



Tell me a story: A United Arab Emirates Case of Engaging Pre-Service Teachers in Interactive Read-Alouds

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Abstract: Reading aloud is a valuable technique that teachers utilize to develop students' literacy skills, improve comprehension skills, expand imagination, and increase text engagement. This strategy also helps English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students to master key elements of successful reading in English, like prosody, vocabulary, and comprehension. This research examined Emirati pre-service teachers' experiences and perceptions of an interactive read-aloud activity, using post read-aloud guided reflections. Common themes emerged and were reported. Participants (n=20) had a positive experience with read-aloud lessons despite minor challenges. Additionally, they recognized the importance of using read-aloud in an EFL context to support learning. Recommendations are made about running a successful read-aloud activity while highlighting its value for pre-service teachers and their trainers. Finally, this paper offers a platform for future researchers in pre-service teaching in similar settings.

Keywords: Interactive Read-Aloud, Teacher Preparation Programs, Literacy Development, Pre-Service Teachers, Foreign Language Teaching, Children's Literature.

1. INTRODUCTION

Read-aloud activities are used to teach reading in elementary school as McCormick (1977) discovered that reading to children improved reading performance, interest and language acquisition. Thus, this strategy is essential to promote literacy skills in children for future reading success and development (Kalb & van Ours, 2014). Read-alouds help construct a community of readers and writers (Berkowitz, 2011), bringing positive effects academically and across the curriculum (Dreher, 2003). Read-aloud activities can be fun, engaging and can help the teacher inspire a love for reading, offering a powerful drive in creating lifelong readers and presenting instructional benefits (International Literacy Association, 2018). Students of any age benefit from and enjoy listening to an experienced reading of a book through read-aloud activities, and develop better listening, comprehension skills (Layne, 2015), and pronunciation (Ninsuwan, 2015).

Read-aloud lessons are a vital literacy practice for pre-service teachers to apply in classrooms (Slay & Morton, 2020), specifically for elementary level students (Heisey

& Kucan, 2010; Wiseman, 2011), yet there is limited evidence on pre-service teachers' perceptions and engagement of read-aloud activities (Slay & Morton, 2020). It is particularly scarce in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context.

This qualitative study explores the effectiveness of read-aloud activities on future early childhood teachers by describing their experiences and perceptions during an interactive read-aloud activity in English, in an Arabic context, such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In the past decade, the UAE progressed in the educational sector (Hopkyns, 2014). Meanwhile, the Emirati population underwent a cultural shift from one where parents narrate folk-tale stories to their children to a society that focuses on written texts (Carroll et al., 2017) and where the English language became the main language of communication (Hopkyns, 2017). Raising awareness about the importance of reading and its impact on society's commitment to books requires concerted efforts from multiple stakeholders including teacher preparation programs (Slay & Morton, 2020). Hence, the significance of this study relies on filling the gap in the read-aloud literature within an EFL context and informing the practice and curriculum designers about the challenges and



benefits of this strategy in teacher preparation programs. This paper documents the efforts to model best teaching practices for literacy for early childhood education undergraduate students. Additionally, through guided reflections, the study investigates the impact of such activity on pre-service teachers' understanding of the role of interactive read-aloud in their future classrooms. This study answers three main questions:

1. How do pre-service teachers describe their experiences with interactive read-aloud activities during teaching practice?
2. How do pre-service teachers perceive the use of interactive read-aloud lessons to develop language skills among EFL learners?
3. What do course instructors learn from this experience?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *English as a Foreign language in the UAE*

Globalization is a partner with the internationalization of the English language making it the undisputable tool to bring about the Western culture or mentality across all populated continents, including the Arab Gulf (Ahmed, 2011). The Arab World has a distinct relation with the English language especially due to the complicated history it has with English-speaking nations (Hopkyns, 2017). With imported education came a fast shift from using "Arabic-only" as a language of instruction in educational institutions to an "English-also" as a language of instruction, with the exception of Islamic studies and Arabic language (Gallagher & Buckingham, 2016). English and Arabic are being hybridized both in and out of the classroom (Hopkyns, 2017) and many scholars encourage and celebrate the blending of two completely separate languages (Van den Hoven & Carroll, 2016). Furthermore, Rubdy (2016), points out that instead of placing value on native-speaking teachers who are usually monolingual, it would be better to appreciate and encourage bilingual teachers since multilingualism is considered enriching and creative.

