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## THE BENEFITS OF READING ALOUD FOR CHILDREN: A REVIEW IN EFL CONTEXT

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Received: 25<sup>th</sup> February 2021; Revised: 24<sup>th</sup> May 2021; Accepted: 28<sup>th</sup> June 2021

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### ABSTRACT

Although reading aloud is an old teaching strategy, its relevance has been vouched by research from time to time. The present study aimed to critically review experts' opinions and results of previous research on the definition and characteristics of reading aloud and its benefits for young children in the EFL contexts by employing George's (2008) model of literature review. The review revealed that the teacher plays the most crucial role in reading aloud, acting as the bridge between the text and the student's comprehension. A good design of reading aloud demands the teacher's competence in choosing the text to meet the students' interest and level; planning the tempo of the reading and the pauses to pose questions and comments; and making connections with the text and the children. Reading aloud benefits children's English regarding their vocabulary, pronunciation, comprehension, listening skills, reading skills, speaking skills, communicative skills, and motivation, literacy, and critical thinking skills. These results imply that reading aloud is still relevant to be implemented nowadays because of the benefits it brings to children's English.

**Key Words:** English as Foreign Language, reading aloud, young learners, characteristics, benefits

### ABSTRAK

Meski sering dianggap metode lama, membaca nyaring memberi banyak manfaat. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk melakukan kajian kritis terhadap pendapat ahli dan penelitian terdahulu mengenai pengertian, ciri khas, serta manfaat membaca nyaring, dengan mengikuti model penelitian kajian pustaka George (2008). Diungkapkan bahwa guru menjadi penentu kesuksesan kegiatan membaca nyaring sebagai jembatan yang menghubungkan siswa dengan teks yang dibaca. Kegiatan membaca nyaring bergantung pada kemampuan guru untuk memilih teks yang sesuai dengan minat dan kemampuan siswa, serta merancang proses pembacaan terkait tempo dan penempatan jeda untuk memberi komentar, bertanya, maupun membuat kaitan-kaitan antara teks dan siswa. Ahli dan penelitian terdahulu berpendapat bahwa kegiatan membaca nyaring berkontribusi secara positif terhadap siswa terkait pembentukan kosakata, pelafalan, pemahaman, keterampilan mendengar, membaca, berbicara, dan berkomunikasi, serta motivasi, literasi, dan kemampuan berpikir kritis berkomunikasi mereka. Jadi, membaca nyaring sangat relevan diimplementasikan pada jaman sekarang karena kegiatan ini sangat positif untuk perkembangan Bahasa Inggris siswa.

**Kata Kunci:** Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing, membaca nyaring, anak usia dini, karakteristik, manfaat

**How to Cite:** Senawati, J., Suwastini, Ni Komang A., Jayantini, I Gusti A.S.R., Adnyani, Ni Luh P. S., Artini, Ni N. (2021). The Benefits of Reading Aloud for Children: A Review in EFL Context. *IJEE (Indonesian Journal of English Education)*, 8(1), 80-107. doi:10.15408/ijee.v8i1.19880

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## INTRODUCTION

Globalization encourages people to speak good English to perform meaningful and communication (Manik & Suwastini, 2020; Miqawati, 2020; Suwastini, Wiraningsih, & Adnyani, 2020a). As the language spoken by most people worldwide, it is often suggested that children should start learning English as a Foreign Language early. In Indonesia, some kindergartens have started introducing English to their students because it is believed that it will benefit the children for their later stages in English learning (Hanifah & Afidah, 2018). Teaching English to young learners is quite different from teaching English to older students. It mainly involves activities that require the students to voluntarily speak English or perform actions according to English instruction with the absence of coercion (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Cameron, 2003). Thus, teachers of young learners must design the instruction to involve activities that will make the children learn English subconsciously through songs, word games, role plays, paintings, cuttings, arranging pictures, or storytelling (Haycraft, 1978; Linse & Nunan, 2005). The students will easily reach the study's goal because the students are motivated to study, and the students will encourage themselves to become

actively involved in the learning process (Muhid, Amalia, Hilalayah, Budiana, & Wajdi, 2020).

Language skills are comprised of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills (Gebhard, 2017). Listening and reading belong to receptive skills, while speaking and writing are productive (Klimova, 2014; Siskin & Nunan, 1990). All these four skills need to be taught simultaneously (Nunan, 2015; Sadiku, 2015). Thus, reading activities can be taught as a beginning to understand words and texts (Fien, Santoro, Baker, Park, Chard, Williams, & Haria, 2011), which the students later use in their speech and writing while processing other oral inputs from their peers, their teacher, or other sources (Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill, & Pincas, 1980; Nunan, 2015). The reading process involves a complex process to understand the text by creating the meaning of the text (Broughton et al., 1980; Dzulfikri & Saukah, 2017), through which students can gain new experience and knowledge. For young learners, reading is the process of matching the sounds of the language and the written text (Nunan, 2015). A good foundation of reading skills can prepare the next step of the reading stage (Batini, Bartolucci, & Timpone, 2018; Korkmaz & Karatepe, 2018). The reading process introduces and consolidates the vocabulary and the

structure to encourage the students' passive vocabulary for the students' pleasure (Haycraft, 1978). Furthermore, reading materials also exemplify morality, character education, and feminist ideology (Hutapea & Suwastini, 2019; Suwastini, Lasmawan, Artini, & Mahayanti, 2020b; Suwastini, Utami, & Artini, 2020c; Utami, Suwastini, Artini, & Kultsum, 2020). Reading is one of the skills that can be integrated easily with any program in teaching English to young learners (Linse & Nunan, 2005)

Reading aloud can be the simplest way for young learners to deliver the reading experience between the students and the teacher to introduce literacy skills (Barrentine, 1996). Many studies have argued the benefits of reading aloud for English students, especially young learners (Burkins & Croft, 2010; Mantei & Kervin, 2018; Pentimonti & Justice, 2010; Tainio & Slotte, 2017). Besides, experts have argued the importance of reading aloud as foundations for children's later language development (Hahn, 2002; Jacobs, 2016; Tarim, 2015). Regarding the many positive arguments for reading aloud in the EFL context, the present study perceives it essential to provide a comprehensive summary of its definition, characteristics, a systematic procedure of its implementation, and a comprehensive

summary of its benefits. Thus, the present study critically reviews experts' opinions and previous studies to achieve these purposes. Such review will provide teachers and researchers in EFL contexts a comprehensive synthesis of the definition, characteristics, procedures, and benefits of reading aloud for young learners in EFL contexts.

