Practices for Comprehension Strategy Instruction:
Helping Kindergarteners Improve Their Listening Comprehension

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ABSTRACT

Helping young children improve their listening comprehension throughout the preschool years is significant for their literacy and academic achievement in the subsequent school years. The purpose of the present study was to evaluate the impact of a comprehension strategy intervention program on kindergarteners' listening comprehension skills improvement. The sample consisted of 14 children aged 4 to 6 years enrolled in a classroom of a public kindergarten school located in a rural area of Crete. The children participated in appropriate practices to develop strategies which are significant for listening comprehension. For that purpose, the classroom teacher was trained to: (a) implement dialogic reading with an emphasis in applying direct instruction techniques which foster vocabulary learning and text comprehension and (b) conduct post reading activities which aimed at helping young children improve their questioning skills and retelling abilities as well as their knowledge of the story structure elements. Children's parents were also trained to read the selected stories by using appropriate materials to guide children in the text comprehension process. Story reading sessions were recorded, transcribed and analyzed through content analysis to describe any possible development in their comprehension skills. The results provide indications about children's response to the implemented program as well as the difficulties they faced in deriving text meaning and improving the targeted comprehension skills.

keywords: listening comprehension; strategy instruction; dialogic reading; direct instruction, kindergarteners

1. Introduction

Comprehension, either listening or reading, could be considered a complex process which requires the listener of the reader to apply several skills and strategies to elaborate and construct meaning from language input (Pardo, 2004). While, in the past, comprehension was considered a general construct comprising both listening and reading comprehension, more recent reforms of relative theoretical approaches led to reconceptualization of comprehension, highlighting the commonalities and the unique characteristics of both listening and reading comprehension (Osada, 2004). Listening comprehension nowadays is considered crucial in the spectrum of language instruction and one of the core skills, which based on relevant theorical approaches, such as the *Simple View of Reading*, contribute significantly to young children's reading comprehension and academic achievement (Hjetland et al., 2017; Kendeou et al., 2009; Lepola et al. 2016). In kindergarten settings, comprehension could be theorized as relating to both listening as well reading comprehension

because children at this age have not acquired decoding skills yet and come in touch with written materials through read alouds conducted mainly by adult readers.

Comprehension in any age is assisted by strategies which listeners or readers activate intentionally to construct meaning from text. Comprehension strategies develop gradually having as a starting point readers' first attempts to use them. Readers or listeners move then from attempts which require full attention for successful strategy implementation to attempts where strategies are automatically activated after readers have received enough practice. Under this point of view, strategies could be transformed into skills in a sense that constitute operations or mind tools that readers or listeners use with less attention and automatically to extract text meaning (Afflerbach & Choo, 2011).

But what are the strategies or skills and knowledge which are directly or indirectly related to listening text comprehension? *Vocabular*y is considered one of the core lower-level semantic components which affect listening text comprehension both in a short term as well as longitudinally (Florit et al., 2014). Thus, teaching key words form text being heard or read becomes essential in helping children construct text meaning. Consequently, *background knowledge activation* pursued by relevant techniques before and during text reading is significant for a reader or a listener to establish the necessary links between already acquired word knowledge and the new information and concepts presented in the text (Pardo, 2004). Relative to background knowledge activation is *inference making.* During inference making readers or listeners are involved in a process which requires them to infer information not explicitly stated in the text. In addition, they come to realize the causal connections or the relation between different parts of text to formulate a more complete overview of text meaning. For accomplishing this goal listeners or readers use available text information as well as vocabulary and background knowledge (Oakhill et al., 2015). *Comprehension monitoring* consequently constitutes a significant metacognitive skill through which listeners or readers reflect on their own comprehension by realizing which parts or information from the text do not make sense for them and they proceed to strategy application to overcome their comprehension difficulties (Oakhill et al., 2015). Comprehension monitoring could be theorized as being related to question generation, where children ask themselves or others questions about aspects of text content to fill in their comprehension gaps. The spectrum containing the skills and processes being involved in text comprehension is further supplemented by research related to comprehension strategy instruction (Shanahan et al., 2010). Specifically, *prediction* is a process by which the readers or listeners use text clues and background information to hypothesize oncoming facts or information in text. *Visualization* refers to the construct of a mental image for the text that is being heard or read. Prediction and visualization constitute useful skills which help readers or listeners enrich the mental model they construct for representing text content with more descriptive details (Duke et al., 2011). Moreover, *summarizing* and *retelling*, two connected but not identical procedures, are related to the retrieval of significant text information. Both are rooted in *text structure* comprehension. In the case of narrative texts, which are widely used in kindergarten, the stories content is structured according to story grammar elements, such as the setting, the characters, the theme, the plot and the resolution (Duke et al., 2021). Text structure knowledge operates as a scaffold which enhances comprehension by helping readers or listeners understand the way that information is being presented and organized in a text (Oakhill et al., 2015).

