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"Seri Cerita Empatiku": Dialogic Reading Method to Develop Empathy in 5-7 Years Old Children

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Abstract: "Seri Cerita Empatiku": Dialogic Reading Method to Develop Empathy in 5-7 Years Old Children. Objective: The prevalence of aggressive behaviors in early childhood children needs significant attention due to its potential negative impact on both the children themselves and those around them. Empathy, a crucial component of prosocial behavior, is an important factor that can be cultivated in early childhood to counteract aggressive tendencies. This study aims to foster empathy in children aged 5–7 years through the dialogic reading method. The intervention focuses on two primary aspects: enhancing children's ability to recognize emotional expression (e.g., happiness, sadness, anger, and fear) and promoting empathy by developing cognitive and affective empathy. **Methods:** The research was conducted with 15 children using the Empathy Scale for Children to measure emotional understanding and the Empathy Continuum Scoring System to measure empathy. The Empathy Scale for Children and the Empathy Continuum Scoring System were translated into Indonesian and adapted for children aged 5-7 years. The book reading intervention using the dialogic reading method was carried out for 3 sessions. In the book reading session, children were divided into small groups of 5-7 children. There were 2 story books read in this study, namely "Aku Tahu Perasaanku" to develop emotional understanding skills and "Aku Tahu Perasaan Temanku" to develop empathy. Statistical tests were carried out using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. **Findings:** Findings indicate that the intervention improves children's understanding of emotional understanding and empathetic responses in specific situations. **Conclusion:** A new empathy measurement scale tailored to diverse emotional understanding in children could be developed for future research. A more elaborate dialogic reading intervention is needed to improve its effectiveness.

Keywords: empathy, dialogic reading, early childhood.

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■ INTRODUCTION

Moral development is one aspect of development in early childhood. Moral development refers to a child's understanding of right and wrong (Borba, 2001). Children's daily interactions with their social surroundings reveal forms of behavior that represent their moral growth. Children with strong moral development can exhibit prosocial behavior in everyday situations (Eisenberg et al., 2007). Prosocial behavior can be identified by an individual's awareness of the needs of others (Hoffman, 2000). Prosocial behavior in early childhood might include caring for friends, assisting friends, collaborating, and sharing (Matondang, 2016).

The results indicates that the development of prosocial conduct in Indonesian children necessitates further attention. Data from the KPAI

(Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia) in 2019 indicated that 67% of elementary school students participated in bullying behavior (Maradewa, 2019). The occurrence of limited prosocial behavior is evident in elementary school pupils and can begin before preschool age. Hanifah and Rakimahwati (2021) stated that early childhood may exhibit aggressive behavior manifested through physical aggression, including striking, kicking, and pushing. Another manifestation of aggressive conduct is verbal violence, which may include insulting and teasing acquaintances. Eisenberg et al. (2015) stated that violent behavior in early childhood is associated with diminished levels of empathy. Zhou (2023) stated that empathy in early childhood can enhance prosocial behavior in children, contrasting with aggressive behavior. Consequently, the cultivation of empathy during early childhood requires consideration.

Empathy the is essence of moral development (Borba, 2001). Empathy is an emotional response that arises when an individual comprehends and experiences the emotional condition of another (Eisenberg et al., 1991; Hoffman, 2000). Individuals who empathize with others understand that the other person experiences an emotion independently of their own feelings. Empathy comprises two elements: cognitive and affective (Hoffman, 2000). Cognitive empathy refers to the ability to comprehend the perspectives and emotions of others, whereas affective empathy refers to the suitability of one's emotional responses in resonating with the emotions of others. Cognitive and affective empathy is associated with children's prosocial behavior towards peers and animals (Dadds et al., 2008).

The development of empathy in early life is shaped by biological characteristics, cultural influences, parental care, and the social and environmental contexts around the child, including interactions with teachers and peers (Eisenberg

et al., 2015). In this instance, children can acquire knowledge by watching prosocial behavior in their surroundings and by direct learning, such as daily interactions with parents and educators (Eisenberg et al., 2015). During the initial year of life, children acquire empathy via copying or by associations derived from their surrounding individuals (Santrock, 2010). Cole et al. (in Santrock, 2010) stated that the comprehension of emotions is a facet of children's social-emotional development. Comprehending emotions commences with the recognition of one's own emotions (Santrock, 2010). Children who comprehend their own emotions recognize that particular events elicit specific feelings, and certain facial expressions convey distinct emotions. This period commences when children are between 2 to 4 years old, during which they start to comprehend various emotions to articulate their feelings. Furthermore, at this stage, children begin to learn that their emotions yield unavoidable consequences (Denham et al., in Santrock, 2010). For instance, children will comprehend how their emotions might influence their actions. Upon achieving self-awareness, children will comprehend the emotions of others as they mature. Children have the capacity to mirror the emotions of others between the ages of 4 and 5.