## METHOD

### Research design

The present study was conducted as library research following George's model of library research that relies on the results of previous studies and experts' opinions for answering the present study's research questions (2008). The current study adopted the adjustment of George's model (2008) into a qualitative design made by Ariantini, Suwastini, Adnyani, Dantes, & Jayantini (2021). The following figure illustrates the research procedure of this study.

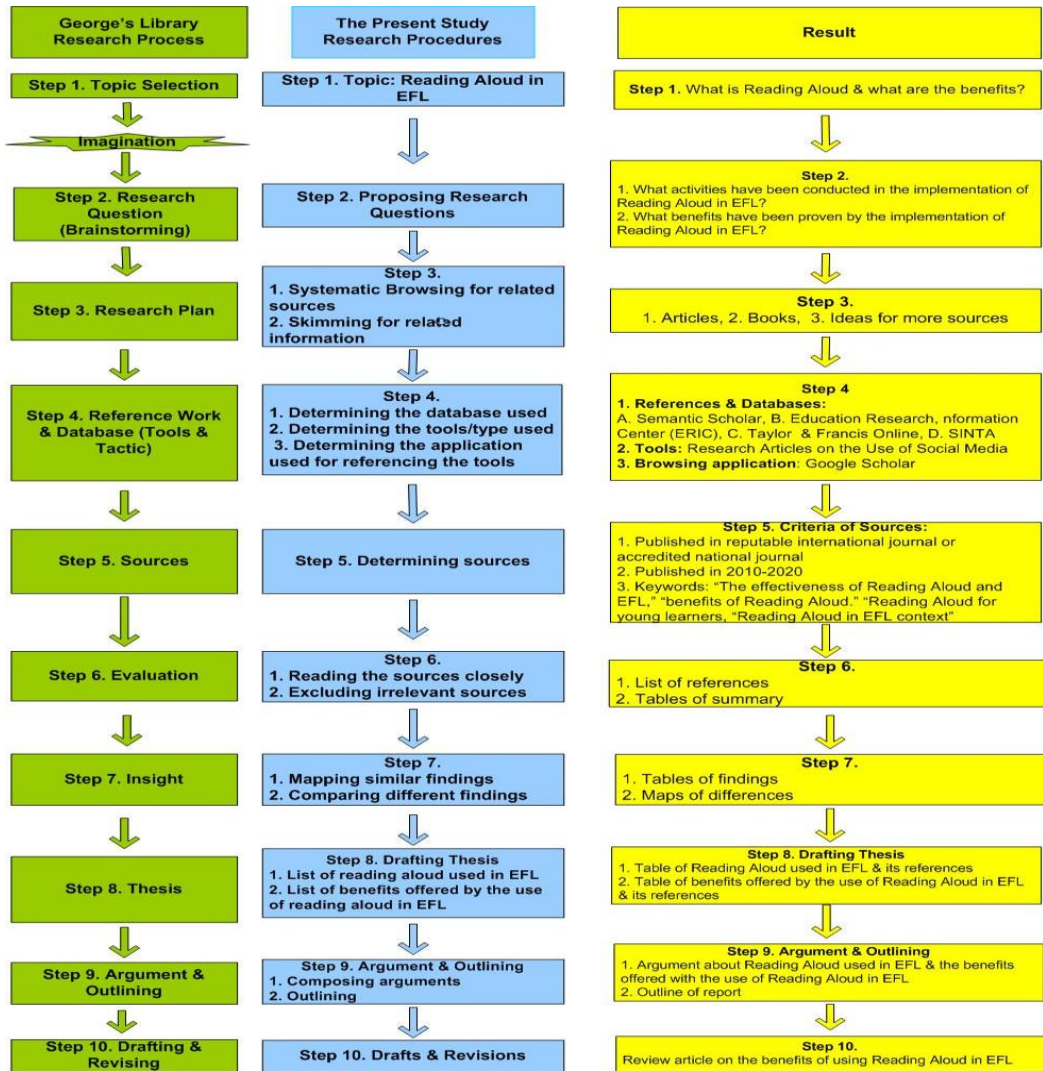


Figure 1. Library Research Procedure. (Source: George, 2008: pp. 66)

Figure 1. Research Procedure

### Research Site and Source of Data

The present study was conducted through online databases, such as Google Scholar, ERIC, Research Gate, and Library Genesis, as library research. From these databases, relevant sources such as a book, journal articles, and website articles were

retrieved. The keywords used to retrieve the books and articles were: the effectiveness of reading aloud, the benefits of reading aloud, reading aloud, reading aloud and listening, reading aloud for young learners, and reading aloud in EFL contexts. The arguments, research findings,

discussions, and recommendations from these sources were used as the source of data for answering the present study's research questions concerning the characteristics, procedures, and benefits of reading aloud for children in the EFL contexts. Because reading aloud is a very traditional method, the present study did not limit the publication of the sources, believing that this conventional method offers unique benefits for children. However, considering the importance of reviewing the relevance of reading aloud in the present contexts, the present study included articles published from 2015 to 2020. Five books and thirty-five articles were selected from these processes to be included in the inclusion/exclusion process that evaluates the relevance of the sources for answering the present study's research questions. After the inclusion/exclusion process, five books and twenty-two articles were established as the data sources for the present study, with thirteen of the articles published from 2015 to 2020.