B. *Developing students' literacy skills through oral storytelling as a useful reading strategy*

Read-aloud activities, a term describing a technique of reading a text audibly to students for educational purposes, are commonly used to introduce literacy to elementary students (Barrentine, 1996). Furthermore, oral storytelling has traditionally played a major role in passing on cultural traditions, values, lessons, and shared emotions (Slay & Morton, 2020). Students 'enjoyment while reading is key

to ensuring success and motivation; thus, one of the targets of read-alouds is to promote enjoyment (Ledger & Merga, 2018). Interactive read-aloud activities and shared readings permit children to interconnect with the text they are listening to; interact verbally with the text, with classmates, and with their teacher (Sudiati., et al 2018).

During interactive read-aloud activities, teachers ask questions to develop the construction of meaning and students make spontaneous comments as the story unfolds. These interactions facilitate the students' abilities to respond and react to stories while giving meaning to the content (Cole et al., 2017; Wright, 2019). Teacher read-aloud can be used to inspire students to read (Corcoran & Mamalakis, 2009) and can assist with the interpretation of the text via different approaches (Hoffman, 2011). Furthermore, using teacher read-aloud activities supports the reinforcing role of modeling (Wright, 2019). Consequently, students become engaged in reading because of perceived rewards for their reading and writing skills (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001).

Moreover, with interactive read-aloud activities, teachers can directly scaffold learning for students and ensure that they have understood the topic. During the interactive read-aloud activities, the teacher engages the pupil, simplifies goals, and motivates the child to attain the learning objective (Cole et al., 2017). The teacher then withdraws gradually allowing students to take responsibility for their learning.

Although read-aloud activities may take various forms (reading aloud, interactive read-aloud, shared reading...), they all share a unified purpose towards the development of learners' literacy and reading skills (International Literacy Association, 2018). Bilingual learners can particularly benefit from using illustrated books to facilitate comprehension, and both language and vocabulary acquisition (Dillon et al., 2018). Furthermore, read-aloud is a proper tool for all grade levels and is metacognitive helping learners think and focus (Duncan, 2018) and increases students' engagement in subjects across the span of the curriculum (Layne, 2015).

C. *Interactive Read-aloud Activities in an EFL Context*

For very young children, oral language and phonemic awareness development can be reinforced by short stories and exchanges in post-reading/listening activities. Listening to stories and discussing them is fundamental in early childhood classrooms, which allows students to think about and work with individual sounds in a spoken language (EFL in this context) (McCormick, 1977). This is particularly significant in a dual-language context (Van den Hoven & Carroll, 2016; Dillon et al., 2018).



Students' active participation has positive impacts such as developing early literacy skills, especially when texts are carefully and suitably selected, and interactive instructions are planned (Lane & Wright, 2007; Slay & Morton, 2020). Read-aloud, in all its forms, is the most effective reading instruction and is directly correlated with the development of fundamental skills and knowledge required by children to become readers in a certain language (International Literacy Association, 2018). Interactive read-aloud activities are becoming an increasingly familiar instructional method, especially in EFL settings (Syafitri et al., 2019). They are beneficial to children because they expand children's vocabulary, increase listening comprehension abilities, and promote syntactic growth (Beck et al., 2013). Additionally, Huang (2010) identifies five benefits of read-aloud activities in any EFL language classroom: pronunciation practice, developing English verbal skills, acquiring greater understanding, increasing language knowledge, and energizing classroom experience. Read-aloud practices have to be age-appropriate taking into consideration the length of time to socialize, use the language in conversations, communicate and solve problems with peers in order for students to familiarize themselves with newly developing words (Loysen, 2010).