Once children comprehend their own feelings, they must differentiate their emotional state from that of others to cultivate empathy (Feshbach, in Hoffman, 2000). At this stage, children are going to develop their cognitive empathy. Children develop cognitive empathy by situational cues, namely by associating the experiences of peers with their own emotions during similar occurrences (Eisenberg et al., 1991). Hoffman (2000) states that children acquire the emotions and viewpoints of others through two mechanisms: self-focused attribution (relating others' experiences to their own) and other-focused attribution (associating others'

experiences with the specific experiences of that person).

Another aspect of empathy, affective empathy, is automatic and innate. In early childhood, affective empathy develops earlier than cognitive empathy. However, developing cognitive empathy will encourage the development of affective empathy (Healey & Grossman, 2018). In the development of affective empathy, a person cannot only understand what another person feels from that person's point of view but can also feel what that person feels (Healey & Grossman, 2018).

Analysis of the need assessment results conducted by researchers at Kindergarten X on preschool-aged children found that there are several approaches that have been undertaken by teachers and parents to enhance children's empathy. The usual approach taken is to scold and remind the children, but this approach seems to be ineffective as many children still cannot empathize with their friends and teachers. The behavior exhibited by the children includes disturbing their friends, using foul language, hitting their friends, and not listening to their friends and teachers when someone is speaking in front of the class.

Through this observation, it was found that preschool-aged children are still in the pre-conventional stage of moral development according to Kohlberg. At this stage, children still perceive right and wrong behavior based on the punishment and reward given for that behavior (Santrock, 2010). Therefore, teaching empathy is not sufficient to be delivered in a one-way manner, but rather through two-way communication or can take place multidimensionally, namely through the child, adults, and the objects they are learning about (Abtahi, 2017; Houston, 2024).

Miranda and Marno (2024) state that child-centered learning has begun to be widely implemented since "Kurikulum Merdeka" was established as Indonesia's national curriculum. There are changes in learning, particularly in differentiated learning that focuses on the needs and interests of students. This curriculum is known to still have several challenges in the implementation of student-centered learning. One of the challenges in learning is the P5 activity or Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (Miranda & Marno, 2024).

Examples of P5 activities centered around this theme for preschool children in various Indonesian schools encompass peer-sharing initiatives, collaborative play and projects, as well as dance and fashion exhibitions that showcase Indonesia's cultural diversity (Ditaria, 2023; GPM School, 2024; PAUD Islam Bintang Juara, 2024; Sekolah Kristen Immanuel, 2024; TK Istiqamah, 2024; Yayasan BPK Penabur, 2024; Wahyudi, 2023). While certain activities are already categorized as social endeavors, there are not yet any programs aimed at fostering a fundamental comprehension of empathy, specifically in the realm of emotional understanding. According to Houston (2024), dialogues concerning emotions constitute a fundamental intervention that can be delivered from adults to enhance children's social and emotional competencies. Consequently, the social activities conducted should be enhanced through reciprocal dialogues between children and adults. This urgency necessitates the development of innovative student-centered learning activities aimed at fostering the foundations of emotional understanding and empathy in preschool children.

At present, various interventions have been established to enhance children's empathy in Indonesia, including those utilizing hand puppets (Abdullah et al., 2019; Salim et al., 2023), dialogic reading (Salsabila et al., 2021; Petrisia et al., 2017), dramatic play (Sari, 2021), and socio-drama (Rohmah et al., 2020). Each intervention possesses advantages and disadvantages. The intervention with hand

puppets incorporates tangible things, enhancing engagement for children; nevertheless, it is deficient in a discussion or dialogue framework that promotes the learning process. Intervention utilizing socio-drama and dramatic play is suitable for children aged 2-7 years, who are in the preoperational stage period. Piaget posits that children at this developmental stage exhibit symbolic thinking and are capable of participating in imaginative play (Santrock, 2010). The constraints of socio-drama and dramatic play methodologies lie in their demand for extended preparation time and the absence of a definitive discussion framework during execution. Dialogic reading is an intervention that integrates book reading with a two-way dialogue. This method's advantage is in its established conversation structure, which enhances the child's learning process, referred to as PEER and CROWD (Whitehurst et al., 1994). The benefits of dialogic reading in comparison to other methods explain its selection as an intervention to foster empathy.

