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HARNESSING VERBAL ABILITY AND INTERACTION TO TRANSFORM CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE SKILLS IN ENGLISH READ-ALOUD ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of verbal ability and interaction on children's language skills during English read-aloud activities. Read-aloud sessions are widely recognized as a pivotal method to enhance children's cognitive and linguistic development. The research employed a structural equation modeling approach to analyze data from a purposive sample of 108 children aged 6 to 9 years participating in interactive English storytelling sessions. Key variables included verbal ability, interaction, and language skill development. Findings reveal that verbal ability has a significant influence on language skills, with a path coefficient of 0.400 ($p = 0.001$), underscoring its critical role in vocabulary acquisition and sentence construction. Interaction, though showing a moderate effect (0.185, $p = 0.068$), highlights the importance of collaborative learning and engagement in strengthening comprehension and contextual language use. Additionally, the response to read-aloud stories demonstrate a meaningful contribution (0.331, $p = 0.009$), emphasizing the role of narrative exposure in fostering linguistic competence. These findings provide actionable insights for educators and parents, suggesting that incorporating interactive elements and verbal practice into English read-aloud sessions can significantly boost children's language skills. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on effective language development strategies, emphasizing the importance of creating engaging and communicative learning environments.

Keywords: Elementary Education, Interaction, Language Skills, Read-Aloud, Verbal Ability.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menyelidiki pengaruh kemampuan verbal dan interaksi terhadap perkembangan bahasa anak selama aktivitas membaca nyaring dalam bahasa Inggris. Sesi membaca nyaring diakui secara luas sebagai metode penting dalam mendorong perkembangan kognitif dan linguistik anak. Dengan menggunakan teknik pemodelan persamaan struktural, penelitian ini menganalisis data menggunakan purposive sampling dari 108 anak berusia 6 hingga 9 tahun yang berpartisipasi dalam sesi bercerita interaktif dalam bahasa Inggris. Variabel utama yang dianalisis mencakup kemampuan verbal, interaksi, dan perkembangan keterampilan berbahasa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kemampuan verbal berperan penting dalam perolehan bahasa, dengan koefisien jalur sebesar 0,400 ($p = 0,001$), yang menegaskan signifikansinya dalam perluasan kosakata dan pembentukan kalimat. Meskipun interaksi menunjukkan efek sedang (0,185, $p = 0,068$), temuan ini menyoroti pentingnya pembelajaran kolaboratif dan keterlibatan aktif dalam meningkatkan pemahaman serta penggunaan bahasa dalam konteks. Selain itu, respons anak terhadap cerita yang dibacakan secara nyaring memberikan kontribusi yang berarti (0,331, $p = 0,009$), menunjukkan bahwa paparan terhadap narasi memiliki dampak besar terhadap kompetensi linguistik. Temuan ini memberikan implikasi praktis bagi pendidik dan orang tua, dengan menyarankan bahwa mengintegrasikan elemen interaktif dan latihan verbal dalam sesi membaca nyaring bahasa Inggris dapat secara signifikan meningkatkan keterampilan berbahasa anak. Studi ini menambah wawasan terhadap penelitian yang berkembang mengenai strategi efektif dalam pengembangan bahasa serta menekankan pentingnya menciptakan lingkungan pembelajaran yang dinamis dan komunikatif.



Kata kunci: Pendidikan Dasar, Interaksi, Keterampilan Berbahasa, Membaca Nyaring, Kemampuan Verbal.

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INTRODUCTION

Language development is a fundamental aspect of early childhood education, serving as a key indicator of cognitive and social growth (Snow et al., 2021). Among various methods to support children's language development, read-aloud sessions have gained significant attention due to their positive impact on children's linguistic skills, comprehension, and vocabulary acquisition (Hutton et al., 2015). These sessions not only enhance word recognition but also foster cognitive connections between spoken and written language, which are essential for literacy development (Kozdras et al., 2006; Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2019). One of the primary factors that influences language development in read-aloud activities is verbal ability. Verbal ability, which encompasses the child's ability to use language effectively in communication, plays a crucial role in vocabulary acquisition, sentence construction, and the overall development of expressive language skills (Håland et al., 2021; Lin, 2014). In early childhood, children's verbal ability is often linked to their exposure to language-rich environments and their ability to engage in meaningful communication (Clegg & Milligan, 2021; Grenfell & Harris, 2002). Thus, enhancing verbal ability through activities like read-aloud may lead to improved language proficiency.