D. Theoretical Framework

This study is an exploratory and an interpretive one whose design draws on the linguistic transactional theory of Rosenbaltt (1978) who concluded that reading is a process, and there is an interplay between the reader and the text in a way that both are essential to creating meaning. Furthermore, Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (1978) promoted educational pedagogy through the lens of the zone of proximal development. He believed that development is a continuum; thus, a learner achieves two levels of performance in the boundaries of this learning zone: an independent achievement and an assisted achievement (Vygotsky, 1978). Consequently, and as a continuation to Vygotsky's theory, comes scaffolding which was an expansion by Berk and Winsler (1995), defined as adjusting the quality of support planned and offered to the learner according to his/ her independent mastery of targeted skills; i.e., encouraging child's autonomy.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. Design

This study examines the perceptions and views of pre-service teachers regarding their experiences with conducting an interactive read-aloud activity during their practical field experience training. Qualitative tools were

used to gain deep interpretations of their experiences and help the researchers analyze and compare the participants' views to illustrate the issue and develop patterns (Creswell, 2013). Data were collected anonymously through guided reflections in order to inform and provide an understanding of experiences after the completion of read-aloud lessons (Creswell, 2007).

B. Participants

Twenty Emirati students, aged between 20 and 22 years, whose native language is Arabic, at an all-female government-funded university in the UAE, participated in this study. They were enrolled in the Early Childhood Education Program in the College of Education. The study took place during their last semester of courses before the senior teaching internship. These students were purposefully selected because of the uniqueness of their individual experience to plan, prepare, and teach a read-aloud lesson to a group of school children from a partner school of the college. The secondary participants were two full-time faculty members who were course instructors and had taught this course for more than four semesters.

C. Setting

Children's Literature is a third-year level course, taken by students during their junior year. It offers an introduction to children's literature and looks for ways to develop pre-service teachers' world awareness and social responsiveness through reading and discussing how various societies express their virtues and convictions through children's literature. Pre-service teachers also deal with cultural topics and call on Arabic and English proficiency. As part of the course assessment, they need to implement an interactive read-aloud activity for a group of young children, which is a graded assessment worth 20% of the course grade. During the read-aloud, they are expected to use a variety of tones, accents, and delivery modes to motivate the listeners' enjoyment and attention to a story and they should use a range of strategies for teaching literature to children. The researcher was present at the read-aloud lesson to evaluate the students' performance and later on assess recordings.

All participants are native Arabic speakers whose second language is English. The course is taught in English with some minor fluctuations between Arabic and English. The teacher preparation program provides pre-service teachers with the chance to practice in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts which mirror the actual classrooms they will face post-graduation.



Data Collection

Ethical clearance was obtained from Zayed University, UAE, through the University Standing Committee for Research prior to the project, and then students were assigned to complete the read-aloud activity and post-activity reflections.

Data were collected through guided reflections completed anonymously by the participants after their read-aloud lessons. As such, the guided reflections could not be a component of the summative assessment and were not a compulsory activity. Students were given the choice to take part in the research or not without any impact on their grades. Participation in the current research was voluntary and this was clearly explained to the students at the onset of the project and reiterated prior to data collection.

The participants were asked to write guided reflections evaluating the read-aloud experience after submitting their lesson plans and conducting their read-aloud lessons. The guided reflections were developed based on international evidence related to the benefits of read-aloud activities for language development as noted by Beck al. (2013), Wiseman (2011), and Cole et al. (2017).

Student reflections gave the participants the chance to express their opinions and give suggestions about their read-aloud activity according to their perceptions of their experiences. In these reflections, participants were also asked to describe the benefits of this activity for children and for the development of their teaching skills. Moreover, they were asked to discuss their ideas relating to this experience and to a future iteration of the read-aloud assignment. Guided reflection prompts are available in Appendix A along with the lesson plan template.

Additionally, the course instructors provided reflective feedback on the read-aloud activity to inform their future teaching decisions.

Data Analysis

The guiding questions on 1) pre-service teachers' descriptions of their experiences with interactive read-aloud in their teaching practice, 2) their perceptions of using read-aloud to develop students' English language skills, and 3) what course instructors can learn from this experience, were used to organize the overarching themes emerging from the participants' reflections' analysis.