### **Data Collection and Data Analysis**

The data collection was conducted by closely reading the five books and twenty-two articles. The first step was to record these twenty-seven sources into a table that maps the arguments, methods, findings, and

recommendations that they pose. The record was continued with tabulating detailed information from the data sources regarding their arguments on the definition and aspects of reading aloud, how to conduct reading aloud, as well as the benefits of implementing reading aloud for children in the EFL contexts.

The data analysis was conducted by making syntheses of similar arguments and drawing comparisons of different details. These syntheses and comparisons are used to draw insights that enabled the present study to draw its thesis on the use of reading aloud in the EFL contexts. After the thesis was drawn, the study was then continued with proposing arguments and outlining its thesis presentation into a comprehensible review research article aimed by this present article.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Reading Aloud: Definition, Aspects and Characteristics**

Reading aloud is the process of the students using their eyes, ears, and brain to take in a series of the story, listen to the narrator's voice, and make sense of what they see and hear (Gurdon, 2019; Trelease, 2013). Reading aloud is argued to be most beneficial for children because it acts as the basis for their foundation to build knowledge

and the source of emotional and intellectual nourishment (Gurdon, 2019). During reading aloud, the teacher plays a crucial role to facilitate the interactions between the text and the students (Huang, 2010; Marchessault & Larwin, 2014). The following figure illustrates the role of the teacher in a reading-aloud activity.

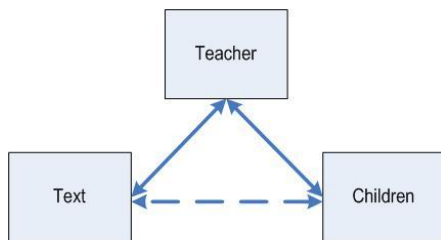


Figure 2. The relationship between Teacher, Text, and Children in Reading Aloud Activity

The central position of the teacher in the reading aloud activity is illustrated in Figure 2. The teacher becomes the bridge between the text and the children. As the bridge between the children and the text, the teacher directly interacts with the text and the children (Huang, 2010). The teacher's direct interaction with the text ensures that the teacher comprehends the text while acting to assess whether the text is suitable for the children. The teacher reads the text aloud to the children to create interaction between the children and the text (Huang, 2010), helping them understand the text without actually reading the text due to their

early stage of competence (Marchessault & Larwin, 2014; Wadsworth, 2008). The teacher's voice will make the students focus on the text and the teacher's voice to avoid misunderstanding.

The other significant interaction in the above figure is the interaction between the teacher and the students. Through this interaction, the teacher firstly recognizes the students' interest and cognitive level, through which the teacher will base the process of the reading aloud. This interaction is a continuous process during the reading aloud to assess the students' comprehension of the text and maintain their interest and motivation (Hahn, 2002). The students need to pay attention to the teacher so they can stay on the line. It is different from watching a video or listening to the audio, in which the students will absorb the information passively, much like being spoon-fed. With prompt questions from the teachers, students can construct more knowledge when listening to reading aloud. During reading aloud, teachers can ask better questions such as who, where, when and discuss the possible answers. Such prompts will encourage the students to examine the text more carefully (Hahn, 2002). The teacher should also show the text's feelings and ideas, act the text out, dramatize the text, use gestures and

facial expressions to convey the emotion of the text (Tarim, 2015). Because of this interaction, reading aloud is better than watching the movie and listening to the audio. Reading aloud allows an active process among the students, whereas watching the video is a passive process (Johnston, 2015).

To make the reading aloud process more effectively, Jacobs (2016) outlines guidelines for the teacher in terms of how to choose the excellent text, how to set the scene of the text, give the title and author of the reading text, and how to read the text with feeling and variety, as can be observed from Figure 3.

