

THE IMPACT OF DIALOGIC LITERARY GATHERINGS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF RECEPTIVE SKILLS IN EFL UNDERGRADUATES

IMPACTO DE LAS TERTULIAS LITERARIAS DIALÓGICAS EN EL DESARROLLO DE LAS DESTREZAS RECEPTIVAS DE ESTUDIANTADO UNIVERSITARIO DE INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA

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45

Abstract

In recent decades, the role of literature in foreign language learning has been reconsidered in an attempt to develop integrative methodologies which benefit from its vast educational potential (Van 2009; Barrette et al. 2010; Bloemert et al. 2017, among others). Building on previous research (Fernández-Fernández 2020; Bouali 2021; Fernández-Fernández and López-Fuentes 2024), this study explores the use of Dialogic Literary Gatherings (DLGs) as an integrative practice in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in higher education. Working with literary texts using DLGs provides students with authentic language input in a meaningful context. Our research attempts to discover how this practice influences the development of students' (N = 39) receptive communicative abilities, and students' and teachers' perceptions of its impact, using standardised tests, questionnaires, videoblogs, focus groups and teachers' observation diaries. Qualitative data highlights the importance of fostering a supportive classroom environment to motivate student engagement and enhance English language practice. Our findings reveal a statistically significant relationship between DLG implementation and students' improvement of their receptive skills in English.

Keywords: shared reading, dialogic education, English as a Foreign Language, literature, higher education.

Resumen

En las últimas décadas, el papel de la literatura en el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras ha sido reconsiderado con un interés en desarrollar metodologías integradas que se beneficien de su gran potencial educativo (Van 2009; Barrette et al. 2010; Bloemert et al. 2017, entre otros). Basándose en investigaciones previas (Fernández-Fernández 2020; Bouali 2021; Fernández-Fernández and López-Fuentes 2024), este estudio explora el uso de las Tertulias Literarias Dialógicas (TLD) como una práctica integrada en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera en la Educación Superior. Trabajar con textos literarios utilizando las tertulias proporciona al alumnado la exposición a un lenguaje auténtico en un contexto significativo. Nuestra investigación pretende descubrir cómo esta práctica influye en el desarrollo de las habilidades comunicativas receptivas en lengua inglesa del alumnado español (n=39), y en las percepciones del estudiantado y profesorado sobre su impacto, utilizando pruebas estandarizadas, cuestionarios, videoblogs, grupos focales y diarios de observación de las profesoras. Los datos cualitativos destacan la importancia del fomento de un ambiente de aula positivo para motivar la participación de estudiantado y mejorar la práctica de la lengua inglesa. Nuestros resultados muestran una relación estadísticamente significativa entre el uso de las tertulias y la mejora de las habilidades receptivas en inglés del estudiantado.

Palabras clave: lectura compartida, educación dialógica, inglés como lengua extranjera, literatura, educación superior.

1. Introduction

The place of literature in English language learning has evolved throughout time. Considered an essential vehicle for language and cultural learning in the past, literary texts later fell out of favour among English language teaching methodologies because of their perceived inability to contribute to the enhancement of real communicative skills (Edmonson 1997). Recently, however, we can find proof of a renewed interest in literature in English language learning. In 2007, the Modern Language Association Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages highlighted the importance of integrating language and literature in their report *Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World* (Geisler et al. 2007). The committee also argued for a comprehensive approach to teaching that enables teachers to combine language skills with cultural and literary studies to develop students' translingual and transcultural competences. In the same line, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages included literature as

a valid educational resource to improve students' comprehension of language and culture and advance their ability to interpret and produce complex texts (Council of Europe 2020). However, little is said about the methodologies recommended to ensure a successful integration of language and literature in the EFL classroom.

Our study proposes Dialogic Literary Gatherings (DLGs) as a valid educational practice to incorporate literature in EFL learning. Under the principles of dialogic education (Freire 2006), DLGs provide a structured yet dynamic learning environment, favouring language acquisition and learning (Fernández-Ortúbe et al. 2021; Ruiz-Eugenio et al. 2023). When participating in DLGs, students engage in collaborative dialogues and fruitful discussions that deepen their understanding of the texts and enhance their communication skills (Loza 2004; Laorden-Gutiérrez and Foncillas-Beamonte 2021). This practice is consistent with current educational goals, as it promotes a comprehensive learning experience that integrates language and cultural and literary competences while promoting inclusion and diversity as well as soft skills such as working in groups, elaborating ideas with others or aiding others to understand a text.