Data generated from the reflections were analyzed based on Langdridge's (2007) *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA). The importance of this qualitative research

approach is that it serves as a tool that enables the researchers to examine the subjective 'lived experiences of the participants, but an experience of something (Alase, 2017) and 'how people make sense of their major life experiences' (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). This technique includes a detailed investigation of the reflection narratives to identify and group topics and key concepts that transpire (Langdridge, 2007). Following this explorative and interpretive approach, the researcher read the narratives multiple times while adding explanation comments in the left-hand margin. On the right-hand margin, the researcher mentioned the emerging topics from the reflections. Then, the researcher organized the major statements into meaningful themes and removed overlapping and repetitive statements (Creswell, 2007). Examples of the themes are interactive read-aloud as a useful teaching strategy; benefits to students; interactive read-aloud as an interdisciplinary teaching approach; the importance of read-aloud for language development; choice of the right book. The themes and sub-themes were used for coding analysis.

4. RESULTS

Below is a summary of the findings in relation to the overarching themes that emerged in the study.

Reading aloud is a useful teaching strategy

Almost all participants (n=18) felt their read-aloud lesson went well and were positive about the experience. For example, Participant #12 explained, "My lesson was a lot of fun. I enjoyed the read-aloud and so did the students. I feel this was a beneficial lesson and not just a storytelling activity." Pre-service teachers described this strategy as a significant tool to engage their students and help them grasp concepts easier. Participant #14 stated, "A teacher can introduce a new concept through a story, and this would facilitate the learning process."

Even though some of the pre-service teachers were unfamiliar with this strategy and its benefits, others expressed that this type of instruction is an easy approach to implement in class frequently as Participant #6 stated, "It is easy to find a story aligned with the topic and because students, especially at primary level, learn better whenever they are taught using a story." It is a very helpful approach for novice teachers to use in their classroom because it helps them manage the classroom and students' behavior, and explain any topic, and it models learning for a foreign language by facilitating English learning. Participant #13 explained,

"I feel I can teach easier because the children will be engaged in the story and therefore will be calm and



express good behavior. This approach helps me teach any subject and specifically helps children learn English without thinking about it.”

Importance of read-aloud for language development

In terms of the development of English language, the pre-service teachers indicated that reading stories to the children in English offers wider exposure to the language outside its academic subjects. Participant #17 said, “During the lesson, I was able to model, explain and demonstrate to children how reading in the English language is accomplished.” Participant #19 added, “Reading to the students in English helped them to learn new words in the second language through the story. The learners didn’t realize they are learning English because they were interested in the story.”

Benefits to students

Interactive read-aloud activities are important in enhancing students’ critical thinking and creating an inquiry-based learning environment. Participant #7 added, “Whenever I paused to ask questions, everyone wanted to answer. All the hands were up. I could see students’ eagerness to answer the questions and ask new questions themselves.” It is an interdisciplinary approach that teachers use to connect subjects together and facilitate students’ learning. This approach is particularly effective whenever teachers want to introduce a new topic and/or teach complex topics specifically in science and math as Participant #1 explained,

“I can use a story to teach a science concept. Stories in the read-aloud can get students focused on math and science ideas.”

Choice of the right storybook

When asked about the factors that made the read-aloud successful, participants revealed that managing their time, preparing the activities, and choosing the right book are important factors. The majority of the participants indicated that they had an issue with time management and that they needed more time to finish than anticipated. That is why pre-service teachers highlighted the importance of preparing the activities in advance to ensure a successful read-aloud lesson and to support students’ language development. Having prepared additional extra activities for students who finished earlier would have helped pre-service teachers control the classroom. Participant # 9 stated, “What I do with the book before, during and after the reading is very important. Important like the story itself because it will help students to get engaged with the lesson and speak up their minds.”

Additionally, pre-service teachers struggled whenever they had to choose the right storybook for the lesson. Some participants described that it will be beneficial for students themselves to choose the book because they will remain engaged throughout the lesson. In their opinion, students will be more motivated by a book that has been adapted from a movie. Participants #3 and 18 indicated that,

“The book was the hardest part of the activity- This was difficult. Choosing the right book for the age and for the interest and for the curriculum. This was a challenge for me. I cannot make a mistake with my choice because it will ruin my lesson.”

“Every time I stopped to ask them a question, they just wanted to continue the story and they were so excited to know the ending.”

