



Improving ESL First Graders' Vocabulary Through Dialogic Teaching

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Abstract

This study investigates how dialogic teaching; a method based on open, thoughtful conversations between teachers and students affects vocabulary development and phonological awareness in first-grade ESL learners in Pakistan. The focus was on understanding whether this interactive approach could help students improve their English language skills, particularly those with varying levels of vocabulary proficiency (low, average, high) and phonological awareness. The research involved 60 first-graders from a private school in Lahore. The school was selected because its student population reflects a wide mix of social and cultural backgrounds, similar to what is found in both public and private schools across the region. To explore the effects of dialogic teaching, the study used a quasi-experimental design. Students were divided into two groups: one experienced dialogic teaching, while the other followed a traditional instructional approach. Before the teaching began, students took a series of pre-tests, including measures of receptive and expressive vocabulary both general and course-book-based as well as a phonological awareness test. After the intervention period, the same tests were used again to see how much students had improved to make sure the results were fair and not skewed by initial differences between the groups, an Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was applied. The findings were encouraging: students in the dialogic teaching group showed significantly greater improvement in both vocabulary and phonological awareness than those in the control group. Importantly, the gains were consistent across both boys and girls, suggesting that dialogic teaching can be a powerful tool for boosting language skills in early ESL education.

Key words: Dialogic teaching, English language learners, vocabulary knowledge, phonological awareness.



Introduction

In the dynamic landscape of English as a Second Language (ESL) education, the quest for effective teaching strategies that enhance students' vocabulary knowledge is crucial. Vocabulary serves as the foundation of language acquisition, enabling students to communicate effectively, comprehend texts, and express their thoughts clearly (Alqahtani, 2015). Among various pedagogical approaches, dialogic teaching stands out as a powerful method that fosters interactive learning (Jay et al., 2017). By engaging students in meaningful dialogue, this approach encourages critical thinking, deepens understanding, and significantly boosts language acquisition. This study focuses on finding the impact of dialogic teaching on the vocabulary knowledge of Grade 1 students in ESL classrooms—a critical stage where foundational language skills are established.

The research aims to explore how dialogic teaching, which emphasizes collaborative learning through dialogue, influences vocabulary development among young learners. The study will also delve into the comparative analysis of performance based on gender, providing insights into whether dialogic strategies are equally effective for both boys and girls. Understanding these dynamics is essential for tailoring instructional methods to fulfil the various needs of students, ultimately enhancing their learning outcomes.

This research is particularly relevant in the context of ESL classrooms in Pakistan, where traditional teaching methods often dominate. By integrating dialogic teaching strategies, educators can create more engaging and interactive learning environments, which are crucial for young learners who are just beginning their journey in mastering the English language. The findings of this study could pave the way for innovative teaching practices that not only improve vocabulary knowledge but also contribute to a more inclusive and equitable education system. Other studies have demonstrated the efficacy of dialogic teaching in various educational settings, highlighting its positive impact on students' language skills and cognitive development (Khan & Khan, 2020; Chow et al., 2021; Soomro, 2023).

By building on this body of research, this study aims to provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of dialogic teaching in Pakistani ESL classrooms, offering valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers.

Objectives

1. To examine the effect of dialogic teaching on vocabulary knowledge of grade I students in ESL classroom.
2. To compare the performance based on the gender of students under dialogic teaching strategies in vocabulary knowledge.

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant effect of dialogic teaching on vocabulary knowledge of grade 1 students in ESL classroom.

H₀: There is no significant difference based on the gender of students under dialogic teaching strategies in vocabulary Knowledge.

Literature Review

Dialogic Teaching

Dialogic teaching is an instructional approach that emphasizes the central role of dialogue and conversation in the learning process. It originates from the work of Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, who introduced the concept of dialogism, highlighting the importance of dialogue as a means of constructing knowledge through interaction and



reflection. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 168). Dialogic teaching, therefore, encourages an open exchange of ideas, where both teachers and students engage in meaningful conversations that foster critical thinking, comprehension, and deeper learning (Cui & Teo, 2020).

This approach contrasts with traditional, monologic methods where the teacher primarily delivers content and students passively receive it.

In comparison, in conventional teaching, instructors tend to convey knowledge while learners act as submissive receivers of learning with less being active in classroom interaction. (Thompson, 2017) With the help of dialogic teaching both teachers and learners can take part in the curriculum making in the desired language. Thus, pupils and instructors work together to achieve teachers' and learners' goals. So the students will get opportunity to listen to different opinions on a particular discussion. (Haneda & Wells, 2013). In many schools students often come across teachers who are not trained to effectively teach students who are from diverse cultural backgrounds. (Becker & Deris, 2019).