Dialogic reading is an interactive approach to storybook reading in which parents or educators ask questions that promote active engagement from children during reading activities (Blom-Hoffman et al., 2006; Mol et al., 2008). Whitehurst et al. (1994) said that children take the role of tale readers in the dialogic reading approach, while parents or teachers serve as listeners. Parents or educators assist children in comprehending the narratives of the book (Gasser et al., 2022). Whitehurst et al. (1994) suggest that parents or educators can enhance children's comprehension by asking questions regarding the story being told.

The active participation of students in dialogic reading is an advantage over the passive book reading method, which limits storytelling to the teachers alone. Salsabila et al. (2021) stated that children can acquire moral values through reading story book. Children can show affective reactions when they show an empathetic understanding of the negative experiences felt by the characters in the storybook (Karnioi, 2012). Zhou (2023) said having a dialogue with children about the story's emotions is important in book reading activities. Having a dialogue about the emotions felt by the characters and why they feel those feelings can help children develop an emotional vocabulary and help them understand various emotions (Satya et al., 2012; Petricia et al., 2018; Zhou, 2023). Children can achieve the ability to understand emotions and empathy by imagining the perspective of the characters in the book and having a dialogue to connect the experiences and feelings of the characters with the experiences and feelings of the children (Gasser et al., 2022).

The recent study employed the same methodology for storybook reading as utilized by Satya et al. (2012) and Petrisia et al. (2018). This study investigates the dialogic reading strategy employed to enhance children's capacity to recognize emotions. Therefore, it is essential to cultivate children's cognitive and affective empathy through dialogic reading. This study introduces a dialogic reading strategy that enhances children's cognitive and affective empathy. The idea corresponds with Hoffman's (2000) notion of empathy evolution. The hypothesis posits that infants will start to cultivate cognitive and affective empathy skills once they comprehend the concept of emotion.

Moreover, the integration of cognitive and affective dimensions of empathy is important for the advancement of empathetic abilities (Hoffman, 2012; Simon & Nader-Grosbois, 2021). An individual can enhance their empathy by experiencing the emotions of others and comprehending the circumstances that elicit these feelings cognitively. Jolliffe and Farrington (2007) stated that both dimensions of empathy affect individuals' prosocial behavior. When both dimensions of empathy decrease, prosocial behavior is similarly reduced (Eggum et al., 2011;

Hoffman, 2012). Consequently, the cultivation of cognitive and affective empathy is necessary.

Cubillos and Gerias (2024) said that prior dialogic reading interventions demonstrate the significance of providing prompts that stimulate children's exploration of their knowledge. In dialogic reading, prompts are questions posed to students to enhance their comprehension of the story (Whitehurst et al., 1994). Research by Cubillos and Gerias (2024) indicates that open-ended prompts are the most helpful for enhancing children's comprehension of the reading material.

Cognitive and emotional empathy develop in early childhood between the ages of 3 and 6 (Simon & Nader-Grosbois, 2023). Piaget asserted that preschool children aged 2 to 7 years are in the preoperational stage of development, marked by egocentrism (Santrock, 2010). Children exhibiting egocentrism are unable to differentiate between the perspectives of others and their perspectives. Children in the preoperational age range can solve problems using the information they have obtained through the environment around them. In addition, the development of children's empathy can also be understood through the development of the Theory of Mind (ToM). Sai et al. (2021) said that ToM in early childhood only begins to develop when children reach the age of 5 years. At this age, children are just beginning to understand that other people have different points of view than themselves. In summary, the development of empathy in children should be nurtured in children 5 to 7 years old.

Based on the explanation before, this study combines the creation of a picture storybook called the "*Cerita Empatiku*" series with the dialogic reading method as a storytelling method. The dialogic reading method developed in this study was conducted by giving questions or prompts to 5-7-year-old children. The research question examined in this study is "Does the dialogic reading intervention 'Empathy Story Series' effectively develop the empathy skills of children aged 5-7 years?". This study aimed to develop 5-7 years old children ability to identify emotions and develop empathy.