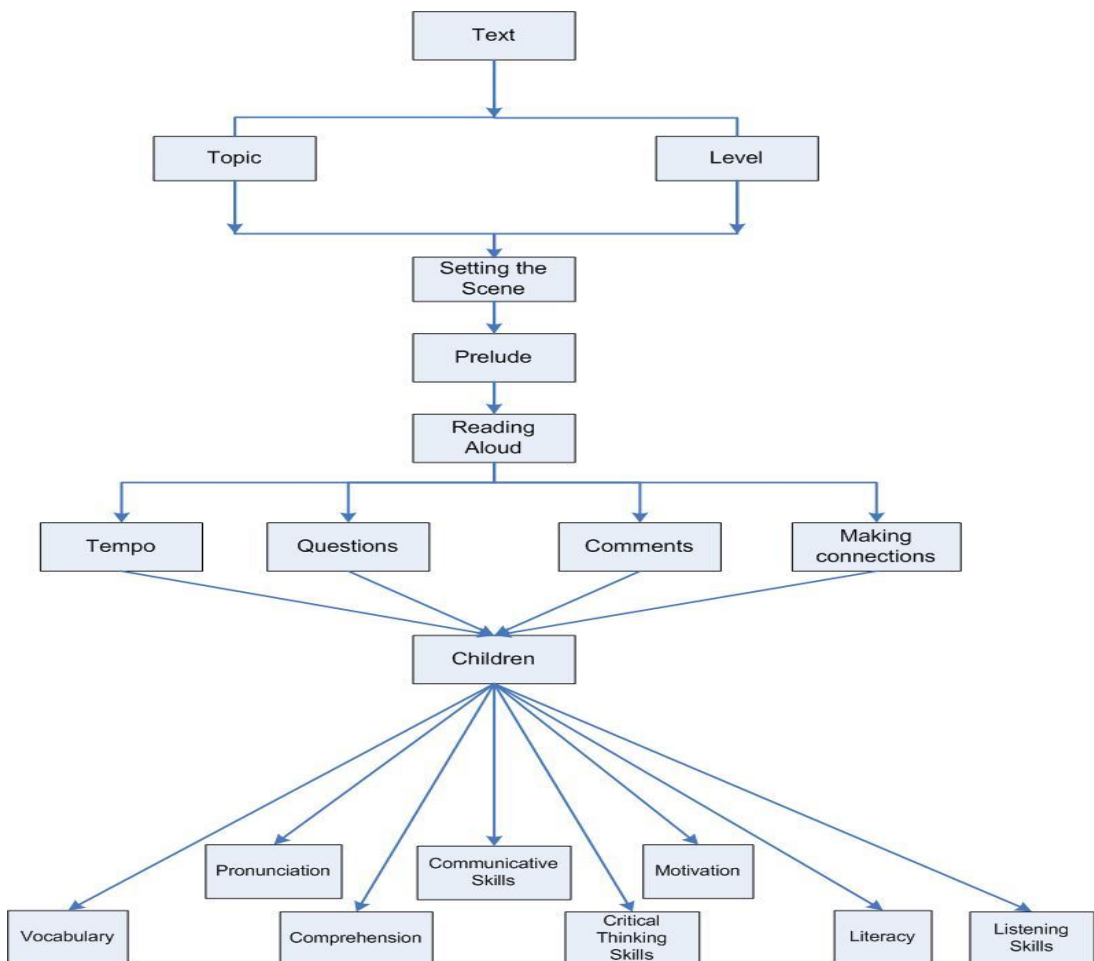


Figure 3. The procedure of reading aloud, according to Jacobs (2016)

The first step of the reading aloud activity would be choosing the right text to read, which meets the students' interests and cognitive level. Choosing the right text is essential, especially to gain the students' interest to listen to the teacher's reading aloud. This step includes considering the topic that the students like and the level of the text that the teacher will read for them. Then the teacher has decided on a particular text. It is essential that the teacher read the text first to understand the meaning of the text, the moral, the linguistic aspects, and marking essential points such as where to pause and pose prompts.

After the teacher is ready with the chosen text, the first step of the actual reading process is setting the scene. It is where the teacher sets the place of the reading and sets the students' mood. The next step is to perform a prelude. This is where the teacher starts reading the title and the author of the text he will read. It also acts as a preliminary activity where the teacher asks questions to recall the right prior knowledge to help them understand the text. Narratively, the prelude allows the students to build their expectations which will trigger suspense in the students' minds. It is crucial to keep the students interested in listening to the reading aloud.

After the prelude succeeds in building the children's interest, the teacher can start reading the content of the text. The tricks to how to read the story should also be abundant. It can be by summarizing, emphasizing slow parts, paraphrasing new words, stopping at exciting places to invite student participation to respond, pose questions, comments, or making connections while encouraging collaboration and critical thinking. Reading aloud is not a race of reading a text; however, reading aloud is the reading process's journey (Trelease, 1989). So, the teacher and the students must pay attention to the process of reading aloud. Simple, fun, and cheap are the key to the reading aloud process to make the students comfortable during the reading aloud class (Trelease, 1989). These strategies can ensure that the reading aloud activity can positively affect the students' vocabulary, pronunciation, comprehension, communicative skills, critical thinking skills, motivation, literacy, listening skills.

In line with Jacob's opinion (2016), Lane and Wright (2007) emphasize three aspects that teachers must be concerned with when applying reading aloud in the classroom: the method, text, and activity. The first aspect is the method used. The reading method in reading aloud should keep the students focused



on the text. Thus, the teacher must plan questions about the text to create interactive communication about the text and give students a chance to understand the text carefully. The second aspect is the reading material. The book that the teacher will read must suit the lesson's goals to support the learning goals in general. The choice of the book will also affect the method planned to deliver the reading aloud and the activities inserted before, during, or after the reading aloud so that the reading aloud activity is delivered well. The third aspect is that the reading activity must be performed as dialogic reading. The teacher can invite the students to become active in the reading aloud activity to avoid the students. By reading aloud, the students realize that reading is crucial in the teaching-learning process to build their future knowledge. The activities can be directed to support the learning goals as well as for building communicative and collaborative skills, as well as for building critical thinking.

According to Trelease (1989), reading aloud needs a minimum of 15 minutes a day to benefit the children. It is argued that reading aloud must be a daily routine for the students in their classroom, and the teacher must facilitate the students in reading aloud to get the best result. To avoid boredom in the teaching-learning process, the

teacher must choose a story that is of interest to the students (Giroir, Grimaldo, Vaughn, & Roberts, 2015). In this case, other than only gaining the students' attention and keeping the students interested, the choice of the reading material can encourage the students to love words, stories, poems, books, and new ideas or knowledge. It is also argued that reading aloud increases the spirit to think and read (Huda, Kartanegara, Gamal, & Zakaria, 2015), which may positively contribute to the students' future development (Batini et al., 2019).

In the context of Indonesian EFL, reading aloud can be a perfect alternative for introducing English as a foreign language to young learners. The first reason is that it does not require the children to actually read, which is convenient since reading is only introduced in elementary school (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017). However, English can be introduced very early to children, especially orally, i.e., through reading aloud. The second reason is related to the fact that English as a foreign language in Indonesia has a very different phonetic system from Indonesian's (Suwastini et al., 2020a; Manik & Suwastini, 2020). Reading aloud can be a medium for exposing young learners to the sounds of English

to young learners (Gabrielatos, 1996; Kelly, 2000; Kindle, 2009).