Having children follow along with their books showed an increase in joy and attention even in the early grades. Participant #4 explained,

“I tried with the book set from the library - we have a big book for me and many smaller ones for the kids. When I was reading, they were following along in their books. It looked like they were enjoying.”

Participant #19 contended, “I had their full attention, and it was lovely. I felt so proud when I saw the two students who were not interested at the beginning of the lesson becoming more engaged and attentive to my reading.”

The goal of interactive read-aloud activities is for teachers to model fluent reading and encourage dialogue to facilitate students’ understanding, elevate the level of student thinking, and scaffold student learning until they read on their own in the future. However, in this study, pre-service teachers struggled with maintaining the discourse among students fully in English. They revealed that students often preferred a storybook in Arabic and lost interest if the whole story was only in English. Therefore, pre-service teachers suggested using bilingual English/Arabic storybooks for the read-aloud activities. Participant #7 clarified, “I chose a dual-language book that is written in both English and Arabic to make sure that my students are engaged and quiet and following me during the lesson. It worked really well. They were very interested in the Arabic parts.”

Interactive read-aloud as an interdisciplinary teaching approach



The majority of the participants reported that the interactive read-aloud increased student motivation and interest in reading and facilitated the learning of any topic, including EFL. As Participant #20 said, "I can teach any topic through stories, like math and science and not only English or Arabic."

The interactive read-aloud permitted teachers to begin the lesson by asking questions about the cover of the book and waiting for students to think about ideas and present their responses. This instructional practice allowed teachers and students to have conversations about the text throughout the reading. The teacher provided opportunities for dialogue and discussion among students to help them experience how others make meaning from a text. This also helped students learn more about the reading process through ongoing interactions with the text, their peers, and the teacher. Participant #15 stated, "After thinking about the cover, I asked them to discuss with their partner what they think this story will be about. They found this to be a very exciting exercise because they wanted to know if they guessed correctly!"

Finally, Participant #10 explained, "I tried to frame the questions and talk in such a way that extends students' thinking but I needed to prepare these questions and the learning activities in advance."

While pre-service teachers were relatively able to support students with guessing word meanings, maintaining fluency, and summarizing the events in the story, they failed to support students to make inferences, synthesize, analyze, and critique. That is why pre-service teachers admitted that they needed to prepare activities in advance to consider students' needs and facilitate interaction with the text, the students, and the teacher. Furthermore, the choice of the book is a significant factor that would provide teachers with opportunities to support students' higher-order thinking skills. Participant #18 explained,

"I think I failed in preparing an activity that would have students answer the questions and make sure that they understood the text and the question. Whenever I asked them the question in English, students answered a very short answer in Arabic."

Participant #19 added, "I wished I prepared activities that target students thinking and help them infer and locate evidence in the text, or maybe questions that could encourage them to identify new information and express their opinions about the story."

Finally, participants agreed that the interactive read-aloud works better in small groups: it keeps the teacher in control

of the classroom, ensures that each student is engaged, facilitates inquiry-based instruction, and better targets linguistic skills. In small groups, teachers have the time to implement and manage activities that would encourage social interaction among students and have them verbally share their thoughts and understanding, and hear the views and perspectives of others. Thereby, students' confidence to communicate in English will increase. Participant #1 reflected,

"I think having a small group of students allowed me to connect with the children and encourage them to communicate and speak their minds. It gave me the chance to focus more on each one of them and to give as much attention as I could."

Participant #9 echoed, "I was happy that my group was small because I was able to model reading strategies and encourage all students to share with their friends and with me what they are thinking about."

As for the answers of the course instructor of the participants, they indicate that this study helped inform their teaching decisions positively. They expressed that the read-aloud activity helped pre-service teachers and their students to make sense of their learning environment through full engagement with the text. The activity aided the students in vocabulary, comprehension, and processing skills. Also, the learners were highly engaged throughout the read-aloud activity.