■ METHOD

Participants

The sampling technique used in this study was convenience sampling. This technique will take samples according to availability and access so that researchers can easily reach them (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). The research participants are 15 children in Kindergarten X aged 5-7 years. The required number of participants was estimated with the G*Power application with the following specifications: family T-test, Wilcoxon signed rank test (one sample case), effect size = .95, á err prob = .05, power = .95. The selection of these participants is also based on the observation that many children at this age still have not shown empathetic behavior, and there is no empathy development program at the school. The characteristics of children aged 5-7 years were chosen based on considerations of the children's social, emotional, moral, and cognitive abilities, which have increasingly developed. In the age range of 5-7 years, children's cognitive and moral development has increasingly developed so they can better understand other people's points of view (Hoffman, 2000; Santrock, 2010; Sai et al., 2021). However, according to Piaget, children aged 5-7 years still have egocentrism, a characteristic of the preoperational development stage, so they still need help empathizing with those around them (Santrock, 2010).

Research Design and Procedures

The study used an experimental research design with children's empathy as the dependent variable and the dialogic reading method as an independent variable. This study used a within-

subject research design. The study conducted tests on the same participants several times at different times to see the difference in the average score of the dependent variable in each condition (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). Limited research time is one of the limitations of this study. One of the advantages of the within-subject research design is that this design can be conducted with a smaller number of participants (Richard et al., 2022). This design is also chosen because within-subject research can measure the estimation of treatment effects better than between-subject research design (Clifford et al., 2021).

The intervention has three sessions and is carried out in small groups of 5-7 children. There are two different storybooks in each meeting. The two-story books are arranged based on the stages of development of children's empathy, according to Borba (2001) and Hoffman (2000).

The book read in the first session was "*Aku Tahu Perasaanku*". This book contains stories about four basic emotions (happy, sad, angry, and fear) that characters feel in various situations. This first session aims to introduce children to 4 basic emotions and help them identify emotions in various situations. This session was given first to strengthen children's understanding of emotional understanding before they learn more complex aspects, such as empathy. The book read in the second session was "*Aku Tahu Perasaan Temanku*". This book tells the story of the characters who know and feel their friend's feelings. The second session aims to develop children's empathy by encouraging children's sensitivity to other people's perspectives and feelings and encouraging children to feel what others feel. In general, the intervention sessions can be seen in Table 1 below

Table 1. Intervention sessions

Session	Activity	Aspects Developed and Measured
First	Pretest	Emotional understanding and empathy
Second	Reading the book "*Aku Tahu Perasaanku*" and posttest 1	Emotional understanding
Third	Reading the book "*Aku Tahu Perasaan Temanku*" and posttest 2	Emotional understanding and empathy

In conducting dialogic reading, there is a primary reading technique called PEER (Whitehurst et al., 1994). PEER consists of several techniques, such as Prompts, Evaluates, Expands, and Repeats. Prompts are questions that can encourage children to say something about the book's story. Evaluations are small comments or questions to evaluate the response or answer given by the child. Expands techniques are questions to develop information that the child has conveyed. Repeats are prompts given repeatedly to ensure that the child understands the knowledge provided. Throughout the story, the story reader will provide several prompts related to the child's experiences and feelings as well as the experiences and feelings of the characters in the book. Whitehurst et al. (1994) said there are five types of prompts in dialogic reading which is CROWD: completion, recall, open-ended, wh-, and distancing. Completion prompts are done by leaving one blank word at the end of the sentence. The child should answer what word can complete the sentence. Recall prompts are done by asking questions about things or events in the book the child has read. Open-ended prompts are given by asking children open-ended questions about the book's story. Wh- prompts ask five types of questions (what,

where, when, who, and how) about the book's story. Distancing prompts are done by asking questions about how much the child's experience matches the story or pictures in the book.

Prompts trigger children to explore their knowledge and expand new knowledge about the story in the storybook. The provision of prompts is adjusted to the aspects developed and measured in each session. In this intervention, the example of the prompts given to children during the book reading session can be seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Example of used prompts

Prompts	Examples
Completion prompts	• "This is the character from earlier. Her name is…… (Caca)" • "That is right! Caca is crying. It means Caca is feeling…. (Sad)"
Recall prompts	• "From the story we have read, what feelings did Caca and Nino feel?" • "Why did Nino feel sad?"
Open-ended prompts	• "What pictures do you see on this page?" • "So you feel angry when your friends tease you. Why do you feel those feelings?"
Wh- prompts	• "What does thunder sound like?" • "According to you, What is the facial expression of an angry person?"
Distancing prompts	• "Have you ever listened to a vacation story from your friend? How did you feel when you heard your friend's story?" • "Have you ever been chased by a dog? How did you feel when a dog chased you?"