According to the different results from various researches, proved that reading done in groups enhanced the development of reading skills such as vocabulary building in very young children. (Mol et al., 2008; Justice et al., 2005; Filiatrault-Veilleux et al., 2016;). Many researchers (Terrell & Watson, 2018; Moore, Tornatore, Irwin & Fowler, 2012, Chen & Dote-Kwan, 2018; Hudson et al., 2017; Lever & Sénéchal, 2011;) are of the view that children reading in groups tend to increase their vocabulary knowledge when they discuss those words in detail. These researchers have also said that another way to develop children's reading skills is through their discussions about the reading and also giving a chance to keep them engaged by asking questions related to the passage.

Development Of Vocabulary Knowledge

The development of vocabulary knowledge in English as a Second Language (ESL) learners is a critical aspect of language acquisition, as it forms the foundation for effective communication and academic success. Research has shown that vocabulary knowledge is essential for ESL learners to achieve proficiency in reading, writing, and oral communication. According to Jean and Geva (2009), the development of English vocabulary in older ESL children is crucial for predicting their word recognition ability, which in turn affects their overall language proficiency. Furthermore, vocabulary acquisition is not only about learning individual words but also about understanding their use in various contexts. Goya et al. (2011) emphasize that vocabulary knowledge is integral to all aspects of ESL learning, particularly in composition, where the ability to use words accurately and effectively is crucial. Another study by Ghalebi et al. (2020) also highlights the role of language learning strategies in developing vocabulary knowledge. Effective strategies can significantly enhance learners' ability to acquire and retain new vocabulary, thereby improving their writing proficiency and overall language competence.

Overall, the development of vocabulary knowledge is a multifaceted process that requires a combination of effective teaching methods, strategic learning, and continuous practice. As research suggests, vocabulary proficiency is a key determinant of ESL learners' success in both academic and everyday communication.

Role of Dialogic Teaching in Enhancing Vocabulary Knowledge

Dialogic teaching plays a significant role in enhancing vocabulary knowledge among ESL learners by promoting interactive and meaningful dialogue within the classroom. Research suggests that dialogic teaching, which is rooted in Bakhtin's theory of Dialogism,



encourages students to engage in discussions that deepen their understanding of language and vocabulary (Carlson, 2019).

This method contrasts with traditional rote memorization techniques, instead fostering a more dynamic and context-rich learning environment. Chow et al. (2021) highlighted how dialogic teaching helps ESL students, particularly those with varying levels of vocabulary knowledge, to develop their language skills more effectively. By engaging students in meaningful conversation, teachers can address gaps in vocabulary and promote a deeper understanding of word meanings and usage.

Additionally, dialogic teaching has been shown to improve vocabulary knowledge of preschool students. This approach allows for a more holistic development of language skills, as students are not only exposed to new vocabulary but also encouraged to use it in context, thus solidifying their understanding and retention (Nunes, 2021).

Overall, dialogic teaching proves to be a powerful strategy for enhancing vocabulary acquisition in ESL classrooms, providing a more engaging and effective learning experience compared to traditional methods. Consequently, the study intends to examine the effect of dialogic teaching on vocabulary of development of grade 1 students of ESL classroom.

Research Methodology

This study followed a quasi-experimental design, specifically a pre-test post-test non-equivalent group design. It involved two groups: an experimental group, which received the intervention, and a control group, which did not.

Table 1: Diagrammatic Representation of Experimental Design

Experimental group	O	X	O
Control group	O	C	O

Pre-test=O=Post-test, X= Treatment, C= No Treatment

Population of the Study

Total 60 students’ boys and girls studying at a private school of Lahore from grade 1 were participated in this study. They were approximately of seven years of age attending primary school at the start of the research.

This study focuses on if dialogic teaching impacts language learning distinctively in pupils having low, average and high degrees of vocabulary. To get this target, pupils with different degrees of vocabulary knowledge were chosen and integrated in this experiment.

Sample of the Study

Two sections of class one - section A and B (intact classrooms) will be assigned as an experimental group with 30 students and a control group also with 30 students. The experimental group will be taught through dialogic-based instructional program by the researcher herself, whereas the control group will be taught by the actual ESL teacher using the conventional way as being done in the school.