Instruction of the comprehension strategies, according to relevant suggestions, should begin early in young children's school life, and there are indications which show that preschoolers benefit from listening comprehension instruction (Duke et al., 2021*)*. While comprehension strategies have their own dynamics, they are better mastered when they are embedded into

appropriate instructional approaches (Gavelek & Bresnahan, 2011). Book reading constitutes a well-recommended practice which fosters text comprehension (Kim & Pilcher, 2016). In the context of book reading practices *dialogic reading* constitutes a significant methodological reading approach successfully implemented in family and school settings. This approach yields benefits for emergent literacy development of children having various language backgrounds (Cohen et al., 2012; Huennekens & Xu, 2016; Zevenbergen et al., 2018). Its basic principle is based on the promotion of children's active participation in text reading. The adult reader scaffolds systematically children's interaction with text information and background experience. To accomplish this, he/she uses open-ended prompts and techniques which foster oral language development with the utter goal for the child to become the storyteller of the text content (Kajamies et al., 2019). It is worth mentioning that while a few empirical data highlight the impact of dialogic reading on preschool or kindergarten children's oral language development (e.g. Simsek & Erdogan, 2015; Zevenbergen et al., 2018; Zevenbergen & Whitehurst, 2003), less research data are available about its impact on children's text comprehension (e.g. Lever & Sénéchal, 2011).

In addition to what has been mentioned above, book reading could be used as a context for applying techniques which enhance children's listening text comprehension skills development. Of special attention is that teachers should move from the teaching of skills to the teaching of relevant cognitive strategies which show to students the way to use the strategies when elaborating on text meaning (Dole et al. 2011). According to appropriate suggestions, comprehension instruction should be balanced, meaning that the appropriate approaches include direct/explicit instruction on specific comprehension strategies and time provided to children to interact with the text in personal and meaningful ways (Duke & Pearson, 2009). Moreover, it is useful at the first stages of this procedure for teachers to use single-strategy instruction introducing one strategy at a time allowing time and space for children's individual and independent practice (Shanahan et al., 2010). Indeed, the few available research data concerning kindergarten children show their adequate response to practices embedding comprehension strategy instruction (Bianco et al., 2010; Chlapana, 2016; Kim & Phillips, 2016; Myers, 2005; Roberts, 2013). Furthermore, they provide indications of comprehension strategies development, such as inference making, comprehension monitoring, vocabulary and background knowledge activation. Taking into consideration all the information presented so far, current research concerning young children's listening text comprehension could be expanded by evaluating the effects of a teaching practice which combines principles of dialogic reading and direct/explicit instruction on the development of comprehension strategies considered to be essential for text processing and understanding.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study was to examine whether an intervention program aiming at listening comprehension instruction using dialogic reading and direct instruction can improve young children's comprehension strategies. *Listening comprehension strategies* are defined as children's ability to express background knowledge about the text topic, make predictions and visualize plot episodes described in the books, express their own comprehension difficulties, as well as summarize, retell and make inferences about key-details in a text.

2.2. Intervention Program Sample

A five-month intervention program was implemented in a kindergarten classroom located in a rural area in Rethymno, Crete. Fourteen children aged 4-6 years old were enrolled in the class. The activities embedded in the program were implemented by the classroom teacher who had 14-years' teaching experience and held a Master's degree and a Ph.D. Children's parents participated also in the study by performing in the family environment the activities which were anticipated regarding their role in the intervention program.

2.3. Intervention Program Implementation

2.3.1. Materials

For the needs of the present study several storybooks were chosen, having as a basic selecting criterion that these books describe well-structured stories, in relation to the basic story structure elements which they include. These elements refer to the characters, the setting, the theme, the plot, the resolution and the ending of the story. Furthermore, several pictures and puppets were used to help children perceive and practice each comprehension skill.