Although the prompts given by the story readers in this study consisted of 5 different types of prompts (completion, recall, open-ended, wh-, and distancing prompts), this study used more open-ended and distancing prompts compared to other prompts. This is related to the findings by Cubilos and Gerias (2024) which stated that open-ended and distancing prompts are the most effective prompts for developing children's knowledge about the book.

Instrument

The research instrument or measuring tool used in this study is the Empathy Scale for Children, developed by Köksal Akyol and Aslan (2014), to measure the ability to identify emotions and empathy. The study will also use the Empathy Continuum Scoring System developed by Stayer (in Strayer & Roberts, 1997) as a basis for recording empathy scores. The researcher modified the Empathy Continuum Scoring System instructions into Indonesian and adapted it for children aged 5-7. The Empathy Continuum Scoring System was tested on a sample of children in Indonesia who met the participant criteria. Five children were tested for readability, and the content validity test was conducted with expert judgment.

The Empathy Scale for Children measurement tool consists of 20 picture cards. There are eight cards with pictures of facial expression with four basic emotions (happiness, sadness, anger, and fear). Each of the emotion contained of 2 cards. There are also 12 cards with pictures of situations that can bring out certain emotions, such as happy (e.g., a child who celebrated her birthday party), sad (e.g., a child which his ice cream is falling to the ground), anger

(e.g., a child which her drawing teared by her friend), and fear (e.g., a child who almost fell from the bike). For this situation cards, each of the emotion contained of 4 cards. On the face picture cards, children are instructed to guess the name of the emotional expression on the card, while on the situation picture cards, the character's facial expression on the card has not been drawn. Children are instructed to guess the name of the emotion felt by the character. The assessment of the answers will use a score of 1 and 0, where the correct answer will be given a score of 1, and the wrong one will be given a score of 0.

The Empathy Continuum Scoring System consists of a scoring table to see how the child's cognitive and affective responses are attributed to the character's feelings in the storybook. Although this scoring table has two aspects of empathy, scoring will be done unidimensionally. The response will be measured in the form of a score where the more the child attributes the character's feelings according to what the character feels, the higher the cognitive and affective empathy scores the child will get. The scoring technique on this measuring instrument is carried out by asking the following questions: 1) What emotion does the character feel? 2) What emotion do you feel when you see this character/picture? 3) Why do you feel this way (referring to question number 2)?

The score range on the Empathy Continuum Scoring System that has been modified by researchers based on ages 5-7 years is 0 to 13. The score is determined based on the accuracy of the child's answer to the feelings felt by the character and the attribution given by the child regarding how they understands the feelings felt by the character. In this measuring instrument, the researcher compiled a scoring guide table that was accompanied by a description of the answers that the child might have. This scoring table has undergone a content validity assessment based on expert evaluation. 7 levels of attribution are

sorted from the smallest to the largest score, namely no attribution, irrelevant, attribution based on events or goods, attribution based on the character's external experience (which is visible), attribution formed from the child's association with their personal experience, attribution based on the character's internal experience (character's feelings), and attribution formed from role taking between the child and the character. Each attribution is divided into 2, namely based on the accuracy of the child's answer regarding the character's feelings. If the child can answer the feelings felt by the character correctly, then the child will get a higher score than if they answers incorrectly but answers similar feelings. One example of a similar feeling is when a child answers sad and not angry when seeing a picture of a situation where the character's toy is taken by their friend. The score table for the Empathy Continuum Scoring System is made in detail for each image on this measuring tool. This score table is made to maintain validity between raters so that they still have the same guidelines.

The validity test of the measuring instrument was conducted by analyzing the validity of the content. The Empathy Scale for Children and Empathy Continuum Scoring System used in this intervention have been reviewed by expert judgments. In addition, the readability test was also conducted by testing the measuring instrument and storybook used on several subjects with the same characteristics as the target participants. The reliability test of the Empathy Scale for Children measuring instrument was conducted using the Kuder-Richardson 20 analysis to test the emotional understanding items. Based on the reliability test results, this measuring instrument has a good reliability value (0.95). The reliability test of the Empathy Continuum Scoring System was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha to test the empathy items. Based on the reliability test results, this measuring instrument has a good reliability value (0.85).