### The Benefits of Reading Aloud in the EFL Contexts

Reviews of the relevant sources conducted in this study resulted in a summary of the benefits of reading aloud as argued by experts and proven by previous studies. Among the twenty-seven sources reviewed in this study, all of them argue for the various benefits of reading aloud for children in the EFL context. The following figure displays the arguments from these articles.

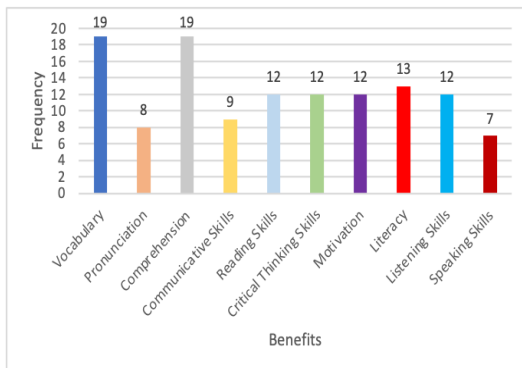


Figure 4. Benefits of Reading Aloud for Children in EFL Contexts

Figure 4 displays that among the twenty-seven sources reviewed in this study, nineteen of them argue that reading aloud positively impacts the students' English vocabulary. Eight of them claim that reading aloud improves students' ability to pronounce English words correctly. Nineteen of

the twenty-seven studies make a case for developing students' comprehension through reading aloud. Nine of these studies vouch that reading aloud can build a foundation for the children's communicative skills. Twelve of these studies maintain that the main benefit of reading aloud is for improving students' reading skills. There are twelve studies among the twenty-seven studies observed that argue for the benefit of reading aloud to promote students' critical thinking. Twelve studies maintain that reading aloud can motivate the students to learn reading habits and learn in general. Thirteen studies perceive reading aloud as beneficial in building students' literacy. Twelve studies connect the activity of reading aloud with the improvement of students' listening skills. Seven of these twenty-eight studies recognize the opportunity for improving students' speaking skills through reading aloud activity. The following sections will elaborate arguments from these studies more thoroughly.

### Reading Aloud for Improving English Vocabulary

Vocabulary is the main component in language proficiency because it provides the basis for the students to comprehend written and oral texts as well as for expressing written and

spoken ideas (Linse & Nunan, 2005; Richards & Renandya, 2002; Richards & Schmidt, 2010). In Indonesia EFL contexts, English as Foreign Language lesson is usually started with introducing English vocabularies (Santosa, Pratama, & Putra, 2020) in order to sufficient vocabulary repertoires that facilitate the students' language skills developments (Abdulrahman & Basalama, 2019; Ferreira, 2003; Nagy & Anderson, 1984).

The aspects of vocabulary include word meaning (i.e., synonym, antonym, connotation, and denotation), extending word use such as idioms, word combination, or collocation, and grammar, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs (Harmer, 2001). Experts have argued that these aspects of vocabulary are positively impacted through reading aloud among children because the teacher's clear speaking style during reading aloud can substantially impact the students' sentence recognition memory, through which the students can recall their prior vocabularies or gain new words (Batini et al., 2018; Bullinaria, 2014; Cerón, 2014; Draper, 1993; Giroir et al., 2015; Hemmati, Gholamrezapour, & Hessamy, 2015; G. Jacobs & Hannah, 2004; Johnston, 2015; Kindle, 2009; Novianti & Abdurahman, 2019; Proença et al., 2017; Trelease, 1989; Yusuf, Yusuf, Yusuf, & Nadya, 2017). According to Draper (1993) and

Huang (2010) for the students to develop good vocabularies through reading aloud, the teacher must maintain good interaction in the reading aloud process to allow the students enough time for constructing the new words while the teacher can check whether the students get the word meanings correctly. Through this interaction, the teacher can provide emphasis on new words and take time to let the new words sink into the students' repertoire (Gurdon, 2019; G. Jacobs, 2016; Kindle, 2009; Marchessault & Larwin, 2014; Novianti & Abdurahman, 2019; Tarim, 2015; Trelease, 2013).

In the context of Indonesian English learning, reading aloud is the safest choice for introducing new vocabulary for children. With globalization, English has become parts of global exposure through television, films, social media, and the internet, providing authentic English exposure to children (Ariantini et al., 2021; Hutapea & Suwastini, 2019; Listiani, Suwastini, Dantes, Adnyani, & Jayantini, 2021; Suwastini et al., 2020b; Suwastini, et al., 2020c; Utami et al., 2020). However, many have argued for the rationing of children's exposure to gadgets to prevent addiction and anti-social behaviors (Chotipaktanasook & Reinders, 2016; Mahmud, 2020; Wulanjani & Indriani, 2021). Thus,

reading aloud can provide English exposure to children without exposing them to excessive screen time. In this case, reading aloud becomes the better alternative due to the children's age and cognitive development that have not reached the mature point for autonomous reading. Parents and teachers will provide the reading texts, exempting the need for their autonomy or the requirement for them to choose their own texts, as appropriate English reading texts for young learners will be provided by knowledgeable adults around them (Huang, 2010; G. Jacobs, 2016; Marchessault & Larwin, 2014; Wadsworth, 2008) (Huang, 2010; Marchessault & Larwin, 2014; Wadsworth, 2008; Jacobs, 2016).