2.3.2. Intervention Program Didactic Practices and Procedure

The classroom teacher was trained by the researcher through script guidelines and role play sessions to implement didactic practices aiming at the development of targeted comprehension skills. Dialogic reading was used as the main reading practice in the context of which direct instruction techniques were embedded. During dialogic reading the teacher encouraged children to participate in text discussion actively by asking: Completion questions, Recall questions, Open type questions, Who, Where, When, Why and What questions aiming at vocabulary explanation, and Questions which encouraged children to relate personal experience with text information. The aim of direct instruction was to help children develop each target comprehension strategy through the following steps. In the beginning, the teacher introduced the target comprehension strategy with a think aloud strategy and subsequently she demonstrated the use of the strategy in practice and helped children cooperatively to proceed to the use of strategy. At the end of the process, she provided guidance and space to children to practice more on the use of the target strategy. The model of the direct instruction was based on the relevant approach described by Duke and Pearson (2009) and on the Gradual Release of Responsibility Approach (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983).

Each selected storybook was read twice in the time period of one till two weeks.

In the first reading session each story was processed as following. In the first stage the teacher implemented an activity, such as a hidden treasure game, for discovering clues to introduce the story and predispose children to the target comprehension skill that they were going to be taught in the session. Then she implemented dialogic reading in combination with direct instruction techniques to introduce the target comprehension strategy and teach vocabulary. At the last step of this procedure there were follow up activities conducted to enhance children's knowledge regarding story structure elements. Indicative after story reading activities:

- Hot potato game, where question cards referring to story structure elements (e.g. When, Where, Who, What, End) were used for recalling story content following the Story Grammar pattern.

- Hands on activities, such as collage with drawings displaying story plot episodes, and art constructions for representing story setting.
- Story dramatization.
- Words walls displaying taught vocabulary.

In the second reading session the story was processed as following. In first stage the teacher read the story following the principles of dialogic reading with the aim to help children improve text comprehension and oral language by being involved in cognitively challenging text discussions. After story reading completion and in the second stage of each reading session the teacher trained children in questioning by the following procedure. One child each time assumed the role of a character that appeared in the story. Then the rest of the group were encouraged to ask the "story character" one kind of questions by using the appropriate question word. Throughout intervention program implementation children were trained to ask What, Where, When and How questions. Supplementary to the above activity, children were encouraged to retell the story under the guidance of the teacher. The teacher took care that all children participate in this process either by retelling a small part of the story either by adding some more information to the contributions made by other children, or by providing feedback, when necessary.

Children's parents participated in the intervention program by reading the same books following guidelines for adopting a dialogic reading style. The classroom teacher provided scripts guidelines to the parents regarding the dialogic reading techniques while some relative sessions were conducted to help them practice dialogic reading and clarify any queries regarding this reading approach. Once a week the children had the opportunity to borrow one of the books that were chosen for the needs of the present study. The aim of this procedure was at the end of the intervention program all chosen storybook to have been borrowed and read by children and their parents in the family environment.

3. Results

3.1. Data Analysis

Reading aloud sessions were recorded and transcribed. Teacher's and children's comments and questions were analyzed through content analysis to describe children's response to the implemented didactic practices and the development of the target listening comprehension strategies. For that purpose, a coding system was developed according to the following skills: prediction, visualization, background knowledge activation, self-monitoring, inference making, vocabulary, summarizing and retelling.

Conventional content analysis was preferred as an approach, since the aim of the analysis was to describe the response of the participants in the implemented teaching practices by providing indications in relation to the development of each target comprehension strategy. This type of analysis has been used in relevant studies (e.g. Chlapana, 2016; Myers, 2005) and is also suggested when research literature regarding the aim and the research questions of the study is quite limited (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Specifically, the coding system aimed at gathering information about the development of each target comprehension strategy at the three time points, at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the intervention program. Each intervention phase lasted approximately 1 1/5 months.

So, in each intervention please the following steps were followed:

    a) For each target comprehension strategy, the first transcriptions were used to categorize children's responses having as basic criterion that these present common reaction patterns.
    b) For each reaction pattern a descriptive code was given.
    c) The type of responses included in each descriptive code was finalized by the subsequent transcriptions and served as base for the data analysis.

This process was followed to describe children's reaction patterns for each target comprehension skill in each intervention phase.

Results will be presented separately for each targeted comprehension strategy.