Data Analysis

Data collection in this study was conducted in one room at Kindergarten X. Data collection was conducted 3 times, which is at the first session (pretest), at the end of the second session (posttest 1), and at the end of the third session (posttest 2). The data analysis used Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test statistical analysis. This statistical method evaluates the mean score prior to and following the intervention, which is appropriate for this study that used non-parametric data (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018).

■ **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The study was conducted on 15 child participants aged 5-7 years who attended the same school, Kindergarten X. 8 participants were boys (53.3%), and 7 participants were girls (45.7%). Most participants, with 10 children, were 6 years old (66.7%). Four participants were 5 years old (26.7%), and 1 participant was 7 years old (6.7%). Most of the fathers among the participants work as private employees, with 10 fathers (66.7%), and most of the mothers among the participants are housewives, with 8 mothers (53.3%). Most of the fathers and mothers of the participants completed their education at the D3/S1 level, with 11 fathers (73.3%) and 13 mothers (86.7%). The mean and SD distribution data from the measurement of emotional understanding and empathy aspects can be seen in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Distribution data on emotional understanding and empathy aspects

Aspects	Paired Sample	Mean	SD	N
Emotional Understanding	Pretest	12.9	2.00	15
	Posttest 1	14.7	1.23	15
	Posttest 2	12.6	2.97	15
Empathy	Pretest	54.5	23.5	15
	Posttest 2	59.5	29.5	15

Hypothesis testing with the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test is used to test data that is not normally distributed. If the value of W < 0.05, then h0 is rejected. If the value of W > 0.05, then h0 is accepted. Hypothesis testing for the emotional understanding aspect can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Hypothesis testing results of pretest, posttest 1, and posttest 2 on emotional understanding aspect
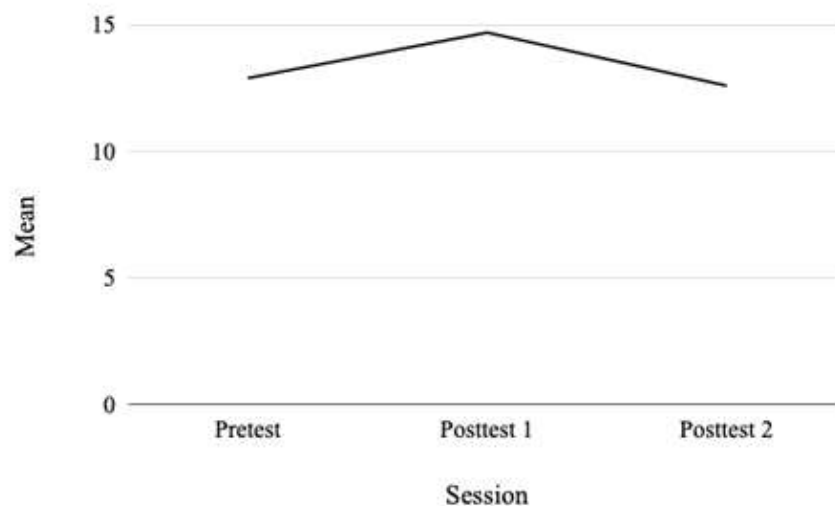
Paired Sample	Mean Difference	W	p	Effect Size
Pretest-Posttest 1	-2.500	0.011	0.011	-0.802
Pretest-Posttest 2	-0.500	0.721	0.721	-0.128
Posttest 1-Posttest 2	2.000	< 0.01	0.004	0.912

The table above shows a significant increase in the mean score in the pretest-posttest 1 and posttest 1-posttest 2 scores. There was a 14% increase in the score from pretest to posttest 1, but a 14% decrease occurred from posttest 1 to posttest 2. There was no significant increase in the mean score from pretest to posttest 2. A minimal decrease (2%) occurred from pretest to posttest 2. A significant effect size value was found in the pretest-posttest and posttest 1-posttest 2. Through this hypothesis test, it is also known that h0 was rejected in pretest-posttest 1 (p < 0.05), but h0 was accepted in pretest-posttest 2 (p > 0.05). The results of this hypothesis test indicate

that the intervention can improve children's understanding of emotional understanding. However, the effectiveness of the intervention cannot be maintained for a long time. A comparison of the results of the pretest, posttest 1, and posttest 2 can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Comparison of pretest, posttest 1, and posttest 2 on emotional understanding aspect

