Using dialogic reading and direct instruction of emotion words to increase emotion vocabulary knowledge in the preschool classroom

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Abstract

Purpose – This research addresses a need in early childhood education for evidence-based teaching strategies that build emotional self-regulation skills in young children. The intervention assessed in this study focused on increasing the emotion vocabulary of preschool-aged students.

Design/methodology/approach – This mixed-methods, quasi-experimental study evaluated the impact a dialogic reading approach combined with direct instruction of emotion words during a shared book-reading activity had on students' emotion vocabulary knowledge. The study was conducted in a licensed daycare center in a suburb of Chicago, Illinois, with ten four- and five-year-old students. Pre- and post-session surveys assessed the intervention's impact on the students' receptive and expressive vocabulary knowledge, and observation notes captured the students' responses to the intervention activities.

Findings – The results showed significant increases with small to medium effect sizes between the students' pre- and post-session survey scores for both receptive and expressive emotion vocabulary knowledge, a strong positive correlation between the level of student engagement during the intervention and their emotion vocabulary assessment scores, and the impact other variables had on the intervention's effectiveness.

Practical implications – This research provides information on a culturally adaptable and quickly learned teaching strategy that could be used to build emotional self-regulation skills in the early childhood classroom.

Originality/value – This research uniquely applies this intervention as a universal strategy with preschool-aged children.

Keywords Early childhood, Education, Preschool, Emotions, Social emotional learning, SEL, Self-regulation, Vocabulary, Picture book, Dialogic reading

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Emotional self-regulation is a critical skill to develop in the early childhood classroom for individual and classroom-level benefits. Children with better self-regulation skills have more social, emotional and academic success in kindergarten and beyond than children with less developed self-regulation skills (Robson *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, emotionally dysregulated students' behavioral challenges in the classroom are negatively related to teacher well-being, leading to burnout and turnover, whereas emotionally supportive classrooms foster a more positive classroom climate (Khalfaoui *et al.*, 2021; Kwon *et al.*, 2022).

Preschoolers need explicit instruction, modeling and scaffolded co-regulation assistance from educators to help them develop emotional self-regulation skills (Silkenbeumer *et al.*, 2018). However, social emotional learning (SEL) curriculum coverage in early childhood teacher preparation programs is lacking, and early childhood educators have little training or professional support in how to teach and model evidence-based strategies that build emotional self-regulation skills in preschool-aged students (Garner and Parker, 2018; Lesaux *et al.*, 2015).

To address this issue, this research aimed to test the effectiveness of a culturally responsive teaching strategy that targets one of the foundational skills of emotional self-regulation, identifying emotions (Jones and Kahn, 2017). If proven effective, the strategy could be presented in low- or no-cost professional development training, adapted to meet the cultural needs of a classroom and easily integrated into existing early childhood curriculum and classroom routines.

The intervention evaluated in this research combined a dialogic reading approach with the direct instruction of emotion vocabulary words during a whole class shared book-reading activity in a preschool classroom. This study evaluated the intervention's impact on the students' receptive and expressive vocabulary knowledge of emotion words presented and discussed during the intervention. This intervention has successfully increased emotion vocabulary in older children at risk of emotional and behavioral problems (Santiago-Poventud *et al.*, 2015). This current research study uniquely applies this intervention as a universal strategy in a preschool classroom setting.

Direct instruction of emotion vocabulary

An evidence-based strategy for developing emotional self-regulation in preschool-aged students is direct instruction of emotion vocabulary (Galinsky, 2020; Hoffmann *et al.*, 2020; Tominey *et al.*, 2017). Children with an expanded emotion vocabulary are more accurate in identifying and expressing their feelings and, therefore, more likely to select an effective emotional regulation strategy (Brackett *et al.*, 2013; Hoffmann *et al.*, 2020). Not only is identifying and labeling emotions a skill needed for explicit emotional self-regulation, but the cognitive activity of naming emotions can also help regulate the body's central nervous system's stress response (Torre and Lieberman, 2018). Toxic stress, which is frequent or prolonged activation of the body's stress management system, can cause many short- and long-term adverse effects on a child's physical and cognitive development (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2014). Studies have found that simply labeling emotions can help deactivate the body's stress response and can help the body with internal, subconscious emotional self-regulation (Torre and Lieberman, 2018).