In addition to verbal ability, interaction during read-aloud activities is crucial in fostering language development, as it actively engages children in the learning process. These interactions often include elements such as asking questions, making comments, responding to prompts, and discussing the story's content. Such interactive engagements create a dynamic environment where children can practice their language skills in a meaningful and contextually relevant manner. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory emphasizes that learning is not a solitary endeavor but is deeply rooted in social interaction and collaborative dialogue (Saarah, 2017; Shabani et al., 2010). Despite the widespread use of read-aloud sessions in educational settings, there remains a significant gap in research examining the combined influence of verbal ability and interaction on children's language development in these activities (Hadley et al., 2023). While many studies have highlighted the individual benefits of verbal ability or interactive engagement during storytelling, few have investigated how these elements synergistically contribute to language acquisition. This study aims to address this gap by examining the dual impact of verbal ability and interaction on various dimensions of children's linguistic development during English read-aloud sessions. Specifically, it will analyze how verbal ability, a child's capacity to express and comprehend language, interacts with the dynamic exchanges that occur in interactive reading environments, such as question-and-answer sessions, contextual discussions, and peer interactions.

The research focuses on critical areas of language development, including vocabulary acquisition, sentence construction, and overall language proficiency. Vocabulary acquisition will be assessed in terms of how well children learn and retain new words introduced during read-aloud activities. Sentence construction will be examined to understand how children develop the ability to form coherent and grammatically correct sentences, a skill influenced by their exposure to structured language use in stories. Lastly, the study assessed overall language proficiency to capture the broader linguistic outcomes of combining verbal ability and interaction, including improved fluency, comprehension, and expressive capabilities. By examining these components holistically, this study aims to provide valuable insights into optimizing read-aloud strategies for enhancing children's language skills, particularly in multilingual or second-language learning contexts.

Furthermore, the study's implications extend to teacher training and curriculum design, emphasizing the need for professional development programs that equip educators with practical techniques for conducting interactive English read-aloud sessions. These findings could guide the development of teaching frameworks that integrate structured storytelling with opportunities for dialogue, collaboration, and critical thinking. By applying these strategies, schools can strengthen their literacy programs, ensuring that English read-aloud activities are not just about reading to students but about actively engaging them in the process of language learning. Ultimately, this research aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice, offering actionable recommendations to maximize the potential of English read-aloud sessions in fostering children's language development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Children's Language Development at Elementary School Age

At primary school age, which encompasses children between the ages of 6 and 12, their language development enters a crucial and significant stage. At this age, children begin to master more complex and abstract language skills. Not only do they understand longer sentences, but they also begin to organize their thought in conversation better, connecting ideas to each other in a more logical and structured way. At this stage, children begin to be able to use more complex sentences, for example, compound sentences or sentences with more than one clause, which is an indication of the development of their syntactic skills (Alatalo et al., 2024)(Berk, 2013). Furthermore, children at this age experience a rapid improvement in their vocabulary understanding. They not only understand the basic words used in everyday life but also begin to learn words that are more technical or related to specific fields, both in school and daily life. Thus, their vocabulary becomes more prosperous and more diverse, which also supports their ability to communicate more accurately and effectively. Their speaking and listening skills also develop over time, enabling them to participate in more in-depth discussions, provide more relevant responses, and structure arguments or opinions in a more structured manner. Therefore, a better understanding of the language structure, along with improved speaking and listening skills, enables children to communicate more effectively and comprehend the world around them (Snow, 2010). This is

particularly important, as good language skills will provide a solid foundation for a child's academic development in other subjects and for the social skills they will need in everyday life.

2. Reading Stories in English

Read-aloud activities in English are one of the most effective ways to support children's language development, particularly during elementary school years. Through this activity, children not only listen to the stories read, but they can also understand the text more deeply. In the context of learning English, *read-aloud* provides many benefits, including introducing new vocabulary, improving listening skills, and strengthening understanding of language structures. One of the main advantages of *read-aloud* activities is that children can be exposed to a richer and more varied vocabulary than they encounter in everyday conversation. These new vocabulary words are often introduced in the context of stories, which helps children to understand the meaning of the words better. They also learn how the words are used in different sentences and situations. In addition, *read-aloud* also helps children become more familiar with correct pronunciation and appropriate intonation in English, which is for improving their speaking skills.