3.2. Background Knowledge Activation

Data analysis showed that at the beginning of the training procedure children were hesitant in responding to background knowledge activation questions. For example,

T[1]: Have you ever had a dog without an owner come to your doorstep?

C: Mmmm…

Gradually, children enhanced their ability to provide answers reflecting background knowledge activation and started to handle their answers more effectively for these to be more directly related to the content of the teacher's questions. For example,

T: Have you ever heard or seen someone pushing away a dog by calling out "Ksut"?

C: In another village, there was somebody who locked his door and I went there and unlocked it.

T: Good, but you have you answered my question?

C: No. Then a dog came along and I called out "Ksut"

Furthermore, it was very encouraging to observe few self-correction instances where children evaluated on their own the relevance of their answers to the teacher's questions. For example,

C: We had seen a dolphin that had come ashore in an advertisement. *Mmm, this is important but it has nothing to do with what we are talking about.*

3.3. Prediction

Data analysis showed that from the beginning and throughout the intervention the children were quite familiar with the prediction process. They were very excited with making predictions and there were indications where they collaboratively confirmed or rejected their initial predictions in the context of dialogic reading. For example,

T: Who do you think might have said "Do you want to play hide and seek?

C1: The lion might have said that.

C2: The girl.

C3: The cat.

T: Ok! Now let us all see whose prediction is going to be confirmed.

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[1] T=Teacher
C=Child

T (reading): "One day she heard a sound. What would you say if we played hide and seek? Sophy turned around and then she saw….

C: *…she saw the lion!!!* (all together)

C1: *So, I was right*!

C: *Me too!* (Many children repeating the same answer).

3.4. Visualization

As far as visualization, children at the first steps of the training program were more likely to make predictions rather than describe mental images that they created in their minds as a result to the teachers' relevant prompts. For example,

T: I will now put these pictures back in the box and I want you to tell me what you imagined by observing all these pictures.

C: *The girl might have got in the hot air balloon and the monkey was already there and then they left together*. (prediction of an upcoming event)

Gradually, the children started to enrich with more descriptive details their answers and thus provided more coherent and complete visualizations. For example,

T: I want you to tell me what image comes in mind when I am telling you that this cook said that "it was the Grotlin who took all the cheese!"

C: *The door house was open so that we see the kitchen. Inside the kitchen was that woman. Behind her was the Grotlin who opens the fridge to take the cheese*. (a more descriptive visualization)

3.5. Self-Monitoring

Regarding self-monitoring, data analysis provided indications that at the beginning of the program the children started to develop an awareness of the necessity of realizing and confronting the encountered text comprehension difficulties. For example:

T: Has it ever happened to you not to understand something that someone reads to you?

C: Yes. (multiple answers)

T: *It happens. Doesn't it? And when we do not understand something what do we have to do?*

C: *Ask someone.*

C: *In the story we read about "Ksut" there was a strange word and I asked my mom about it.*

At the same period there were also occasions that they seemed hesitant in expressing their comprehension difficulties in public. For example:

T: I am going to read you the story now and what will you do when you realize that you do not understand something?

C: *Miss…what if all the others understand it and there is only us that do not understand something?*

During the intervention it was very encouraging to observe indications of children's self-monitoring ability development. There were instances where children expressed the comprehension difficulties they encountered in a word level, by querying for example for the meaning of unknown words, in a sentence and in a text level. For example,

In word level:

T:…when the night fell…What do you want to ask?

C*: Yes, is that what sloop means?*

In sentence level:

C*: Miss, I do not understand it. Can you read it one more time?*

T: Ok! "in a cloud of foam and steam they sang as the ice broke into pieces and how strange they knew exactly where to go.."

In text level:

T: Ok, would you like to ask something else?

C: Yes, how come the whales heard something?

T: Does the story tell us something about it?

C: I guess not.

3.6. Inference Making

At the beginning of the program children faced difficulties in the inference making process. The teacher had to point out the necessary clues to help them reach to appropriate references. For example,

T: Does the writer tell us what is the work of these dogs?

T: Mmmm.

T: Ok, I will help you. Look at this picture. They are holding some music instruments and this one has his mouth open. So…

C1: He is singing.

C2: He makes "bam bam". (sound that is produced by percussion instruments)

T: So they are having a band.