5. DISCUSSION

Pre-service teachers, students, and course instructors in this study were able to see the benefits of read-aloud, a powerful tool to support students literacy and language learning. It is thus essential to prepare and train pre-service teachers to implement read-aloud activities in their programs (Slay & Morton, 2020). Sadly, nowadays, interest in storytelling is dwindling, thus, educators should find new ways to preserve the tradition of storytelling in their classrooms. Furthermore, when inspecting Vygotsky's socio-cultural principles, we draw on the concept that language is a tool that people use to change something in their environment (Berk & Winsler, 1995). The use of read-aloud activities is an effective teaching strategy to start a class and introduce a lesson in any subject, and it is an integral part of classroom practice. In alignment with the literature, participants of this study valued the importance of this strategy to motivate students to read independently (Corcoran & Mamalakis, 2009; McCormick & McTigue, 2011). They expressed positive perceptions regarding their experiences with interactive read-aloud lessons particularly because this method helped introduce new topics, connect curriculum and subjects,



and enhance content instruction (Delacruz, 2013). Pre-service teachers in this study, similarly to their worldwide peers, stated that through this strategy they can model the characteristics of fluent, independent reading and develop students' literacy and reading skills (Wright, 2019). They also believed that it helped foster students' comprehension and promote independent thinking, by increasing students' engagement and motivation due to perceived improvement in reading and writing (Ivey & Broadus, 2001), inquiry skills, and critical thinking (Delacruz, 2013). Hence, participants happily reported how their students were intrigued by this approach exhibiting high interaction even among the most reluctant learners. This resonates with Vygotsky's perspective that views that children must be actively constructing their knowledge while using language as a tool in a social situation (Berk & Winsler, 1995).

However, this study showed that teachers can enhance the read-aloud activity by planning and preparing the lesson to ensure that it targets students' linguistic skills, models successful reading strategies, and encourages students to think critically about the content (Wiseman, 2011). This is especially crucial in field experience in foreign language settings (Cole, Dunston & Butler, 2017). Interactive read-aloud activities provide opportunities for EFL students to hear the rich language of stories they cannot yet read on their own (Routman, 2003). The pre-service teachers modeled various reading strategies to develop students' linguistic skills by expanding their vocabulary and grammar and correcting pronunciation. Also, they created activities and facilitated discussions to connect students with the story and increase their understanding and expand thinking skills and this links with the scholars that follow Vygotsky (1978) who view that learning happens within a reading aloud social setting accompanied with meaning and facilitated by language. As such, students were invited to retell the story and demonstrate their understanding and teachers elicited students' opinions about the story and the characters. However, the participants felt that the activities or questions they prepared did not encourage students to make inferences and synthesis of the information in the text. Doing so would have related the story to the students' context, made the learning concrete and relevant (Heisey & Kucan, 2010; Cole et al., 2017), and developed higher-order thinking skills (Layne, 2015).

Based on the pre-service teachers' reflections, conducting a successful read-aloud experience is related to a strategic selection of the text, preparation, and planning, and having a small group of students. Selecting a text that supports and extends learners' current reading abilities is a cornerstone for facilitating effective and engaging interactive read-aloud activities. It can also support students' abilities to think critically about content and to

attempt new reading strategies (Heisey & Kucan, 2010; Wiseman, 2011; Hojeij et al., 2019). When choosing a suitable book, teachers should keep in mind language level, interests, and the attractiveness and versatility of the actual book. Some questions to consider are: Will my students be able to follow along with the story? Will they find the story interesting? Do the illustrations and the text go hand-in-hand? How can I use this story to teach? Is this book fun and entertaining? It is important to understand the demands of the text and the opportunities it provides for learning (Dillon et al., 2018). Thus, pre-service teachers need to plan and prepare lessons and activities: plan facilitative questions to encourage students to verbally articulate their thinking and express their personal understandings and perspectives. They would be scaffolding learning similarly to Vygotsky's scaffolding continued principles where the teacher plans support for the learners according to their competence acquisition (Vygotsky, 1978). Doing so will enrich students' discussions while supporting and challenging the ideas of their peers (Wiseman, 2011) and this relates to Rosenblatt's transactional theory (Rosenblatt, 1988). This study showed that even with the few short activities that pre-service teachers prepared, students were engaged in the discussions and felt comfortable sharing their thoughts. Thus, the interactive read-aloud helped them overcome the obstacles they face when communicating in English.