Read-aloud activities also provide opportunities for children to participate in social learning. During the reading session, children can discuss the content of the story, ask questions, and relate their personal experiences to the story being read. This enables them to connect new information to their existing knowledge, which is essential for the development of their language and cognitive skills. Overall, *read-aloud activities in English* are a handy tool in helping children develop their language skills. Not only does it serve to introduce new vocabulary and language structures, but it also provides an opportunity to interact, discuss, and analyze stories in depth. All of this provides a solid foundation for children to develop higher language skills and gain a better understanding of their world.

3. The Relationship Between Verbal Ability, Interaction, and Language Skills

Verbal ability and social interaction play a crucial role in the development of children's English skills, particularly during primary school age. Verbal ability includes the ability of children to understand, speak, and use language effectively in various situations (Clegg & Milligan, 2021; Grenfell & Harris, 2002). This includes mastery of vocabulary, the ability to compose correct sentences, and the skill of expressing opinions and ideas clearly. At the primary school age, verbal ability becomes a crucial foundation for learning English, as children are exposed to more complex language structures and begin to master various speaking and writing skills in the language. Research by Dündar-Coecke et al., (2020) shows that children who are frequently involved in verbal interactions with adults and peers have better language development, both in their mother tongue and in foreign languages such as English. This verbal interaction, in the context of English language learning, includes conversations, discussions, and the exchange of ideas in the target language used by the children. This interaction not only helps children develop their speaking and listening skills but also enriches their understanding of the structure and use of English.

In the activity of reading stories in English (read-aloud), verbal ability greatly determines how well children can follow the storyline, understand the characters, and draw conclusions from the stories read. Children with good verbal skills are easier to identify new vocabulary, understand more complex sentences, and discuss the content of the story clearly (Baker et al., 2020; Ridwan et al., 2023). This activity of reading English stories not only gives children the opportunity to enrich their vocabulary but also develops their ability to construct longer and more complex sentences, which is important in the development of speaking and writing skills. Additionally, social interaction during English story reading sessions plays a crucial role in enriching the child's language experience. While reading together, children not only listen to the reader or teacher but also participate in discussions about the story. They ask questions, provide comments, and connect stories to their personal experiences. In this context, children learn to use English in authentic and meaningful social situations. This process enables children to hone their language skills, enhance their speaking abilities, and help them to be more confident in using English.

In line with Vygotsky's theory of learning through social interaction, the activity of reading stories in English provides an opportunity for children to interact with peers or adults in an environment that supports their language development (Shabani et al., 2010; Tsunemoto et al., 2023). The discussions that take place during the story-reading session not only help children develop speaking skills but also improve their ability to listen and understand English. This activity also strengthens their understanding of the meaning and context of the words used in the story, while providing an opportunity to expand their English vocabulary. Thus, verbal ability and social interaction have a vital role in supporting the development of children's English skills. Good verbal skills allow children to understand and respond to stories in English more effectively, while social interaction enriches their language experience in a broader context (Dündar-Coecke et al., 2020; Mechanic, 1964). Reading English stories (read-aloud) is one of the effective ways to strengthen these two factors and support children's English development.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a quantitative approach with a correlational research design, utilizing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to analyze the data. PLS-SEM is a robust statistical technique suitable for complex models with multiple variables, allowing the researcher to test relationships between interaction, verbal ability, and responses to read-aloud stories on children's language skills. This approach was chosen due to its capability to handle small to medium sample sizes, address non-normal data distribution, and provide insights into the causal relationships between observed and latent variables (J. F. Hair et al., 2019). The correlational design in this study seeks to identify the extent to which these variables are interrelated and contribute to the language development of elementary school-aged children during shared reading sessions.

The use of PLS-SEM enables the researcher to examine not only the direct effects of verbal ability, interaction, and responses on language skills but also their indirect effects and interaction patterns. For instance, the technique allows for testing whether social interaction during read-aloud

sessions mediates the relationship between verbal ability and children's language skills. By applying this advanced analytical approach, the study can identify key pathways and highlight the strength of each relationship. This analytical rigor ensures the findings are both statistically reliable and practically relevant for educators. The results are expected to guide the development of targeted interventions that optimize the use of read-aloud activities in fostering English language acquisition among young learners, addressing the unique needs of elementary school students in diverse educational settings (Henseler et al., 2016; Sarstedt et al., 2019).