Dialogic reading

Multiple early childhood organizations promote dialogic reading as a best practice for supporting language development in preschool-aged children (Christ and Wang, 2010; Folsom, 2017; Horst *et al.*, 2019). Dialogic reading is a child-centered approach to shared book reading that encourages engagement and discussion between the adult and child throughout the experience (Folsom, 2017). A traditional dialogic reading strategy involves repeated readings of the same picture book, presenting children with discussion prompts while the book is being read to them and expanding on their responses to build a deeper cognitive understanding of the story, characters and vocabulary in the book (Folsom, 2017). Dialogic reading has also been suggested as an approach educators can use to build social and emotional competencies with younger students (Deglan and Leung, 2021; Doyle and Bramwell, 2006). Engaging in discussion with children during a shared book-reading experience helps children make deep cognitive connections and provides a meaningful context for them to learn about emotions (Bassett *et al.*, 2020; Deitcher *et al.*, 2021).

Theoretical framework
This research aligns with the constructivist view of emotion development; emotions are learned and constructed through social and cultural experiences (Eisenberg and Morris, 2003). Scholars who align with this constructivist view hypothesize that language plays an essential role in children's cognitive construction of emotion concepts and that hearing emotion words gives children opportunities to connect emotional experiences and perceptions to their cognitive understanding of emotions (Hoemann and Xu, 2019).

This research is also based on emotional intelligence theory. Salovey and Mayer (1990) created an emotional intelligence model which divides emotional intelligence into four abilities: perceiving, using, understanding and managing emotions. These abilities are separate from personality traits and can be developed with age and experience (Mayer *et al.*, 1999; Salovey and Grewel, 2005). Multiple scholars point to perceiving emotions, or emotional knowledge, as the most basic and core aspect of emotional intelligence (Brackett *et al.*, 2013; Izard, 2001; Salovey and Grewel, 2005). Studies have shown that children with higher emotional intelligence have more positive social interactions, positive attitudes about school and learning, better attention and behavior regulation skills and higher academic outcomes (Denham *et al.*, 2015; Tominey *et al.*, 2017).

A dialogic reading approach aligns with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of development and his position that learning and development occur when a child's zone of proximal development is expanded with the help of adult scaffolding efforts (Garner and Parker, 2018; Vygotsky and Cole, 1978). When adults guide discussions, ask questions and provide feedback during shared book-reading activities, these language development scaffolding efforts help expand children's zone of proximal development. Children become active participants in a collaborative and meaningful context, and according to Vygotsky's theory, this activity enables them to reach a higher level of cognitive understanding, and language development occurs (Vygotsky and Cole, 1978; Zevenbergen and Whitehurst, 2003).

McClelland *et al.* (2017) state that embedding SEL interventions into daily classroom activities, like story time, is an effective strategy for a successful intervention effort. Researchers continue to stress that the most effective and sustainable SEL approaches consider social, emotional and academic learning as interdependent, and efforts should be made by educators to deliberately integrate academic content with social and emotional learning strategies (Jones and Bouffard, 2012; Jones and Kahn, 2017).

Research question
This research explored how conducting dialogic reading activities with direct instruction of emotion vocabulary would impact preschool students' emotion vocabulary knowledge. The intervention attempted to increase children's receptive and expressive vocabulary knowledge of emotion words. Receptive language development refers to how children nonverbally understand language, and expressive language development refers to how children verbally express language. Typically, children acquire receptive language before expressive language and have a more extensive receptive vocabulary than expressive (National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, 2022). This means that children may recognize and understand a word but may not be developmentally ready to express that word verbally in a meaningful context.

Methods and procedures
This research was conducted over four weeks in a preschool classroom of ten four- and five-year-old students in a private licensed daycare center in a suburb of Chicago, Illinois. During the intervention period, the researcher visited the classroom for 30-min visits twice per week.

During the visits, the researcher facilitated a whole class, shared book-reading activity. A different picture book was featured each week, and the book was read to the students twice, once during the first visit and again during the second visit. During both visits, a lesson plan for the shared book-reading activity was followed, which included dialogic reading prompts and direct instruction of target emotion vocabulary words.

Picture book selection

Four picture books with narratives that focused on the character's emotions were identified for this research. The picture books used in this study needed to meet the criteria for high-quality early childhood literature, as defined in higher education textbooks and similar studies, which included a simple plot, few printed words in relation to pictures, developmentally appropriate vocabulary, stories with familiar and interesting situations to young children, a limited number of main characters and culturally diverse characters (Edwards, 2010; Santiago-Poventud *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, picture books that featured human characters, rather than animals or other objects, were deliberately selected as research has shown that children are more positively impacted by the prosocial messages of books that feature human characters rather than animal characters (Larsen *et al.*, 2018). Also, books with highly metaphorical content were not considered because preschool-aged children are not cognitively mature enough to understand symbolic references to emotions (Carriedo *et al.*, 2016).