The research project was carried out in first-year undergraduates (N = 39) enrolled in the subject English I in the Degree in Modern Languages and Translation, and was part of the educational innovation project “Dialogic Talks in Higher Education EFL contexts” (UAHEV/1465) (2022-2023) approved by the Universidad de Alcalá. The present study provides evidence of the impact of this innovative pedagogical intervention on students' receptive skills. Reception was the chosen area of focus because of the nature of the intervention, which highlights this mode of communication specifically, and due to learners' language needs, as they scored lower on receptive tasks than in the productive areas. Also, first-year undergraduates must develop a strong foundation in receptive skills to advance their learning throughout the degree. Our data was collected through questionnaires, standardised tests, students' videoblogs, focus groups and teachers' observation diaries. By looking at students' perceptions and results, this research examines whether and how the implementation of DLGs influences the development of students' EFL receptive skills in this context.

47

2. An Overview of Dialogic Literary Gatherings

DLGs are considered a social practice under the umbrella of dialogic education, as proposed by Freire in his fundamental work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2006). As stated in Fernández-González et al. (2012), DLGs are related to the principles of dialogic education in that they foster egalitarian dialogue, promote the development of cultural intelligence, make use of instrumental

learning, promote solidarity, acknowledge diversity, give learners a purpose and boost transformation. Essentially, they highlight the power of dialogue to foster freedom and transformation, acknowledging the voice of each individual and encouraging meaningful conversations that enable learners to actively engage in their own learning process. This will lead them to develop their critical thinking and challenge oppressive structures. This approach to literature is in line with Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading (1938) inasmuch as it values reading, dialogue and critical thinking as indispensable elements in creating a better society.

In the present study, we draw upon DLGs, recognised as a Successful Educational Action (Soler-Gallart 2019; Ruiz-Eugenio et al. 2023). DLGs are considered cultural activities which involve the discussion of literary texts by a group of people. The mechanics are simple: participants bring a paragraph or piece of text they want to discuss with the group. A moderator presents the text, ensures effective turn-taking and promotes the participation of all the members of the group. In the interchange of ideas, all the participants' contributions are listened to, discussed and welcomed. These contributions may come from people other than the class, as DLGs are open to the educational community. Therefore, DLGs provide a space for students to engage in collaborative reading and discussion, emphasising mutual respect and understanding, as well as shared meaning-making.

In language learning terms, Loza (2004) asserts that DLGs can improve both receptive and productive skills but highlights their potential to promote respectful and active listening to all participants. After all, people participating in DLGs build and reshape their ideas together with others. Therefore, oral reception is developed with a critical perspective. Also, DLGs are said to improve either independent reading or reading aloud, facilitating learning through all communication modes, but using written reception as the springboard for production. In this sense, receptive skills play a fundamental role in developing DLGs successfully, while DLGs contribute to adequate development of these skills.

All the aforementioned elements align seamlessly with the considerations of the CEFR, particularly in its latest version, the Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020), which recognises language learners as social agents, emphasising their active role in language acquisition and communication. It also recommends the development of comprehensive language learning through activities that promote reception, production, interaction and mediation. DLGs, as an educational practice, engage students in reading and discussing literary texts, creating a safe and encouraging environment for learners to use their communicative abilities in an authentic context and with real-life purposes. The collaborative nature of DLGs fosters interaction and mediation, as students interpret texts, share perspectives and

negotiate meaning in an egalitarian dialogue. This approach improves linguistic proficiency and cultivates plurilingual and pluricultural competencies, since they align with the goal of promoting intercultural dialogue and social inclusion. Therefore, integrating literature into language learning using DLGs provides students with a holistic educational experience that meets the current principles of effective language education.

3. Literature Review

A recent systematic review of literature on the use of DLGs in education (Ruiz-Eugenio et al. 2023) found that scarce work on the use of this educational practice has been carried out in higher education contexts, particularly in English language learning contexts. To further prove this point, we conducted an overview of articles published in recognised academic journals from 2019 to the time of writing. To that end, the academic search engines Google Scholar and ERIC and the AI tool Consensus were used to extract relevant sources. This process led to the retrieval of eight articles on the use of DLGs in higher education (see Table 1).