### **Reading for Nurturing Pronunciation**

Pronunciation is another aspect to worry about when the target language has a different phonetic system than the children's mother tongue (Adnyani, Beratha, & Suparwa, 2017; Adnyani & Pastika, 2016). It is also the case with the Indonesian EFL context. Unattended mispronunciation may result in fossilization or permanent incorrect pronunciation (Adnyani & Kusumawardani, 2020; Adnyani, Sari, Suputra, Pastika, & Suparwa, 2018; Suwastini, Wiraningsih, et al., 2020). Thus, it is essential to introduce correct

pronunciation as early as possible to children learning English as a foreign language (Gabrielatos, 1996). Improper pronunciation can create misunderstanding and miscommunication (Haycraft, 1978; Kelly, 2000). It is argued that reading aloud can be the best activity for exposing children to the model of correct pronunciation.

Bullinaria (2014), Gabrielatos (1996), Huang (2010), Kailani (1998), Proença et al. (2017), and Wadsworth (2008) recognize the importance of reading aloud as the activity that provides model pronunciation for children when they listen to the teacher reading the words and pronounce whole words appropriately. The examples from the teacher in the reading aloud activity will help students recognize the pronunciation of words and collective words (Bullinaria, 2014; Proença et al., 2017). With young children, the internalization of these model pronunciations can happen subconsciously as their purpose is listening to the story being read, not to absorb correct pronunciation. This process is critical to embed the correct pronunciation into the children's repertoire (Adnyani & Pastika, 2016; Adnyani & Kusumawardani, 2020). With older children, the process of absorbing the model pronunciation can be more of a twofold process for a

richer benefit. As older children start to recognize letters and written words, reading aloud prompts children to connect the written text that the students are reading with the sounds that the teacher is pronouncing, building a foundation for their later development of reading skills (Gabrielatos, 1996).

Reading aloud also provides a chance for students to practice their pronunciation. It includes pauses where the teacher asks questions to the students, comments on essential points, and connects parts of the texts and between the text and the students (Jacobs, 2016). When students answer questions or give comments, they can practice pronouncing English words correctly (Kailani, 1998; Huda et al., 2015). Again, the teacher's role is crucial here because she should interrupt students' improper pronunciation to prevent fossilizations (Adnyani et al., 2018; Kailani, 1998; Adnyani & Kusumawardani, 2020; Proença et al., 2017). As the teacher is ready with markings of new and challenging words to pronounce, the teacher can prompt the pronunciation of these words by posing questions that require the students to answer using these words (Tarim, 2015). Proença et al. (2017) argue that reading aloud for older children should give a chance for the students to be the reader, through

which they would practice their pronunciation and develop their other skills. This turn-taking between the teacher and the students will allow the teacher to detect problems in the students' pronunciation and assess the students' fluency (Proença et al., 2017).

### **Reading Aloud for Cultivating Comprehension**

Language use involves the process of exchanging information, where information is expressed and comprehended by interlocutors (Giovanelli, 2015). Thus, comprehension plays a significant role in students learning English as a foreign language. The four language skills aimed at language learning depend on the students' comprehension of the content being communicated: how much the students comprehend from what they listen and read will determine how well they speak and write (Nunan, 1989, 2004; Renandya & Widodo, 2016). Regarding the process of reading aloud recommended by Jacobs (2016), reading aloud can cultivate students' understanding in several ways.

First of all, by nature, reading aloud is both reading and listening activities (Gurdon, 2019), the receptive skills that determine how much the students will comprehend a reading text or a speech (Linse & Nunan, 2005;

Mol & Bus, 2011; Mundhe, 2015). Gurdon (2019) emphasizes that reading aloud cultivates the students' comprehension by exposing them to a text delivered in dual mode: as they listen to the teacher, they read the text and vice versa. This duality collaboratively helps the students' comprehension of the text because the teacher's reading will add dimensions of accents, intonations, and comments from the teachers that guide the students' comprehension when they are reading the text simultaneously (Batini et al., 2018; Giroir et al., 2015; Huang, 2010; Huda et al., 2015; Wadsworth, 2008; Yusuf, et al., 2017).

As argued by Jacobs (2016) and Marchessault and Larwin (2014), reading aloud is conducted with pauses for making connections, asking questions, as well as making and inviting comments. This interaction is a rich process that cultivates students' understanding. For Huang (2010), the pauses in reading aloud give moments for the students to let the information they hear sink into their minds. This process is important because this is where the students make connections among bits of information that they hear and between the new information with their repertoire prior knowledge, creating an understanding that becomes the basis of their comprehension (Draper, 1993; Hahn, 2002; Hemmati et

al., 2015; Jacobs & Renandya, 2019; Kailani, 1998). According to Tarim (2015), Gurdon (2019), Johnston (2015), Lane & Wright (2007), Novianti & Abdurahman (2019), and Trelease (1989), the simple questions asked by the teacher during reading aloud activity cultivate the students' comprehension by guiding them through the process of connecting information from the story and the information from the students' life in general.

### **Reading Aloud for Training Listening Skills**

Listening is the receptive skill that trains the students' comprehension through auditory media (Nunan, 2015). As a passive skill, its practice does not usually require the students to produce the language. Instead, they are required to extract the meaning of a spoken or written text that has been heard (Mundhe, 2015). This receptive skill's primary goal is to develop the students' ability to interpret and understand the texts' meaning using the students' existing language knowledge (Gabrielatos, 1996). Children develop their listening skills by listening to the sounds around them (Linse & Nunan, 2005). Hence, reading aloud can be a very good activity for honing students' listening skills.