As the program was unfolded, children became more capable in analyzing the book illustration firstly (see Example 1) and text context secondly to make inferences about characters' intentions and actions (see Example 2).

Example 1.: Book illustration operated as a means for facilitating inference making

C: He has his hands on his waist.

C: And he is smiling. (Children are describing the picture)

T: Now he is smiling. He has made a big decision. What is that going to be?

C*: I know. He probably wants to come down from the stairs and get in through the door*.

Example 2.: Text context operated as a means for facilitating inference making

T (the teacher rereads the sentence): "The day after the contest the atmosphere was electrified. "We do not like your cat music!" Who might have said that?
C: *The dogs!!!*

3.7. Vocabulary

It was really encouraging to observe from data analysis that, as the intervention program was developed, children started to pay attention to story text vocabulary and to use productively in several occasions the words that the teacher had taught to them. For example,

T: ...and what was he doing?

C: He was *wandering* the streets. (productive use of the word while describing the picture)

3.8. Summarizing

Interesting were the indications about children's improvement in the summarizing ability. It is worth mentioning that in the beginning summarizing took the form of cooperative sort retellings based on the text story structure elements. In the following example the questioning words Who, Where, When, What correspond to relative story structure elements such as the characters, the context and the story plot. For example,

T: Let me write it down with one word. *Who* went to the grocery shop?

C: Titos with his cat.

T: Perfect. I will write it down. *Where* did they go?

C: To the grocery shop.

T: *When* did they go? What day was it?

C: I think it was Monday.

T: *What* did they want to do?

C: To buy some fruits and vegetables.

T: See, it was not so difficult to say with a few word what happened in these pages of our book.

Gradually, as we can see in the following example, there were indications that children started to proceed to more complete summarizing attempts by summarizing key text information individually. For example,

T: You are all amazing. Let's say everything we have read in a few words. Who would like to tell me?

C*: Darreios and the brown cat fought with each other because both of them wanted to kick each other away..*

T: and..?

C: *Darreios won because he had eaten a lot of salad and because he took care of his diet.*

3.9. Retelling

As data have shown, during the first period of the training program, children cooperated with each other in order to retell the story content. For example,

T: Would you like to continue the story?

C1: *Yes. A couple had taken the dog and were playing with it and then another dog came along and dogs started to fight each other.*

C2: *…the other dog approached "Ksut" and it was very angry.*

T: Yes, the other dog was very angry.

C3: *And there was a battle between them.*

Gradually children became more capable in retelling parts of the story individually by assuming in a way the role of a storyteller. For example,

T: What is happening in this picture?

C*: There was a pregnant woman with her husband. She was tired and lay down to rest herself. And then she gave birth to her child and then she called out to the dog "Ksut".*

3.10. Questioning

Helping young children generate their own questions properly to participate in the meaning making process constitute a significant goal in the spectrum of comprehension instruction. Regarding this parameter, it is useful to see how children responded to questioning training procedures. At the beginning, children confronted difficulties in formulating the questions by using the appropriate questions words. The teacher provided directives and correction-feedback to help them express their thoughts. For example,

C1: What were you playing with Louie?

C2: We played hide and seek.

C3: Then the other.

T: Ask her correctly. Remember that your question has to begin with the word "what".

C3: What else did you play?

C2: Chase.

It was really encouraging to observe that children started to cooperate in the context of dialogic reading to formulate the right questions and reach to the respective answers. For example,

T: Yes, and…

C1: What did see you when we were looking…

C2: ...at the sky?

C3: The lion.

As the intervention program proceeded to its completion, it was observed an increased diversity in the content of children's generated questions and more stable use of the appropriate question words. For example,

C: **Where** was that building and **how** they played.

T: Do not ask him many things and the same time. Just one Where question.

C: **Where** was that building?

C: **When** did you go to the concert hall?

C: **How** did you make the balloon?

C: **Why** I do not have any friends and I am driven away from any house and leave me on the streets?

C: **What would happen if** you had not eaten so much food?

C: **What if** you lived on the streets alone?

4. Discussion

The goal of the present study was to examine children's response in an intervention program comprised of practices aiming at listening text comprehension strategy instruction. Data analysis provided indications of children's comprehension strategies development and heightened their difficulties in various facets of the program. Furthermore, the conclusions extracted from the present study extend previous relevant research in showing that dialogic reading and direct/explicit instruction could be combined successfully for multi-facet listening text comprehension instruction applied in young children (Bianco et al., 2010; Chlapana, 2016; Kim & Phillips, 2016; Myers, 2005; Roberts, 2013; Schultz, 2017).