**Table 6.** Hypothesis testing results of pretest and posttest 2 on empathy aspect

Paired Sample	Mean Difference	W	p	Effect Size
Pretest-Posttest 2	-5.00	0.208	0.208	-0.407

Hypothesis testing was also conducted on the empathy aspect. The results of this hypothesis test can be seen in Table 6 below. The table above shows that there is no significant difference in mean scores on the cognitive and affective empathy aspects from the pretest to posttest 2 sessions. In this case, there is an increase in scores from pretest to posttest 2 of 9.36%. However, the increase in scores is not yet significant. This hypothesis test shows that h0 is accepted in pretest-posttest 2 (p > 0.05). The results of this test mean that the intervention carried out has not been proven to significantly increase children's cognitive and affective empathy. The small effect size value from pretest to posttest 1 strengthens the argument from the hypothesis test results. It is known that a small effect size value indicates a slight influence from the intervention carried out to increase children's cognitive and affective empathy. A comparison of the results of pretest and posttest 2 can be seen in Figure 2. Based on the data obtained, the researchers have also conducted a difference test on the variables of emotional understanding and empathy based on 4 demographic categories, namely age, gender, parental occupation, and parental education. The results of the difference test indicate that there are no significant differences among the four demographic categories (p > .05).

Based on the hypothesis test results, this study found that the dialogic reading method used improved the understanding of children aged 5-7 years about emotional understanding and empathy in certain situations. Qualitatively, there was an increase in empathy seen in children using the dialogic reading method.

The dialogic reading method can be an effective method to increase empathy in children aged 5-7 years by providing prompts that can encourage active participation in children (Novara
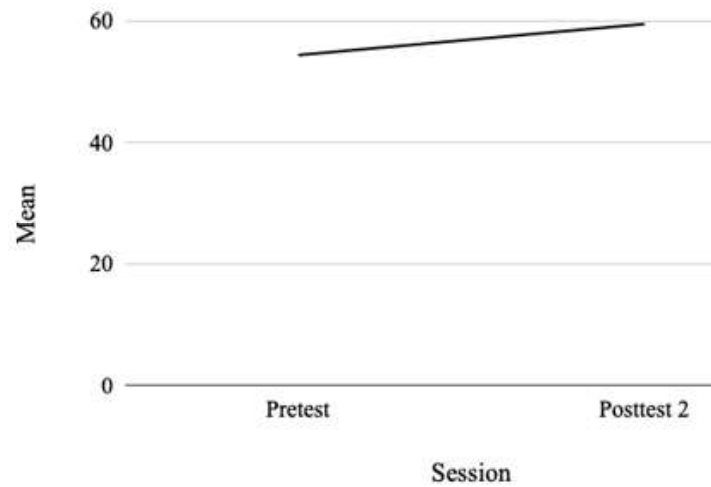
Figure 2. Comparison of pretest and posttest 2 on empathy aspect

& Widyasari, 2023). This active learning is driven by structured instructions delivered by parents or teachers. The prompts given are a form of scaffolding to encourage children's activeness. Through observations, the dialogic reading method encourages each child to express their opinion. In this method, each child can express their opinion. From the observation, children who tend to be quiet are encouraged to share stories like their other friends.

Prompts given during the dialogic reading method help children develop an understanding of the emotions they feel in various situations. The results of this study align with Hoffman's (2000) theory of empathy development, which states that children develop an understanding of the feelings and perspectives of others by linking the experiences felt by others to their own experiences. Prompts used in dialogic reading can encourage children to imagine the characters' perspectives in the book and link them to the child's experiences (Gasser et al., 2022).

In addition, some children could also say two names of emotions felt by the characters that happened simultaneously in one situation. It shows that some children can feel mixed emotions. Smith et al. (2015) said mixed emotions are the presence of two opposing emotions a person feels simultaneously in a particular situation (Smith et al., 2015). The ability to feel mixed emotions emerges when a child is 5-6 years old, although this ability will develop further when the child is older (Larsen et al., 2007).

The increased empathy scores can be explained through children's diverse perceptions and understanding of their emotions in a particular situation. Empathy scores measured using the Empathy Continuum Scoring System measure children's feelings towards characters but also measure children's attributions to situations that trigger emotions of happiness, sadness, anger, or fear. Through this study, it was found that although some children did not correctly answer the name of the emotion the character felt, they provided a more developed attribution in the second book reading session.