Children mostly listen to the teacher's voice during reading aloud as the teacher reads the text aloud. The teacher's voice delivers spoken words, phrases, sentences that act as general listening practice for children (Batini et al., 2018; Cerón 2014; Gabrielatos, 1996; Hahn 2002; Mol & Bus, 2011; Proença et al., 2017; Trelease 1989). For Batini et al. (2018), Hemmati et al. (2015), Jacobs & Hannah (2004), and Jacobs (2016), the activity of listening to the voice of the teacher speaking in English is the practice that makes the children accustomed to listening to English words. It is essential in areas where English is not part of the daily interaction, such as rural and frontier areas. Indonesia has a broad coverage of such regions, where books are rare, and internet connections are scarce (Puspitasari, Suwastini, Blangsinga, Dantes, & Tuerah, 2021; Utami, Suwastini, Dantes, Suprihatin, & Adnyani, 2021). In such a situation, reading aloud can be very practical for honing children's listening skills and getting them accustomed to hearing English words.

Besides improving students' basic listening skills, reading aloud offers other benefits that can further enhance students' later listening skill development. Draper (1993) believes that the prelude stage in the reading aloud activity provides children with

clues and intriguing questions about the text. It does not only function to build students' interest but also to build the next level of listening skill, predicting the next words or sentences that may come after the certain sentences. Furthermore, the teacher's pauses during the reading aloud help students stay focused on what is coming from the teacher's story (Lane & Wright, 2007). For Jacobs (2016) and Lane and Wright (2007), it is the interaction between the teacher and the students that offer the most benefit for students' listening skills, because the children can feel the presence of the teacher, and so they feel paid attention to, listened to, and cared for. This interaction is the missing part from listening activity conducted with recorded audios or videos (Hahn, 2002; Johnston, 2015), where children become passive listeners. For Draper (1993), Gabrielatos (1996), and Jacobs (2016), being active listeners make them better English learners than just being passive listeners.

### **Reading Aloud for Developing Reading Skills and General Literacy**

Jacobs & Hannah (2004) and Batini et al. (2018) claim that reading aloud places the foundation for further developing reading skills because reading aloud promotes silent reading.

For Jacobs & Hannah (2004), it is essential for children to advance to silent reading because it is centered on the students, making them the focal point of learning beyond the mastery of language skills. Reading becomes the strategy to gain knowledge and insights about the world. Cerón (2014) and Hahn (2002) perceive the benefits of reading aloud beyond the students' general reading skills. They are particularly riveted to the interaction between the teacher and the students while reading aloud activity. For Cerón (2014), reading aloud changes the reading process into an active interaction that inhibits students from falling into passive reading. The questions and comments posed by the teacher can trigger the students to actively think about the text and make a connection between the text and their life. Hahn (202) shares this same idea and sees this active reading as an opportunity for building a taste for fine literature.

Reading aloud is argued to offer further benefits to younger children's reading skills. Batini et al. (2018) consider the interaction between the teacher and the children while reading aloud activity as the pioneering step for reading comprehension. For Batini et al. (2018), reading aloud acts as a guided reading activity. In the first level, children's reading is guided by the

teacher's voice. It is in line with Gabrielatos' (1996) opinion that children start recognizing written forms of the words pronounced by the teacher through reading aloud. Furthermore, the dialogue between the teacher and the students and the reading aloud process can act as a bridge that guides the students' comprehension (Batini et al., 2018; Marchessault & Larwin, 2014). In this case, the teacher can scaffold the guidance to advance the students' comprehension (Ersani, Suwastini, Padmadewi, & Artini, 2021).

In the Indonesian EFL context, reading aloud can be very strategic for a couple of reasons. First of all, Indonesia has low literacy, and children prefer watching to reading (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017; Listiani et al., 2021; Ariantini et al., 2021). Although watching has its own benefits, students need to build basic literacy with adequate reading skills. Reading aloud can bridge this gap by presenting reading in an effortless environment where children do not have to "read" in the reading aloud activity (Gurdon, 2019; Hahn, 2002; Johnston, 2015; Lane & Wright, 2007). Later on, teachers can modify the questions during the reading aloud to excite the students, build their curiosity, and generate their interest toward the text, through which children will develop their basic literacy (Draper,



1993; Hahn, 2002; Huda et al., 2015; Batini et al., 2018). Because reading aloud is an effortless reading, children are not scared to be involved, opening opportunities for building their literacy (Bulinnaria, 2014; Cerón, 2014; Jacobs & Hannah, 2004; Novianti & Abdurahman, 2019; Trelease 1989; Trelease, 2013).

### **Reading Aloud for Stimulating Speaking, Communicative, and Writing Skills**

According to Cerón (2014), the dialogic process during these questions and answers can kickstart students' speaking skills. When the teacher asks questions, she can modify the questions to direct the students to provide elaborative answers (Gabrielatos 1996; Jacobs, 2016). Together with the students' comprehension from listening to the teacher's reading, students can build confidence in answering the questions (Cerón, 2014; Gabrielatos, 1996; Giroir et al., 2015; Hahn, 2002; Hemmati et al., 2015; Jacobs & Hannah, 2004). For Novianti and Abdurahman (2019) and Tarim (2015), this confidence, supported with a wide range of vocabulary and trained pronunciation, reading aloud can foster students' speaking fluency.

Novianti and Abdurahman (2019) implemented reading aloud among college students to benefits relevant to

21<sup>st</sup>-century skills. They argue that reading aloud in an EFL context can be used to coach students' writing skills with adult learners. The teacher-student interaction mandated in reading aloud activity can be shifted into activities that promote writing skills with older students. Novianti and Abdurahman (2019) used literary text in their experiment. During and after the reading aloud, the students were asked to write comments, opinions, interpretation, and analysis of the literary text they read. Written comments and report like this can become a habit that foster students' writing skills. Because they have to write their own interpretation and analysis, this activity can be challenging and exciting.