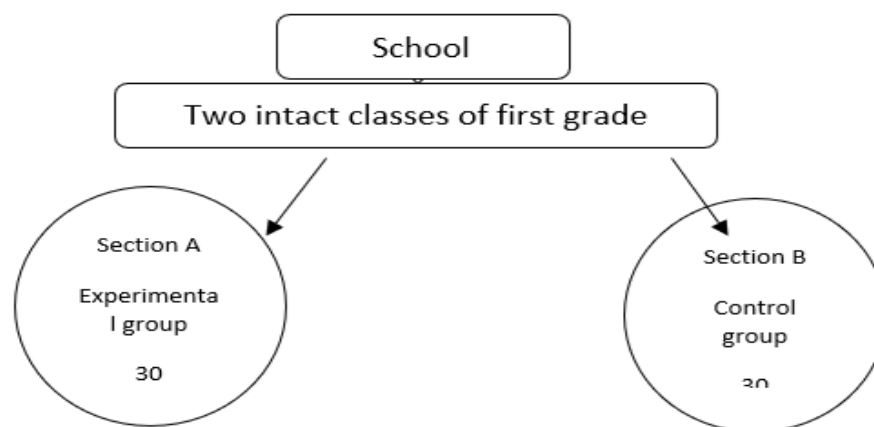


Figure 1.3: Sampling Design

Validation of Instrument

A pilot study will be conducted for ensuring the reliability of receptive vocabulary and expressive vocabulary tests (vocabulary knowledge and phonological awareness). Instrument will be validated from a panel of experts (two Ph.Ds. and two English teachers). Instrumentation

The data will be gathered by implementing the following tests:

a. Receptive Vocabulary

The researcher will say the word orally for each of the 20 items, and students will be asked to select from four options. Random selection of the items in the test will be done.

b. Receptive Vocabulary From Course Book

A test of Receptive Vocabulary from course book will be given to further explore the effect of the dialogic teaching on the words students learnt in the experimental phase. For every 16 items, the teacher will orally give a word, and participants will be asked to select the required picture from four given answers. The items in this assessment will be taken from their course book which they will be using in lessons of English in the experimental phase.

c. English Expressive Vocabulary

In this test students will be required to tell a word which shows the best option with the illustration from every 18 items that will be selected randomly from the 60 items.

d. English Expressive Vocabulary With Course Book Items

For good understanding, this test distributed to the students. The words in this test were consist of 16 items taken from the English textbook that the participants used in their English lessons during the experimental phase.

Results and Discussion

Table 2: Summary of ANCOVA: Post-test expressive Score as dependent, Experimental group as independent and Pre-test Expressive Score as covariate

Source	Type III SS	df	MS	F	Value
Pre-Expressive score	363.9	1	363.9	1.3	0.268
Group (Experiment, Control)	17024.7	1	17024.7	58.6	<.001
Error	16562.8	57	290.6		
Total	206400.	60			
R ² = .507 (Adjusted R Squared = .490)					



Table 2 presents the results of an ANCOVA technique examining the posttest expressive scores, with the experimental group as the independent variable and the pre-test expressive score as a covariate. The analysis indicates that the pre-test expressive score, with a Type III Sum of Squares (SS) of 363.9 and a Mean Square (MS) of 363.9, results in an F-value of 1.3 and a p-value of 0.268, suggesting it does not significantly influence the post-test scores. However, the group factor (experimental vs. control) shows a significant effect, with a Type III SS of 17024.7, an MS of 17024.7, an F-value of 58.6, and a p-value of less than .001, demonstrating a substantial impact of the experimental group on the posttest expressive scores. The error term, with a Type III SS of 16562.8 and an MS of 290.6 across 57 degrees of freedom (df), contributes to the overall model. The total SS for the model is 206400, spanning 60 participants. The R-squared value of .507, with an adjusted R-squared of .490, indicates that approximately 49% of the variance in post-test expressive scores is explained by the experimental intervention, highlighting its effectiveness in enhancing expressive language abilities.

Table 3

Summary of ANCOVA: Post-test Receptive Score as dependent, Experimental group as independent and Pre-test Receptive Score as covariate for Boys

Sources	Type III SS	df	MS	F-ratio	p-value
Pre receptive score	260.5	1	260.5	0.746	0.395
Group (Experiment, Control)	6347.6	1	6347.6	18.169	<.001
Error	9432.8	27	349.4		
Total	129600.0	30			

a. $R^2 = .348$ (Adjusted R Squared = .325)

Table 3 presents the results of an ANCOVA analysis that looked at how an experimental treatment affected boys' post-test receptive scores, while taking their pre-test scores into account.

Interestingly, the pre-test scores did not significantly predict how well the boys performed after the intervention ($F(1, 27) = 0.746$, $p = 0.395$). This means that the boys' starting scores didn't have a noticeable effect on their final results. On the other hand, whether a boy was in the experimental or control group made a big difference. The group factor was highly significant ($F(1, 27) = 18.169$, $p < .001$), showing that the experimental treatment had a strong and meaningful impact on improving receptive scores. The analysis also showed that the model explains about **34.8%** of the variation in post-test scores ($R^2 = 0.348$). After adjusting for the number of predictors, the adjusted R^2 value is **0.325**, which still indicates a solid effect. The remaining variation (represented by the error term with a mean square of 349.4) reflects differences in scores that couldn't be explained by the treatment or pre-test scores. Overall, these results clearly demonstrate that the experimental intervention was effective in improving receptive language scores among boys, even though there wasn't a strong link between their pre-test and post-test scores.

