interactive book-mediated collective reading tasks can develop children's receptive language skills in listening, children's expressive language skills following the characters in the story, and also enhance children's motor skills in performing activities contained in interactive book media

There are also those who say that reading books together is one of the alternatives to eliminate children's boredom because of activities that are not only read by children:

Combining book reading activities together with other activities can prevent children from getting bored and reading books is a fun activity for children. Children can also practice directly with these activities so as to increase children's experience and knowledge. In the joint reading activity, of course, there are moral messages that we will explain to children, invite them to actively communicate, provide them with simple questions so that the child's curiosity is greater and the child's cognitive and language abilities can increase

From the results of interviews with teachers, it can be known that the activity of reading books together is effective in developing children's abilities, and by using interactive book media that contain several activities, then the children's ability can develop optimally, not only language ability, but also children's cognitive and motor abilities can develop. There are many benefits of reading books together to improve children's ability. Muhinyi and Rowe (2019) reported that a child's interest in reading a book together at the age of 10 months predicts the expressive, receptive and pragmatic language skills of the child at the age of 18 months. The frequency of reading activities together can also mediate the influence of parental education on children's vocabulary and grammar (Marjanovič-Umek, Fekonja-Peklaj, and Sočan 2017). A study conducted by S. R. Jimenez and Saylor (2017) shows that interactive vocabulary teaching during collective reading tasks affects the cognitive development of preschoolers. Interactive book-mediated collective tasks can develop children's abilities optimally. Interactive book media in early childhood education is a tool to stimulate the knowledge of letters and spoken language of children (Mol, Bus, and De Jong 2009). Interactive book reading offers children a very effective context for teaching children language skills and reading skills (Piasta et al. 2012; Wasik, Hindman, and Snell 2016) because it requires the attention of teachers and children to the stimulus provided. Mol and Bus (2011)

reported that reading interactive books with preschoolers seems to be an important initial experience and is significantly related to a child's later reading achievements.

## Conclusion

This study aims to investigate the significance of interactive book-mediated collective reading tasks to develop aspects of early childhood language, cognitive, and motor development. The results of study showed that interactive book-mediated collective reading tasks in Indonesia which contains not only writings and images, but also other activities such as sticking, matching images, as well as practicing pages, can involve the active role of the child. Children are invited to do thinking processes including remembering, problem-solving, and decision-making on what is on the theme of reading books together so that their cognitive abilities develop. They were asked to read according to reading figures in order to develop their expressive language skills. Furthermore, they were also invited to do reading instructions so that their receptive language skills can develop. The activity of practicing the instructions requested in the book script allows children to develop their fine and gross motor skills. Therefore, by promoting the use of shared reading books activities, teachers can help children in having better school readiness in various aspects of development, such as cognitive development, language development and motor development so that children are better prepared to participate in primary school activities. Future research can examine the impact of shared reading books activities that parents do at home on children's development to see shared reading books with parents and children at home has the same impact as shared reading books with teachers and children at kindergarten. In addition, parents should be encouraged to collaborate with teachers in shared reading books activities to impact other children's abilities related to aspects of children's emotional development such as self-regulation abilities, for example, children can behave patiently and diligently, and self-efficacy abilities, for example children have confidence in completing their tasks. The implication of this research is that teachers in early childhood education institutions and parents at home can use shared reading books as an activity to stimulate language development, especially in increasing vocabulary, stimulating cognitive development including the process of remembering, problem-solving, and also making decisions in problem-solving, as well as giving children the ability to gain meaning and knowledge from the experience of shared reading books activity, stimulates motor development, especially in the activity of moving pictures, matching and pasting pictures and coordinating fingers and eyes so that children can control and direct their hands to carry out task instructions from shared reading books activity.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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