Target emotion word identification

Three target emotion words for direct instruction during dialogic reading were identified for each of the four picture books that would be read to the class each week during the four-week study, for 12 new emotion target words for the entire study. The content of each picture book was reviewed, and a list was created for each book that identified every emotion the character was depicted as feeling, either through the story's narrative or the book's illustrations. To ensure the developmental appropriateness of the target emotion words selected for this study, the list of emotion words identified from the books was compared to a list of emotion words identified through research that are known but spoken infrequently by preschool-aged children, meaning the children had receptive knowledge of the terms but less expressive abilities (Ogren and Sandhofer, 2021). This study's target emotion vocabulary words were identified using this comparison result. The target emotion words presented to the students in this study were *annoyed*, *frustrated*, *furious*, *surprised*, *nervous*, *worried*, *lonely*, *proud*, *overwhelmed*, *focused*, *excited* and *disappointed*.

Dialogic reading and direct emotion word instruction lesson planning

Lesson plans with discussion prompts for the dialogic book-reading activities were prepared using the CROWD (completion, recall, open-ended, "wh" and distancing questions) dialogic reading planning technique (Folsom, 2017; Simsek and Erdogan, 2015). The content of the discussion prompts focused on the children's understanding of and relating to the book's narrative, linking what was happening in the story to the illustrations, pointing out physical changes in characters as their emotions changed in the story and relating real-world scenarios to the scenarios presented in the picture book.

Age-appropriate definitions of each target emotion word were created based on emotion definitions in the *How We Feel* app, developed by the Yale Center of Emotional Intelligence (The How We Feel Project, Inc., 2023). The lesson plan included direct instruction prompts that introduced the target emotion word to the students, emphasized the phonetic pronunciation of the emotion word, provided the definition of the target emotion word and

included one or more CROWD prompts to promote further contextual discussion about the emotion word.

The lesson plan documented the book's page number when the prompt would be presented to the students. To help the researcher adhere to the dialogic prompts in the lesson plan, sticky notes with the discussion prompts written on them were placed on the appropriate pages in the picture books.

Data collection

To assess the impact of the intervention on the students' emotion vocabulary knowledge, this action research followed the recommendations of Hadley and Dickinson (2020) to evaluate both the receptive and expressive components of a child's vocabulary knowledge. Pre- and post-session receptive and expressive vocabulary assessment surveys were conducted to assess changes in the students' emotion vocabulary before and after the intervention. The emotion words presented in the surveys were a combination of three basic emotion words, identified in other research as emotion words commonly known and spoken by preschool-aged children, and the three target emotion words, defined in the dialogic reading lesson plans for that week (Ogren and Sandhofer, 2021). The basic emotion words were included to measure the validity of the receptive and expressive vocabulary assessment tools. The basic words used in the assessment tools were *happy*, *loved*, *sad*, *mad* and *scared*. The basic emotion vocabulary list is shorter than the target emotion vocabulary list because some basic emotion words were used in multiple assessments during the study.

Receptive vocabulary assessment

The students' receptive vocabulary knowledge of the emotion words was assessed by collecting data on their ability to nonverbally label illustrations from the picture book with the correct emotion word. The design of the receptive assessment survey followed the format of the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test*, which is an assessment commonly used to assess receptive language and emotion recognition in preschool-aged children (Chronaki *et al.*, 2015; Hadley and Dickinson, 2020; Leung, 2008; Wasik and Bond, 2001). Each week, before the first shared book-reading session, three randomly selected students were presented with six survey questions in a one-on-one setting with the researcher. Each question consisted of four pictures of the character from the picture book being read that week. The student was asked to nonverbally identify (point to) the picture where the character demonstrated the emotion vocabulary word being presented (i.e., "In which picture is [*insert the name of the character from the book*] feeling [*insert emotion word*]?"). After the second shared book-reading session, the survey was presented in the same format to the same students. No identifying data was collected for the students participating in the survey.

The receptive assessment data was scored using a binary scoring system. If the student's response matched the expected answer for each question, the survey response was marked as correct and scored with one point. If the student's response did not match the expected answer, the survey response was marked as incorrect, and no points were scored for that question.