Sample

The sample for the study consisted of 108 children, chosen randomly from selected schools. The inclusion criteria for participants were children aged 6 to 12 years who had attended at least five shared reading sessions using similar story materials. This criterion ensured that all participants had adequate exposure to the shared reading sessions, allowing for a reliable assessment of the effects of verbal ability, interaction, and responses to stories on their language skills. By focusing on this age group, the study aims to explore how various factors influence language development during the crucial elementary years, contributing valuable insights into educational practices and strategies. This research adheres to the principles of research ethics, including obtaining consent from the child's parents or guardians prior to participation. The children participating in the study were provided with clear explanations of the activities to be carried out, and they were given the freedom to stop participating at any time without consequences. All data collected is kept confidential and used only for research purposes.

Table 1. Demography Profiles

Demographics	Details	Count	Total
Age	6 years old	5	108
	7 years old	18	
	8 years old	14	
	9 years old	16	
	10 years old	27	
	11 years old	21	
	12 years old	7	
Grade Levels	Grade 1	12	128
	Grade 2	24	
	Grade 3	19	
	Grade 4	20	
	Grade 5	21	
	Grade 6	32	
Gender	Male	8	105

Demographics	Details	Count	Total
	Female	97	

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the study participants, which includes age categories, grade levels, and genders. Based on age, the study participants ranged from 6 to 12 years old, with the majority aged 10 years (27 participants), followed by participants aged 11 years (21 participants) and 7 years old (18 participants). The total number of participants, categorized by age, was 108 participants. For the grade level, the distribution is relatively even, with the most significant number of participants coming from grade 6 (32 participants), followed by class 2 (24 people) and class 5 (21 participants). The total number of participants categorized by class level was 128 participants. Meanwhile, gender data showed significant inequality, where many participants were women (97 participants), while only 8 participants were male. The total number of participants by gender was 105 participants. Thus, the study sample was predominantly female and comprised participants aged 7 to 11 years, with most being at the 6th-grade level.

Research Instruments

This study employs an instrument designed to measure three primary variables, namely verbal ability, response to read-aloud stories, and interaction during read-aloud sessions. The instrument was compiled based on a literature review and discussion with experts in the field of early childhood education and language development and validated to ensure its relevance and reliability. To measure verbal ability, seven indicators are used, including fluency in speaking, vocabulary use, the ability to answer questions clearly, and the ability to form simple sentences. The assessment was conducted using a Likert scale of 1–5, where a value of 1 indicates low ability and a value of 5 indicates very high ability. This measurement aims to describe the extent to which children can understand and use spoken language, particularly in relation to new vocabulary introduced in the stories they read.

Children's responses to stories read are measured through five indicators, including the child's focus on the story, emotional reactions such as smiling or laughing, imitation of sounds or words, questions about the story, and the ability to retell. This assessment also uses a Likert scale of 1–5 to record the child's emotional and cognitive involvement during the reading session together. In addition, the aspect of children's interaction during the reading session was measured through five indicators, including children's responses to readers' questions, comments related to the book's content, interaction with peers, and collaboration in story discussions. All instruments have been tested for content validity by experts and tested on a small sample to ensure clarity and consistency. Data analysis was conducted using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique, which enabled researchers to examine complex relationships between latent variables. Thus, this study aims to provide comprehensive insights into the influence of interaction, verbal skills, and responses to stories in supporting the development of children's language skills.

Research Procedure

This research involves students from the Elementary School Teacher Education Study Program (PGSD) as data collectors, with the aim of directly engaging them in read-aloud activities with elementary school children in their neighborhoods. Before implementation, students received training from researchers on effective storytelling techniques. This training includes aspects of intonation, expression, and strategies to encourage child interaction during reading sessions. Students were also introduced to *the Let's Read* application as a source of stories to be used. They were taught to choose stories that were appropriate to the age and interests of elementary school children and how to use the stories as a language-learning medium.