An example will be provided using one of the components of the Empathy Scale for Children. One item features an image of the main character with a toy being seized by a companion beside him. During the pretest session, a participant stated that, in his opinion, the individual depicted in the image showed anger. The child expressed that the character experienced anger due to his friend seizing his toy. Subsequently, in posttest session 2, the same participant provided a different response. The participant stated that the character experienced sadness. The

participant indicated that the figure experienced sadness, resembling the participant's own feelings of sadness when his toy was taken. The results indicate that in some children, despite a decline in emotional understanding scores, there was an increase in attribution scores on pretest 2. This aligns with the level of attribution stated by Strayer and Roberts (1997). It was stated that the higher the tendency of children to relate others' emotions to their own experiences, the higher their level of empathy.

The varied perspectives and understandings of children regarding the situations examined in the study are presumed to influence the effectiveness of the study. This study found that children have a broader comprehension of emotions. In situations depicting characters exhibiting anger, certain children interpreted the emotion as sadness. It also occurred in items depicting characters exhibiting fearness. In items with fearness emotions, some children perceived the emotion as sadness. It demonstrates that various children can interpret emotions differently under the same conditions.

The study also found that some children had never experienced some situations in the storybooks and measuring instruments. For example, some children said that they had never experienced their toys being taken by friends. Furthermore, two other children felt different emotions from what they should have felt. They said they did not feel sad when falling off the bicycle because they were used to it. The children's different experiences can influence the emotional responses of each child in the same situation. It is in line with what Santrock (2010) and Barrett et al. (2019) said, where a person's experiences influence their emotions.

An individual's perception of others being injured or feeling uncomfortable is influenced by the experiences that the individual has learned (Cheng et al., 2007). In this study, it can happen to children who perceive that falling off a bicycle

often happens to them and is not sad for them. Children also perceive that they do not need to cry if someone else falls off a bicycle. It can also happen if the response of people around the child becomes a reinforcement for the child not to cry. Decety and Holovet (2021) said that experience and social interactions can influence individuals' empathy. How parents respond to their children's emotions can be a reinforcement for children to continue to express emotions learned from their surroundings (Decety & Holovet, 2021).

The result of this study found that the attribution formed in children regarding empathy will develop following the experiences they first feel before they can attribute those experiences to others. This is in accordance with what Hoffman (2000) stated, where it is said that children's attribution is formed based on their attribution with their own experiences (self-focused attribution) and with the experiences of others (other-focused attribution). Through this research, it is known that the subjective experiences felt by each child are an important basis for the varying empathetic responses of the children.

In this study, interventions were carried out in small groups of 5-7 children to minimize distractions. However, the inevitable distractions around the room used to conduct the study and differences in children's concentration were limitations of this study. Observations during the dialogic reading session revealed that ambient sound disturbances, however minimal, were nevertheless audible. In addition, children in a book reading session with a group of five can concentrate better than children in a group with seven other children.

Mundir et al. (2022) stated that efficient learning occurs when the surroundings and learning process are free of distractions. A distraction-free setting will facilitate children's concentration and enhance their comprehension of knowledge. Observations indicate that children

who have good concentration engage more actively in book reading sessions compared to those who struggle to concentrate. Children with the ability to concentrate are generally more engaged in responding to the given prompts.

The results of this study can be developed further. Through the intervention, it is known that children's various emotional responses to the same situation need to be facilitated. Reinforcing emotional knowledge and empathy in daily activities is also important to increase the effectiveness of new intervention. Another limitation of this study, such as the sound distractions and the number of participants, needs to be reviewed to support the effectiveness of new interventions that can be developed.

■ CONCLUSION

The study aims to improve empathy in children aged 5 to 7 years through dialogic reading. This study assessed variations in children's capacity to understand emotions and exhibit empathy. This study demonstrates that dialogic reading can significantly enhance children's comprehension of emotional subtleties in specific contexts and foster empathy. This research possesses multiple limitations. The efficacy of this study is affected by several factors, including the small number of participants, time restrictions, unavoidable problems in the research setting, and children's individual emotional experiences. The findings of this study will hopefully act as a foundation for future studies. Additional study can be conducted by creating measurement tools that explain variations in children's experiences which affect their emotional responses. Conducting activities to instill empathy values in the classroom has not been implemented in this study, so researchers and education practitioners are advised to carry out additional practical activities in class after the book reading session. This activity is expected to strengthen children's empathy and is recommended for daily activities in class.

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