Expressive vocabulary assessment

The students' expressive vocabulary knowledge of the emotion words was assessed by collecting data on their ability to use the target emotion word to verbally label a picture of the character from the picture book. The design of the expressive assessment survey followed the format of the *Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test*, which has been used to assess children's expressive language in similar research studies (Hadley and Dickinson, 2020;

Wasik and Bond, 2001). Like the receptive assessment survey process, each week, before the first shared book-reading session, three randomly selected students, in a one-on-one setting with the researcher, were presented with six survey questions. Each question featured one picture of the character from the picture book being read that week. The student was asked to verbally label how the character felt in each picture, and their response was recorded. After the second shared book-reading session, the survey was presented in the same format to the same students. No identifying data was collected for the students participating in the survey.

The expressive assessment data was scored using a six-point rubric based on the accuracy of the student's response. The rubric scoring criteria were: 5 points scored when the student used the exact target word to label the picture, 4 points scored when the student attempted to label the picture with the exact target word with a mispronunciation, 3 points scored when the student labeled the picture with a related emotion word, 2 points scored when the student labeled the picture with an unrelated emotion word, 1 point scored when the student labeled the picture with a non-emotion word and 0 points scored when the student said "I don't know" or did not respond.

Intervention observation notes
The researcher also captured qualitative observation notes after the intervention. The observation notes captured the student responses to each dialogic reading prompt type: completion, recall, open-ended, wh- and distancing.

Data analysis & findings
This study assessed if the students demonstrated increased receptive and expressive vocabulary knowledge of the emotion words after the intervention. Quantitative data from the pre- and post-session receptive and expressive survey results were compared using a one-tailed, paired sample, equal variance, t-test analysis. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$, and the effect size was analyzed using a commonly used interpretation of Cohen's d (Lakens, 2013). Simple, linear regression testing was also conducted on the quantitative post-session assessments to identify any correlation between vocabulary knowledge and the length of exposure to the intervention.

A thematic analysis of the observation data was conducted to identify patterns and themes in the students' responses. Patterns in the quality of the students' responses were identified, and the observation notes were quantitatively coded using a four-point scoring rubric for the quality of the responses to the prompts. The rubric scoring criteria were: 3 points scored when one or more children responded with multi-word responses that were relevant and expanded on the original prompt, 2 points scored when one or more children responded with multi-word responses that were relevant to the prompt or provided a relevant one-word response, 1 point scored when one or more students responded with a one-word response or a vague/non-relevant response and 0 points scored when there was no response to the prompt.

This quantitative student response data was then used for statistical analysis to compare the quality of student responses between the different prompt types and identify correlations or other significant relationships. Finally, the coded observation data was analyzed with the post-session assessment quantitative data to identify any correlations between the level of the student's engagement during the intervention and the assessment survey results.

Receptive vocabulary assessment analysis
Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the pre- and post-session receptive vocabulary assessment scores. The difference between the students' pre- and post-session receptive survey scores for the basic emotion words was not significant, which was expected as these

were vocabulary words commonly known and spoken by preschool-aged students and were included to serve as a measure of the validity of the assessment tool (Ogren and Sandhofer, 2021). However, the increase between the students' pre-session receptive assessment scores [mean (M) = 0.8, standard deviation (SD) = 0.4] and post-session receptive assessment scores (M = 0.9, SD = 0.3) for the target emotion words was significant ($p < 0.05$, $p = 0.04$) with a small positive effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.32$). Simple linear regression testing indicated a significant and positive relationship between the post-session receptive vocabulary assessment scores and the length of exposure to the intervention ($p = 0.00$, $p < 0.05$, Pearson's $r = 0.17 \pm 0.25$), with a 0.17 score increase in post-session receptive vocabulary scores for every additional week of intervention.

Expressive vocabulary assessment analysis
Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for the pre- and post-session expressive vocabulary assessment scores. The increase between the students' pre-session expressive assessment scores (M = 3.6, SD = 1.9) and post-session expressive survey scores (M = 4.2, SD = 1.4) for the basic emotion words was significant ($p = 0.03$, $p < 0.05$) with a small positive effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.34$). The increase between the students' pre-session expressive assessment scores (M = 2.6, SD = 1.1) and post-session expressive survey scores (M = 3.4, SD = 1.5) for the target emotion words was also significant ($p = 0.00$, $p < 0.05$) with a medium positive effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.62$). Simple linear regression testing indicated a significant and positive relationship between the post-session expressive vocabulary assessment scores and the length of exposure to the intervention ($p = 0.00$, $p < 0.05$, Pearson's $r = 0.16 \pm 1.46$), with a 0.16 score increase for every additional week of intervention.