After the training, students were asked to identify two to three elementary school children aged 6–12 years in their neighborhood as research subjects. The selected children are expected to be willing to participate voluntarily and meet the inclusion criteria, namely, having attended elementary school. Next, students conduct a *15-20 minutes read-aloud session* by reading stories from *the Let's Read application*. During the sessions, students encouraged the child's active participation by asking open-ended questions, motivating discussions, and recording the child's verbal responses and interactions with the story. The results of the observations were recorded in worksheets that included indicators of verbal ability, response to stories, and social interaction during the session. The data collected was then analyzed using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique to test the relationship between the variables studied. In addition to producing research data, this procedure also provides practical experience for PGSD students in supporting the literacy development of children in their surroundings.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the observation and measurement results during *the read-aloud* session were analyzed using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique. PLS-SEM was chosen for its ability to test direct relationships between variables, evaluate measurement models, and analyze structural models simultaneously, even with a relatively small sample number. This analysis enabled researchers to determine the impact of social interaction, verbal skills, and responses to stories on the language skills of elementary school children. In the first stage, the validity and reliability of the measurement model are evaluated by analyzing the indicators of each variable. The validity of convergence was checked through the value of *outer loading* (expected > 0.70) and *average variance extracted (AVE)* (expected > 0.50). Reliability is evaluated through Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values, both of which are expected to be > 0.70 . Furthermore, the structural model was tested to assess the relationship between variables using path analysis. The *original sample* value (O), sample mean (M), standard deviation (STDEV), T statistical value (*T Statistics*), and P value (*P-Values*) were used to determine the significance of the relationship between variables. The relationship is considered significant if the P value < 0.05 and the T value > 1.96 . The results of this analysis offer insight into the extent to which children's social interactions, verbal abilities, and responses to stories influence the development of their language skills. These findings also help identify effective

strategies for improving language skills through read-aloud activities, particularly in the context of English language learning among primary school children.

FINDING

Structural Model Evaluation

The results of structural model tests measure the relationship between variables in the model. The three relationships tested were the influence of **Interaction** on **Language Skills**, the influence of **Response to a Read-Aloud Story** on **Language Skills**, and the influence of **Verbal Ability** on **Language Skills**.

Table 1. Structural Model Testing

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	F Square	R Square
Interaction -> Language Skill	0.185	0.170	0.101	1.826	0.068	0.030	
Response to a Read- Aloud Story -> Language Skill	0.331	0.335	0.126	2.635	0.009	0.079	0.735
Verbal ability -> Language Skill	0.400	0.413	0.115	3.471	0.001	0.205	

Table 1 shows that the first relationship, namely **Interaction -> Language Skill**, has a path coefficient value of 0.185 with a T-statistic of 1.826 ($p = 0.068$), indicating a positive but insignificant influence at the 0.05 level. An F Square value of 0.030 indicates a small influence, and an R Square of 0.735 indicates that 73.5% of the variance of **Language Skill** can be explained by **Interaction**.

Furthermore, the relationship between **Response to a Read-Aloud Story -> Language Skill** had a path coefficient of 0.331 with T statistics of 2.635 ($p = 0.009$), which showed a significant influence between the two variables. Although the F Square for this relationship is 0.079, which indicates a small influence, this relationship makes an important contribution to **Language Skill**. Finally, the relationship between **Verbal Ability and Language Skill** showed a path coefficient of 0.400 with a T-statistic of 3.471 ($p = 0.001$), indicating a very significant and strong positive influence. An F Square of 0.205 indicates a moderate influence, and this relationship contributes significantly to **Language Skill**. Overall, the results of this test showed that **Verbal Ability** had the strongest and most significant influence on **Language Skill**, followed by **Response to a Read-Aloud Story**. In contrast, interaction showed a minor and less significant influence.

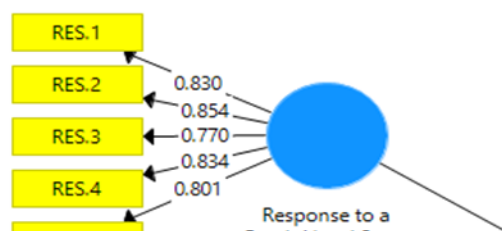


Diagram 1. Structural Model Evaluation

Measurement Model Results

This table presents the results of the analysis used to measure four main variables related to children's ability to respond and interact with the stories read, language skills.

Table 2. Measurement Model Results Table

Variable	Measure	Indicator	Outer Loading	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Response to a Read-Aloud Story	RES.1	The child focuses on the story.	0.830	0.876	0.910	0.670
	RES.2	The child reacts to the story (smiling, laughing, or other expressions).	0.854			
	RES.3	The child imitates sounds or words from the story.	0.770			
	RES.4	The child asks questions about the story.	0.834			
	RES.5	The child provides relevant comments.	0.801			
Language Skill	LANG.1	The child recognizes and understands new words.	0.804	0.904	0.929	0.724