One of the clearest results of the present study concerned the productive use by the children of target words taught during the intervention program. This result is explained to some degree from the use of dialogic reading and is consistent with previous research showing the positive impact of this methodological approach on children's vocabulary development (Zevenbergen et al., 2018; Zevenbergen & Whitehurst, 2003). The specific techniques that were used, such as completion and open-ended prompts, triggered children not only to pay attention to text vocabulary but also to use it productively in their effort to process text information. Through the rich explanations provided during story reading, the target words were connected to other relevant words and concepts in a "semantic network" (Oakhill et al., 2015). In this way word knowledge became concurrently world knowledge and provided to the listeners the necessary background information to analyze the text. After reading activities that were conducted during the intervention program, such as word walls and story dramatizations, helped children sustain a stable contact with the target vocabulary and thus deepen the receptive knowledge and enhance the productive use of the taught words. Relevant to the results concerning the vocabulary use by the sample children are the conclusions referring to background knowledge activation. During the intervention program implementation children become more skillful in activating background knowledge. This was accomplished as they gained more information about keywords of the selected books and as they received support from the scaffolded questioning used by the teacher. It seems that vocabulary and background knowledge are connected in reciprocal relationship by contributing mutually to the development of each other (Demir, 2012). Furthermore, it was very encouraging to observe instances where children showed a metacognitive ability in evaluating by their own the relevance of their answers to the teacher's background knowledge questions and text information. Direct explanation techniques provided the context for helping children accomplish this goal. At the begging of each story reading the teacher provided the necessary clues, such as the story title and the picture of the front cover of the book, which served as scaffolding means and helped children activate background knowledge relative to the theme of the story. Then, and in the context of the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model, scaffolding means were gradually removed enabling children respond to background knowledge prompts and evaluate their answers just by hearing the text read aloud by the teacher.

It is worth to mention that comprehension should be considered as a chain of skills which are closely related. As for inference making it is useful to be noted that when someone wants to make inferences in response to appropriate prompts, he/she has to use background knowledge and vocabulary, extract and combine the necessary clues from text context so as to achieve comprehension (Oakhill et al., 2015). In storybooks the text and the congruent with-it illustrations operate as a mean which facilitates young children's text comprehension (Takacs & Bus, 2018). Data analysis in the present study provided indications about children's attempts to analyze the pictorial and text context to make the appropriate inferences. Furthermore, their effort to infer story characters' action intentions was obvious enough. This

can be partly explained because of the type of texts used in the present study. Specifically, narrative texts trigger readers or listeners to make inferences about elements, such as the motives and the goals of the story characters, because these are necessary for narrative comprehension (Oakhill et al., 2015). Furthermore, the practices used before and after story reading guided children in the inference making process. Specifically, playful learning principles and techniques were embedded in the conducted activities. Short scenarios were created which encouraged children to assume different kind of roles and reach to appropriate inferences. For example, in an indicative activity children heard a recorded message about a boy who wanted to go to school. He looked out the window of his house and then put on a raincoat and took an umbrella. Children assumed the role of detectives and in groups discussed what might happened. The teachers pointed at the necessary clues, such as the raincoat and the umbrella, to enable children in the inference making process. So, playful learning and direct instruction techniques combined effectively proving young children motivation to respond to the intervention program practices.