Intervention observation analysis
The descriptive statistics for the quantified data from the observation notes are in Table 3. After reviewing the descriptive statistics of the quantified data, an increase in the quality of

Week of study	N	Basic emotion word M (SD)		Target emotion word M (SD)	
		Pre-session	Post-session	Pre-session	Post-session
Week 1	6	0.8 (0.4)	1.0 (0.0)	0.8 (0.4)	1.0 (0.0)
Week 2	6	1.0 (0.0)	1.0 (0.0)	0.7 (0.5)	0.7 (0.5)
Week 3	9	1.0 (0.0)	1.0 (0.0)	0.8 (0.4)	1.0 (0.0)
Week 4	9	0.9 (0.3)	1.0 (0.0)	1.0 (0.0)	1.0 (0.0)
Average		*0.9 (0.3)*	*1.0 (0.0)*	*0.8 (0.4)*	*0.9 (0.3)*
Source(s): Table by author					

Table 1.
Descriptive statistics for the pre- and post-session receptive vocabulary assessments

Week of study	N	Basic emotion word M (SD)		Target emotion word M (SD)	
		Pre-session	Post-session	Pre-session	Post-session
Week 1	9	4.3 (1.0)	4.3 (1.0)	2.2 (1.3)	3.2 (1.5)
Week 2	6	2.7 (2.6)	4.1 (2.0)	2.0 (1.6)	2.3 (2.0)
Week 3	9	3.8 (1.6)	4.1 (1.1)	3.2 (0.7)	4.3 (1.0)
Week 4	9	3.3 (2.2)	4.0 (1.7)	2.8 (0.4)	3.3 (1.0)
Average		*3.6 (1.9)*	*4.2 (1.4)*	*2.6 (1.1)*	*3.4 (1.5)*
Source(s): Table by author					

Table 2.
Descriptive statistics for pre- and post-session expressive vocabulary assessments

student responses throughout the study was observed. To determine if that increase was significant, a regression test was conducted and a significant and strongly positive relationship between the quality of the student responses and length of exposure to the intervention was found ($p = 0.01$, $p < 0.05$, Pearson's $r = 0.88 \pm 0.15$), with a 0.88 unit increase in the quality of the student's responses to the dialogic reading prompts for every week of intervention. This result aligned with the regression analysis relationship between the post-session receptive and expressive survey scores and the length of exposure to the intervention. Further correlation analysis indicated that the quality of the students' responses and the scores on the post-session vocabulary assessments were significant and strongly positively correlated ($p = 0.01$, $p < 0.05$, Pearson's $r = 0.82 \pm 0.54$).

The descriptive statistics also identified outliers in the data. The distancing prompt type had the highest mean score in the quality of students' responses and the largest standard deviation. Week 4 of the study, also identified as an outlier, had the highest quality of students' responses and the highest standard deviation. Further analysis of Week 4 data identified that the distancing prompts used that week were also outliers in that they had a noticeably higher mean score of quality of student responses ($M = 3.0$). Further thematic analysis was conducted to identify possible variables that had impacted the quality of responses for the outliers.

The thematic analysis revealed that when the researcher presented a distancing prompt with a personal example, the quality of the student responses was higher than when the researcher presented a distancing prompt without a personal example. For example, when the researcher used this distancing prompt in the first reading session without a personal example, "Who could you talk to about a worry?" the students' responses were "No one" and "I never get worried." However, when the prompt was re-phrased in the second session to include a personal example, "When I worry, I talk to my husband, my mom, my friends . . . who do you talk to when you worry?" the students' responses were much more robust; "My brother," "My cousin," "My friends," and "Everyone in this class." A t-test analysis found the difference in the quality of the students' responses when the researcher used a personal example as part of a distancing-type prompt ($M = 3$, $SD = 0.0$) and when a personal example was not used in a distancing-type prompt ($M = 2.0$, $SD = 1.2$) was significant ($p = 0.00$, $p < 0.05$) with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.92$).

Additionally, to determine if the inclusion of the direct instruction prompts for the emotion vocabulary words was a significant variable in the effectiveness of the intervention, the count of direct instruction prompts presented to the students for each week of the study was identified and compared to the post-session vocabulary assessment scores using a simple linear regression test. Regression analysis indicated a significant ($p = 0.02$, $p < 0.05$) and moderately positive relationship between the number of direct instruction prompts presented to the students each week and the post-session vocabulary assessment scores (Pearson's $r = 0.37 \pm 1.41$) with a 0.37 score increase for every additional direct instruction prompt.