	LANG.2	The child uses new words appropriately.	0.905				
	LANG.3	The child forms simple sentences using words from the story.	0.877				
	LANG.4	The child connects the story to personal experiences.	0.850				
	LANG.5	The child retells part or all of the story.	0.814				
Verbal Ability	VER.1	The child speaks clearly and is understood.	0.925				
	VER.2	The child expresses opinions about the story.	0.859				
	VER.3	The child uses a varied vocabulary.	0.848				
	VER.4	The child answers questions clearly.	0.843				
	VER.5	The child speaks fluently without frequent pauses.	0.820				
Interaction	INT.1	The child interacts with the reader.	0.860				
	INT.2	The child asks questions about the story.	0.757				
	INT.3	The child comments on the pictures or content of the book.	0.851				
	INT.4	The child responds to the reader's questions.	0.830				
	INT.5	The child collaborates with peers during the read-aloud session.	0.783				

Table 2 shows that the first variable is Response to a Read-Aloud Story, which includes five indicators: focus on the story (RES.1), reaction to the story (RES.2), mimic the sound or words of the story (RES.3), ask about the story (RES.4), and provide relevant comments (RES.5). The outer loading values for these indicators ranged from 0.770 to 0.854, indicating the significant contribution of each indicator to the variable, with RES.2 having the highest value (0.854). Cronbach's Alpha value for this variable is 0.876, which indicates good internal reliability, which means that the indicators are consistent in measuring the same variable. In addition, a Composite Reliability value of 0.910 indicates excellent composite reliability, and an AVE (Average Variance Extracted) of 0.670 indicates that 67% of the indicator's variance can be explained by this variable, which also reflects good convergent validity (> 0.5) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

The second variable, Language Skill, consists of five indicators: recognizing and understanding new words (LANG.1), using new words appropriately (LANG.2), forming simple sentences (LANG.3), connecting stories with personal experiences (LANG.4), and retelling part or all the

story (LANG.5). The outer loading values of these indicators ranged from 0.804 to 0.905, with LANG.2 having the highest value (0.905), which indicates that this indicator is powerful in representing the Language Skill variable. The Cronbach's Alpha value for this variable is 0.904, indicating excellent internal consistency, and the Composite Reliability of 0.929 indicates very high composite reliability. An AVE of 0.724 indicates that 72.4% of the indicator's variance can be explained by this variable, which reflects excellent convergent validity (Hair et al., 2010).

The third variable, Verbal Ability, focuses on children's verbal abilities with indicators such as speaking clearly and understandably (VER.1), expressing opinions about stories (VER.2), using varied vocabulary (VER.3), answering questions clearly (VER.4), and speaking fluently (VER.5). The outer loading values of the indicators ranged from 0.820 to 0.925, with VER.1 showing the highest value (0.925), indicating that this indicator is the strongest in describing the Verbal Ability variable. Cronbach's Alpha value for this variable is 0.911, indicating excellent internal reliability. Composite Reliability, which reaches 0.934, confirms extreme composite reliability. An AVE of 0.739 indicates that 73.9% of the indicator's variance can be explained by this variable, which indicates excellent convergence validity (Nunnally, 1978).

Finally, Interaction measures the extent to which children interact with readers and peers during a story reading session. Indicators for this variable include interaction with readers (INT.1), asking about stories (INT.2), commenting on images or book content (INT.3), responding to readers' questions (INT.4), and collaborating with peers (INT.5). The outer loading value for the indicators ranges from 0.757 to 0.860, with INT.1 having the highest value (0.860), which indicates that this indicator is very representative for the Interaction variable. Although INT.2 has the lowest outer loading value (0.757), this figure is still within the accepted limit (>0.7), indicating an adequate contribution. Cronbach's Alpha for this variable is 0.875, which indicates good internal reliability, and a Composite Reliability of 0.909 indicates excellent reliability. The AVE for this variable is 0.668, indicating that 66.8% of the variance in the indicator can be explained by this variable, with convergent validity that is also good (Hair et al., 2010). Overall, all the variables in this table show very adequate results in terms of reliability and validity. The high outer loading values for each indicator, along with Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and AVE values that meet or exceed the expected standards, indicate that this measurement model is reliable and valid for measuring a child's ability to respond, use language, speak, and interact during a story reading session. This model has met the validity and reliability criteria required for testing in educational research.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

Fornell-Larcker Criterion				
	Interaction	Language Skill	Response to a Read-Aloud Story	Verbal ability
Interaction	0.817			
Language Skill	0.775	0.851		
Response to a Read-Aloud Story	0.870	0.814	0.818	
Verbal ability	0.755	0.806	0.805	0.860

Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)				
	Interaction	Language Skill	Response to a Read-Aloud Story	Verbal ability
Interaction				
Language Skill	0.863			
Response to a Read-Aloud Story	0.991	0.912		
Verbal ability	0.840	0.886	0.900	

This table presents two types of discriminatory validity tests used to evaluate whether the variables in the model are different (discriminatory) or not, namely the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). These two methods are often used in the analysis of measurement models within the framework of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The Fornell-Larcker Criterion is one of the classic methods for assessing the validity of discrimination, which compares the AVE (Average Variance Extracted) root of each variable with the correlation between the variables. According to (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) To satisfy the validity of discrimination, the root of the AVE for each construct must be greater than the correlation between constructs. In this table, the central diagonal values show the AVE root of each variable: Interaction (0.817), Language Skill (0.851), Response to a Read-Aloud Story (0.818), and Verbal Ability (0.860). All these AVE root values are greater than the correlation between variables, such as the correlation between Interaction and Language Skill, which is 0.775, between Language Skill and Response to a Read-Aloud Story, which is 0.814, and between Verbal Ability and other variables. This shows that the variables in this model have sufficient discriminatory validity.

In addition, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) is a more sensitive test of the validity of discrimination, developed by (Wang et al., 2022). HTMT measures the relationships between different constructs (heterotraits) compared to relationships within the same construct (monotraits). An HTMT value lower than 0.90 indicates that the constructs are well separated, while a higher value indicates potential overlap between constructs. In this table, most of the variable pairs have an HTMT value lower than 0.90, such as between Interaction and Verbal Ability of 0.840, and between Language Skill and Verbal Ability of 0.886, indicating that there is no problem in the validity of discrimination between these variables. However, two pairs of variables showed a strong relationship, namely Interaction and Response to a Read-Aloud Story (with an HTMT value of 0.991) and Language Skill and Response to a Read-Aloud Story (with an HTMT value of 0.912). Both pairs are slightly higher than the 0.90 boundary, which could indicate an overly close relationship between these variables and needs further analysis. Nonetheless, overall, the results from the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and HTMT show that the variables in this model mostly have good discriminatory validity. However, the higher values on some pairs of variables, such as Interaction and Response to a Read-Aloud Story, as well as Language Skill and Response to a Read-Aloud Story, suggest that these variables may be more strongly interrelated than expected and warrant further study.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide an in-depth picture of the relationship between variables that affect the development of children's language skills during story reading sessions. These findings confirm the importance of various factors, such as the ability to respond to stories, verbal skills, and social interaction, in supporting Language Skills as the primary variable. The results showed that:

1. Verbal Ability

Verbal Ability was the most significant variable in influencing Language Skills, with a p-value of 0.001 and a pathway coefficient of 0.400, indicating a powerful relationship between children's speaking ability and the development of their language skills. This significant influence reinforces the finding that verbal ability is a major predictor of children's language skills. The path coefficient of 0.400 shows that the better the child's verbal ability, the greater the improvement in their language skills. This means that the development of children's language skills is greatly influenced by how effectively they express themselves verbally, both in speaking, understanding, and using language appropriately. In addition, an F Square value of 0.205 indicates a moderate but strong influence, indicating that Verbal Ability contributes significantly to improving Language Skills. This influence confirms that good verbal skills can facilitate the mastery of language structure, vocabulary, and children's ability to communicate effectively (Magno et al., 2024). For example, a child's ability to speak clearly, fluently, and variously is closely related to how they understand and use language in different social contexts. Children's speaking skills reflect not only mastery of vocabulary but also an understanding of more complex grammatical rules and linguistic conventions. With good speaking skills, children can string together the correct sentences and convey ideas more easily, which is an integral part of the overall development of language skills (Jeremic et al., 2009). Language development theory states that children's verbal expressions, such as speaking fluently and expressing feelings or thoughts effectively, reflect their understanding of language structure and appropriate ways of using language according to social and situational contexts (Snow et al., 2021). Therefore, strengthening verbal skills through various speaking exercises, discussions, or conversation-based activities is essential in supporting the development of children's language skills.