Comparable and related to inference making are the conclusions extracted about the self-monitoring strategy development. The step-by-step guidance provided by the teacher helped children acknowledge the necessity of realizing and confronting their comprehension gaps. It was interesting to observe that at the first stages of the intervention program children's lack of adequate response was not exclusively due to their inability to monitor their comprehension but also due to their hesitation in expressing their comprehension difficulties. Gradually, they become more confident in generating questions reflecting comprehension difficulties they faced in a word, sentence, and text level. This was very interesting because it illustrated children's intention to make local cohesion inferences, by relating words or sentences, as well as global coherence inferences, which require active processing parts of a text, to build a coherent mental model of the text (Oakhill et al., 2015). The techniques used in the present study and mainly the think aloud strategy, as has been shown in relevant research data (Schultz, 2017), may have contributed toward that direction. Furthermore, children were encouraged to use their stop signs to interrupt story reading and ask a question about parts of the text that they could not understand. This is a playful element which, according to anecdotal notes, enhanced children active participation in the self-monitoring process. Additionally, along with the children, the teacher used a stop sign to ask for children's help by pretending that she could not understand parts of the story. This practice helped children realize that lack of comprehension is something usual and totally acceptable while hearing text read aloud or when reading by ourselves a text. Children' s enhanced self-monitoring ability might also has been enabled by the training procedure that took place and aimed at helping them practice in asking different types of questions. As the intervention program proceeded, there where indications that children become more capable in how to use questions words to formulate a question and more aware of the type of question sentence that is signalized by the different kind of questions words. This resulted in a diversity of questions on behalf of the children expressing their queries about the story content. Features of playful learning were once again adopted for motivating children to participate in the anticipated procedure. They assumed the role of story characters and participated in role play sessions where they were encouraged to either ask questions or provide answers to the generated questions on behalf of the story character. Through this way a twofold purpose was accomplished, to express their own queries and unfold their comprehension about aspects of the text that the questions were addressed to.

Encouraging were the results concerning children's summarizing and retelling ability. Data analysis provided indications that throughout the intervention program children become more capable in responding adequately to the corresponding training procedures. The content of

the stories chosen for present study was well-organized according to story grammar elements, such as the setting, the theme, the plot, and the resolution. This organizational pattern was also evident in parts of the story and specifically those concerning the plot episodes. The training that took place with the aim to help children recognize story grammar elements may have affected equally their summarizing and retelling ability. At the end of the first reading of each book used in the present study, children were guided through appropriate games (e.g. Hot Potato game) to recall story content in a proper sequential order by incorporating all the necessary structure elements. Furthermore, guided and cooperative retelling and the art activities, such as story dramatization, that were conducted at the completion of the second reading of each book, helped children stabilize story structure knowledge and productively replicate the content of the story. Recommendations based on relevant research suggest that children benefit from text structure instruction in comprehension development of different kind of texts (Duke et al., 2021). Furthermore, dialogic reading, implemented in children's school and family environment, enabled children to become storytellers and narrate parts of the story. Unpublished reports from participating parents describe their children's willingness to narrate parts of the stories that they read to them and heard in school.

Prediction was one of the comprehension skills targeted by the present study. According to the transcribed data, the children, as in the studies of Myers (2005) and Chlapana (2016), responded with enthusiasm in the relative training procedure and formulated accurate predictions in a cooperative atmosphere promoted by dialogic reading. Children's familiarization with the prediction process was strong enough to affect children's initial response to the visualization process. Data analysis provided indications that children at the first steps of this process were more likely to make predictions rather than describe mental images that they created in their minds as a result to the teachers' relevant prompts. Gradually and under the systematic guidance they managed to overcome partly this difficulty and to procced to more descriptive visualizations. This process turned to be demanding for kindergarteners since they had to construct an internal visualization and subsequently transform this mental image into an external visualization by using oral language. While using verbal (e.g. text) and nonverbal clues (e.g. book illustrations), as it was applied in the present study, is an accepted practice for training children in visualization (De Koning et al., 2013), more research is needed about the best practices that can be used for helping young children visualize while hearing texts read aloud.

5. Conclusions

The conclusions formulated from the data of the present study do not describe the fully acquisition of the target comprehension strategies by the children but provide indications of their effort to make progress regarding the development of listening comprehension. They also suggest appropriate practices to teachers which combine dialogic reading procedures and explicit/direct techniques. Children are in need of effective practices implemented during story book reading to develop their listening comprehension strategies. Cognitively challenging discussions conducted during dialogic reading trigger children's comprehension and encourage them to construct text meaning cooperatively. In the context of book reading and by adopting direct instruction techniques, it is useful to present and model each comprehension strategy by think aloud practices and allow time and space to children to practice on the strategy. Furthermore, it is important for comprehension improvement to move from teacher-centered to children-centered practices by transferring children the responsibility of asking questions and unfold their comprehension needs. In the implementation of any proposed practice, researchers and educators have to bear in mind that children learn through play. For that reason, teachers should provide playful characteristics in

the implemented didactic practices to motivate children's engagement and enhance their self-confidence regarding their response to the learning procedures. Of course, the replication of the proposed intervention program in a bigger sample would be necessary so that more reliable results to be extracted.

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