	Completion	Recall	Open-ended	Wh-	Distancing	Total (M)	Standard deviation
Week 1	6 (2.0)	3 (2.0)	10 (2.3)	5 (2.0)	8 (1.6)	32 (2.0)	0.2
Week 2	2 (2.0)	4 (1.5)	8 (1.9)	8 (2.0)	9 (2.0)	31 (1.9)	0.2
Week 3	2 (2.0)	1 (2.0)	7 (2.3)	6 (2.2)	3 (2.7)	19 (2.2)	0.3
Week 4	0 (n/a)	0 (n/a)	12 (2.1)	4 (2.3)	4 (3.0)	20 (2.4)	0.5
Total n (M)	10 (2.0)	8 (1.8)	37 (2.1)	23 (2.1)	24 (2.3)	102 (2.1)	
Standard Deviation	0.0	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.6		

Source(s): Table by author

Table 3.
Descriptive statistics of observation notes: Count (mean of quality of response)

Discussion

This research aimed to determine if a dialogic reading strategy combined with direct instruction of emotion vocabulary would increase preschool-aged students' emotion vocabulary knowledge. The results indicate that the intervention significantly and meaningfully increased the students' receptive (nonverbal) and expressive (verbal) vocabulary knowledge of the emotion words presented in the book-reading sessions. These results align with similar research conducted with kindergarten and first-grade students at risk for behavioral problems (Santiago-Poventud *et al.*, 2015).

The results also indicate that the students had greater receptive than expressive vocabulary knowledge of emotion words. Therefore, students may recognize and be able to nonverbally label an emotion word before verbalizing or using it in context, which aligns with typical language development (National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, 2022).

Regression testing identified that the more exposure the students had to the intervention, the more skilled they became at recognizing and labeling emotions and responding with higher levels of engagement to the discussion prompts presented during the book-reading session. The quality of the students' responses to the prompts was also strongly positively correlated to their ability to recognize and label emotions in the assessment surveys.

Further analysis identified a significant and strong positive relationship between the students' quality of responses to the dialogic reading prompts and distancing-style prompts with personal examples. Results also indicated a significant and moderately positive relationship between the student's vocabulary knowledge and the number of direct instruction prompts that were presented during the book-reading sessions.

Practical applications

This study has provided evidence that using a dialogic reading approach with direct instruction of emotion vocabulary during a whole class, shared book-reading activity was an effective strategy to increase the emotion vocabulary of the preschool-aged students who participated in the study.

Because this study found a positive correlation between students' engagement levels during the intervention and their vocabulary knowledge after the intervention, educators may want to identify ways to optimize student engagement when using this strategy. Using picture books with emotional themes or vocabulary relevant to student interests or classroom scenarios would be a way to maximize student engagement. Using materials that connect students to relevant and meaningful real-life scenarios is a well-recognized strategy for increasing student engagement, and one study found that more language development occurs when relevant and meaningful picture books are used for shared book-reading activities (Parsons and Taylor, 2011; Hammer and Sawyer, 2016).

This study also found that students became better at labeling emotions and more engaged during the book-reading sessions as the study progressed. Therefore, these findings support an approach that integrates this intervention into the classroom's ongoing routines and curriculum activities to increase students' emotion vocabulary throughout the entire school year rather than only using this strategy during an emotion-themed unit of study for a short period.

The findings also indicate that distancing prompts elicited the most engagement from the students, and adding personal examples to the distancing prompts presented to the students increased the level of engagement even more during the dialogic reading sessions. Results also suggest that using both the CROWD and direct instruction prompts rather than only using the CROWD dialogic reading prompts will improve emotion vocabulary in preschool-aged students.

Limitations

This study was conducted without a control group, with a small sample size of students, over a relatively short duration. There were also data collection limitations to the study due to student absences. If a student had participated in a pre-session survey but was absent on the day of the post-session survey, then that students' survey responses were removed from the data set. The custom-made vocabulary assessment tools may also have presented reliability and validity risks.

Future research

Future researchers may want to expand on the design of this quasi-experimental study to include a control group, a larger sample size, a longer duration and a teacher-led intervention. Investigating if this approach is practical for multiple language learners is also an opportunity to explore. Future researchers may look to investigate the impacts of extending this strategy to include play-based extension activities in addition to the book-reading sessions. This would expand on current research that suggests that dialogic reading efforts are more effective in early literacy development when accompanied by meaningful, experiential activities (Dickinson *et al.*, 2019; Wall *et al.*, 2022).

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