2. Interaction

Interaction had a positive influence on language skills, although this influence was not statistically significant ($p = 0.068$). With an F Square value of 0.030, the effect of interaction on language skills is relatively small. This suggests that although interaction during reading sessions plays a role in supporting the development of children's language skills, its effect is not as significant as that of other variables. One possible cause is the quality of interaction that may be more passive or less directed than direct verbal contributions from children. According to J. Hair & Alamer, (2022), directed verbal interaction can accelerate language development through dialogue that occurs during activities. It explains that the language input received by children, such as direct interaction, plays a key role in the formation of language skills. In addition, Shabani et al., (2010) note that Vygotsky's theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction in language learning, focusing on collaboration between children and educators to support cognitive and language development. Research by Magno et al., (2024), suggests that reading activities involving active interaction can strengthen children's language skills. However, the effect may vary depending on the quality and intensity of those interactions. Therefore, although interactions can

affect language skills, other factors such as the quality and type of interactions that occur during a reading session need to be considered to increase their effectiveness in supporting language development.

3. Response to a Read-Aloud Story

Response to a Read-Aloud Story to Language Skills can be seen from several important aspects. A path coefficient of 0.331 indicates a positive influence, meaning that the higher the children's response to the stories they read, the greater the improvement in language skills they show. A value of $p = 0.009$ indicates that this influence is significant at a 95% confidence level, which means there is a real association between active interaction during reading and the development of children's language skills, such as vocabulary and comprehension of sentence structure (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). This significant influence supports the theory that the experience of actively hearing a story not only involves understanding the story but also enriches the child's language skills. When children respond to stories, such as asking questions or making comments, they expand their vocabulary, understand the context and structure of sentences better, and practice using language directly (Karatsareas, 2022). This aligns with the view that active verbal interaction during story reading provides an opportunity for children to apply language contextually and enhance their language proficiency. Although an F Square value of 0.079 indicates a relatively small influence, it is important to note that although this influence is small, it remains statistically significant. This indicates that although the influence of Response to a Read-Aloud Story on Language Skills is not as significant as other variables, such as Verbal Ability, it still makes a contribution that cannot be ignored in supporting the development of children's language skills. Therefore, these results highlight the importance of providing children with a rich experience of verbal interaction during story-reading activities. By involving children in discussions about stories, asking questions, or even commenting, the development of their language skills can be substantially improved (Karhulahti & Backe, 2021). In addition, this small influence could also suggest that even when verbal interaction occurs, the context of reading or the way children interact with the story can affect the effectiveness of the experience in improving their language skills. It also suggests that other factors, such as interaction intensity, reading quality, and social influence from peers or companions, may also influence how many language skills a child gains during a reading session.

Overall, these results show that although all variables contribute to the development of Language Skills, Verbal Ability has the most significant influence. This shows the importance of integrating activities that support verbal expression in learning, such as group discussions or interactive storytelling. In addition, even if the influence of Interaction is not significant, it is still important to design activities that encourage more dynamic interaction during the reading session, as this can support the child's social skills. Discriminatory validity testing through the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and HTMT shows that most of the variables in this model have sufficient validity. However, the very close relationship between some variables, such as Response to a Read-Aloud Story and Language Skill, suggests the need for more attention to the possibility of

overlap between variables. Nonetheless, the structural model managed to account for 73.5% of the variance in Language Skill, reflecting its high predictive power in explaining children's language skills.

CONCLUSION

This study offers valuable insights into the factors that influence children's language skills within the context of English read-aloud activities. The main findings of the study indicate that Verbal Ability has the most significant impact on Language Skill, with a strong path coefficient (0.400) and a highly significant p-value ($p = 0.001$). A child's verbal ability, including clear, fluent, and varied speaking skills, proves to be a primary predictor of their language development, as verbal expression reflects their understanding of language structure and social context. Meanwhile, Interaction during the reading sessions has a positive influence on language skills, though its effect is small and not statistically significant ($p = 0.068$). This finding suggests that while interaction in read-aloud sessions has the potential to support language skills, more active and purposeful interactions are needed for a more substantial impact. Furthermore, Response to a Read-Aloud Story, which involves active participation from the child in responding or asking questions during the story being read, was found to have a significant impact on language skills, albeit with a small effect, according to the F-Square value (0.079). This indicates that the experience of listening and responding to the story significantly contributes to enriching children's vocabulary and language comprehension. Overall, this study confirms that a child's verbal ability and active engagement in interaction during reading activities are crucial for improving language skills, particularly in the context of English reading. Therefore, to maximize children's language potential, reading activities that involve conversational interaction, and verbal responses should be prioritized. These findings contribute significantly to the development of effective teaching practices, focusing on verbal interaction and reading activities that encourage active child participation.

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