In the context of this study that was conducted in the UAE where EFL has become a language of communication and a language of education, pre-service teachers highlighted the importance of having students select the book because they tend to select picture books and dual language books. However, this is controversial because it is necessary for teachers to strategically select a book that aligns with their lesson objectives and the skills they want to teach from the story (Lane & Wright, 2007). Using these books helped pre-service teachers facilitate their dual language learners' comprehension and support language and vocabulary acquisition (Dillon et al., 2018). This is supported by Deena Boraie's (2015) emphasis on using English and Arabic in EFL classes with the intent of enriching language classes using bilingual approaches, though still controversial. In the UAE, switching between English and Arabic as a language of instruction (translanguaging) in class is still considered taboo (Carroll & van den Hoven 2016). Translanguaging however offers many pedagogical advantages in future teacher preparation (Al-Bataineh & Gallagher, 2021). English and Arabic were both hybridized in the classroom setting and some pre-service teachers reported being able to deliver their objectives using both mediations (Hopkyns, 2017) Students' critical thinking is heavily influenced by the text selected for reading during the interactive read-aloud (Heisey & Kucan, 2010; Wiseman, 2011; Hojeij et al., 2019). Hence,



participants in this study felt that despite the advantages that the interactive read-aloud lessons hold, they did not reach the level of developing students' inquiry-based and critical thinking skills.

As for the challenges, pre-service teachers struggled with time management and the planning of activities. Thus, to successfully conduct an interactive read-aloud lesson, novice teachers should be trained across grades and content areas. Teacher preparation courses should train student-teachers on practical strategies and instructional design to appropriately engage in read-aloud activities (Nichols et al., 2007; Slay & Morton, 2020). Thus, it is important for the curriculum of pre-service training to include skills on how to choose a book, prepare useful activities, and relate English to all other subjects. Indeed, creating follow-up activities that include art, drama, writing, literacy, inquiry, and discussions helped teachers to extend the content, engaged them further with the text, and offered a chance to extend their learning and to respond to the text (McCormick & McTigue, 2011; Rosenblatt, 1978). Consequently, students were able to make meaning of the content and become more motivated and engaged in reading (Cole et al., 2017; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001).

Curriculum designers and course instructors should keep in mind the importance of higher-order thinking strategies being included when preparing such lessons. These interactive read-aloud lessons will provide great insights for the pre-service teachers as they transition into their own full-time teaching placements. As the researchers review the findings of this study, they re-iterate the importance of reading aloud to students and revisit the benefits of such an activity. Conducting this study has allowed the researcher to review how instructors should structure read-aloud learning based on what is learned from the pre-service teachers. It was concluded that more time for preparation is needed for the success of the activity. Perhaps even running a few read-aloud modeling sessions in a class prior to pre-service teachers conducting their own lessons would also be a possibility (Slay & Morton, 2020) which would increase confidence and aid in preparing activities to allow students to engage deeply with the text.

Overall, similar to Huang (2010), this study revealed that during the interactive read-aloud lesson, pre-service teachers succeeded in developing EFL students' confidence in English communication, increased their understanding of the text, and created an active and energized learning environment.

Limitations and Future Recommendations

The limitations of the study are sample size, data collection method, limited duration and the descriptive nature of the study. Triangulating the data by using several data collection methods would strengthen the findings (Creswell, 2013). Consequently, critical interrogation of the subject is not in-depth. The paper reads as a description of read-aloud, then a description of students' evaluations of read-aloud. Further avenues of research would also involve looking at teachers' perceptions of the read-aloud through various methods of data collection and not only reflections and grading rubrics.

6. CONCLUSION

Read-aloud activities promote children's love for books and learning and increase student motivation (Dillon et al., 2018). Read-aloud activities are powerful because they inspire, encourage, motivate, develop comprehension, and help student understanding. When planning a read-aloud lesson, many elements contribute to the success of interactive readings such as the selection of the text, preparation, and having a small group of students. Besides, additional specifics that must be considered in an EFL context include the selection of dual language books. Additionally, contextual findings of this study highlighted the benefits of having students choose the book for the success of the lesson which should be done with the teacher's guidance (Lane & Wright, 2007). Novice teachers should be supported and trained on how to appropriately engage students and effectively deliver interactive read-aloud lessons (Nichols et al., 2007).

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