The goal of language learning is the communicative skills that allow the students to use the target language effectively. Reading aloud has been argued to promote vocabulary building, pronunciation practice, comprehension of spoken and written text, and listening, reading, and speaking skills needed to build communicative skills. According to Cerón (2014) and Gabrielatos (1996), the listening and speaking skills built through the reading aloud activity build the students' confidence about their English competence, leading to their confidence to communicate using

English as their target language. For Hahn (2002) and Huda et al. (2015), when the language skills are equipped with sufficient vocabulary and trained pronunciation achieved from the dialogic process, reading aloud can promote students' communicative skills in general.

### **Reading Aloud for Constructing Motivation and Critical Thinking Skills**

Marchessault & Larwin (2014) and Jacobs (2016) maintain that teacher-led reading aloud can increase students' motivation to read. The reading process seems effortless, as the teacher starts the reading activity with a story that requires the students only to listen. It creates a variation from the usual "paper-and-pencil tasks" (Hahn, 2002). In the context of EFL learning, this effortlessness also eases the students into an English learning atmosphere that is fun and entertaining (Huang, 2010; Trelease, 1989; Trelease, 2013). Furthermore, the pauses taken by the teacher during reading aloud provide interaction that can encourage dialogic expressions among children, making them feel welcome to the learning process (Batini et al., 2018; Cerón, 2014; Hahn, 2002; Johnston, 2015).

Another important impact of reading aloud on students' motivation is how reading aloud can promote a

passion for reading, which is the foundation for later literacy skills (Hahn, 2002; Huda et al., 2015; Jacobs & Hannah, 2004; Gurdon 2019). Trelease (1989) argues that reading aloud presents reading as a pleasure that can create an internal motivation to gain more reading pleasures. During the reading aloud activity, the teacher can pause from reading to make comments and connections and ask questions that can enrich this pleasure of reading. For Trelease (2013), Wadsworth (2008), and Draper (1993), this is what cultivates students' passion for reading. What is most important about this passion is that reading is the very activity that opens students' access to unlimited knowledge.

For Jacobs (2016), Cerón (2014), and Huda et al. (2015), the interaction established by the teacher during reading aloud activity can be directed to trigger students' critical thinking. When the teacher comments and invites students to share their opinions, students construct their arguments by connecting facts in the text and between facts in the text and the students' real-life (Wadsworth, 2008). Besides, the prelude and the questions from the teacher can also train students' predictive ability by conditioning them to make predictions about what will happen in the story (Marchessault & Larwin, 2014; Draper, 1993). When

appropriately prompted, students can find possible solutions and outcomes to the problems faced by the characters in the story, training them in problem-solving skills (Johnston 2015).

For Batini et al. (2018) and Gurdon (2019), the process of critical thinking happens when students creatively construct imaginations about the story being read. Books for children provide many descriptions (Kindle, 2009), and through the teacher's voice, students can imagine what is verbally described. Batini et al. (2018) further argue that children also develop empathy toward the events experienced by the characters in the book being read. Furthermore, when the teacher invites the students to make comments and connections, reading aloud becomes a stage for emotional sharing (Batini et al., 2018). Making connections between the details in the story and the students' respective experience also create a stage for sharing experience. Mundhe (2015) and Novianti and Abdurahman (2019) argue that the sharing moments can engage the students' critical thinking by conditioning them to take a point of view in commenting on facts from the text.

Furthermore, Johnston (2015) argues that reading aloud can raise awareness about cultural differences among children. The teacher can use

pauses while reading aloud to comment on cultural differences between the students' cultural background and the target culture. In the Indonesian EFL context, text with culturally authentic content is crucial for introducing awareness about cultural differences between Indonesian culture and the target cultures of English-speaking countries Indonesian people. Indonesia is a very culturally diverse country, and many conflicts have happened due to simple misunderstandings or systematic ethnocentrism. Thus, reading aloud can be deliberately designed to raise cultural differences awareness among children.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

From the discussions above, it can be concluded that reading aloud has been deemed an excellent strategy for teaching English to young learners. The strategy requires the teacher to choose appropriate texts for the students' level and interest, read the text aloud with proper pronunciation and intonation, and pause to make comments, ask questions, and make the connection. Experts and previous research have argued that this activity positively impacts the students' vocabulary, pronunciation, language skills, communicative skills, literacy, motivation, and critical thinking skills. Furthermore, reading aloud can create

an enjoyable learning experience that motivates the students to read. It can train their creative thinking and cultivate their imagination. Reading aloud also improves the students' interpersonal skills: when they are trained to listen and pay attention to the speaker, they learn to appreciate others. Reading aloud also cultivates the students' compassion toward the text's emotions. These benefits have been argued to affect the students' future progress in their English learning. Another important conclusion from this study is the centrality of the teacher's role in reading aloud activity. The teacher acts as the bridge between the text and the children's comprehension, as well as the model for proper pronunciation, awareness about cultural differences, train students' empathy, provide moments for sharing, and foster an appetite for reading and learning in general.

In the Indonesian context, reading aloud can be one of the best alternatives for introducing English to children. Reading aloud can prevent children from gadget addictions in urban areas. In contrast, reading aloud in rural and frontier areas can increase students' exposure to English and enrich their insights into the world. Parents can also apply this at home, where simple stories and fairy tales could be an excellent choice of texts for their

children as children find stories enjoyable. It is true that reading aloud may be one of the oldest teaching strategies. Nevertheless, considering the benefits of reading aloud for young learners range from building a foundation for their future development in English as well as for developing their imagination, critical thinking, empathy, and compassion, reading aloud is a very relevant strategy for teaching English for young learners in this 21st Century. After all, reading is the path that delivers students to books, where books are the source of knowledge. To quote Emily Dickinson's poem "There is Frigate like a Book," reading can take students "lands away," a school that is accessible even to "the poorest." When a book can contain so much knowledge and insights, it is reading that becomes the key that deliver the students to that knowledge.

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