Table 4: Comparison of mean scores and experimental and control group on Receptive scores for boys

Variables	Experimental group		Control Group		p-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Post-test Receptive Score	76.67	9.76	46.00	24.44	<.001
Pre-test Receptive Score	40.00	13.63	34.00	19.57	0.338



Table 4 presents a comparison of receptive language scores for boys in the experimental and control groups, measured before and after the intervention. Before the intervention, both groups started at similar levels. The experimental group had an average score of 40.00 (SD = 13.63), while the control group averaged 34.00 (SD = 19.57). The difference wasn't statistically significant ($p = 0.338$), indicating that both groups were relatively equal at the beginning. However, after the intervention, a clear difference emerged. Boys in the experimental group showed a much higher average score of 76.67 (SD = 9.76), compared to just 46.00 (SD = 24.44) in the control group. This difference was statistically significant, with a p -value of less than .001, suggesting that the experimental treatment had a strong and positive effect on their receptive language skills. In summary, these findings show that the intervention made a significant difference in improving receptive scores for boys, and that the improvement can be confidently attributed to the treatment rather than any initial group differences.

Figure 4.4: Bar chart showing the mean scores of the experimental and control groups for the pre-test and post-test in receptive scores of boys.

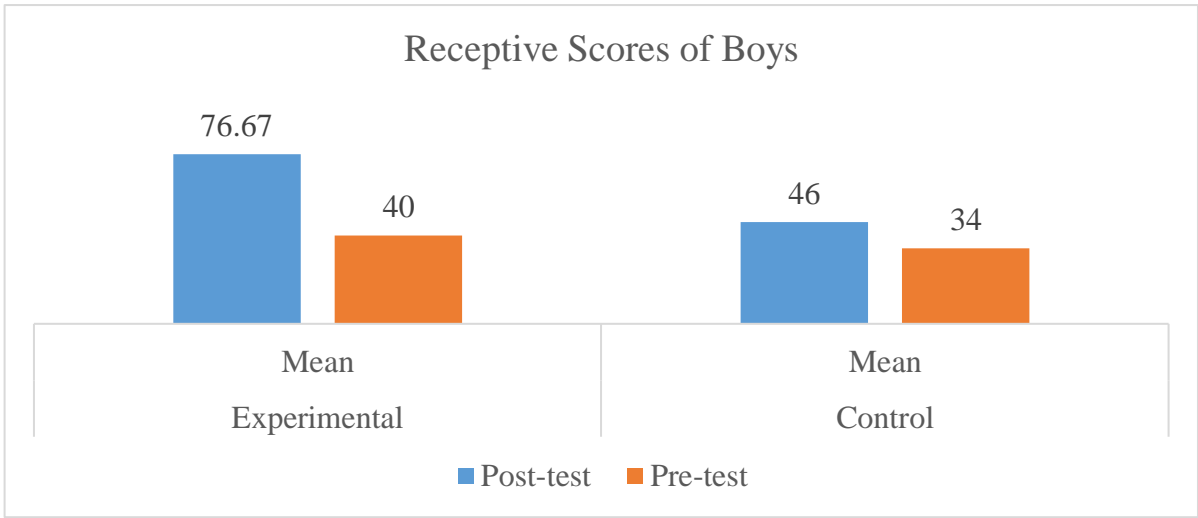


Table 5: Mean Receptive Scores Of Girls: Experimental Vs. Control Group Comparison

Variables	Experimental groups		Control Group		p-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Post-test Receptive Score	79.33	10.33	62.00	20.42	<.001
Pre-test Receptive Score	36.00	24.44	36.00	12.98	1.00

Table 4.11 shows a comparison of how girls in both the experimental and control groups performed on receptive language scores before and after the intervention. Before the intervention, both groups started at the exact same average score of 36.00, showing no difference at the baseline. While the standard deviations varied (24.44 for the experimental group and 12.98 for the control group), the p -value was 1.00, meaning there was no statistically significant difference between the groups at that point. However, after the intervention, the picture changed dramatically. The girls in the experimental group had a much higher average score of 79.33 (SD = 10.33), compared to 62.00 (SD = 20.42) for the control group. This difference was highly significant, with a p -value of less than .001. These results strongly suggest that the intervention had a meaningful and positive effect on the



receptive language scores for girls in the experimental group, confirming the success of the treatment and showing that any improvements weren't due to pre-existing differences between the groups.

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