49

Authors (year)	Context	Country
Pérez-Gutiérrez et al. (2019)	Early childhood teacher education degree	Spain
Lozano et al. (2019)	Early childhood and primary teacher education	Spain
Fernández-Fernández (2020)	EFL primary teacher education	Spain
Fernández-Ortúbe et al. (2021)	Sports science and primary teacher education	Spain
Bouali (2021)	EFL	Algeria
Laorden-Gutiérrez and Foncillas-Beamonte (2021)	Social education degree	Spain
Camús Ferri et al. (2022)	Early childhood education	Spain
Fernández-Fernández and López-Fuentes (2024)	EFL primary teacher education	Spain

Table 1. Studies reporting on DLGs in higher education contexts reviewed

The fact that most studies have been carried out in Spain comes as no surprise, as DLGs originated in adult schools in Barcelona (Spain) and, accordingly, there are several ongoing initiatives on DLGs in the country. Regarding the context of this earlier research, six studies focus on teacher education (generally at the early childhood and primary education levels), and only two deal with EFL contexts. Therefore, there is little published research on DLGs in contexts where an additional

language is used. This is especially contradictory since many studies in L1 settings, such as Fernández-Ortube et al. (2021) or Camús Ferri et al. (2022), highlight their potential to improve students' language and communicative abilities.

The studies analysed show different areas of research focus as well as a variety of data-gathering tools. One prominent area is student opinions, perceptions and/or attitudes towards the use of DLGs. Lozano et al. (2019) and Camús Ferri et al. (2022) employ semi-structured interviews, while in Fernández-Fernández (2020) and Fernández-Fernández and López-Fuentes (2024) there is a set of tools encompassing pre- and post-questionnaires, written or oral testimonies, focus groups, observation diaries or recorded sessions. One study (Fernández-Fernández and López-Fuentes 2024) provides findings from a sustained experience applying DLGs over three years to different student cohorts. Another common area of research is cognition and, more specifically, how DLGs influence students' higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) (Anderson and Kratwohl 2001) as found in Fernández-Fernández (2020), Bouali (2021) and Fernández-Ortube et al. (2021).

In all the articles analysed, there is evidence of the positive impact of DLGs, as they improve students' participation in the learning process and promote academic excellence (Pérez-Gutiérrez et al. 2019); make students value the experience of sharing their ideas and experiences in a respectful environment (Lozano et al. 2019); engage learners in discussing social issues (Fernández-Ortube et al. 2021); improve student attitudes towards the use of literature as an educational tool (Fernández-Fernández, 2020; Fernández-Fernández and López-Fuentes 2024) and develop their cognitive skills at higher levels (Fernández-Fernández 2020; Bouali 2021; Fernández-Ortube et al. 2021).

Concerning the development of language and communication, previous research has provided evidence on how DLGs improve students' interactional skills. However, these studies are not sufficiently systematised and are generally based on informal observations. Also, some indicate this as an area of improvement, as students seem to have difficulties expressing their thinking (Lozano et al. 2019) and using more complex communication skills to share information (Camús Ferri et al. 2022). Generally, the studies analysed delve into productive skills, especially speaking and interaction skills, and prominently in the mother tongue (Fernández-Ortube et al. 2021; Camús Ferri et al. 2022).

These lacunae found in the literature review underscore the importance of studying language gains and difficulties more systematically and observing skills other than productive ones in foreign language contexts. Thus, our study attempts to fill this gap, considering how DLGs influence Spanish students' receptive skills in English, an additional language. Students involved in this practice read literary texts and play an active role as listeners; however, little is known about the impact of this

practice on their foreign language development. Another important concern is that data is generally retrieved from informal observation. For this reason, we aim to obtain information using different data-gathering tools: standardised tests, questionnaires, videoblogs, focus groups and teachers' observation diaries, through which we will get a better insight into the possible benefits of the practice implemented. Finally, we also want to contribute to the area of EFL in higher education, which is clearly underrepresented in the literature.

4. The Study

4.1. Aims

This study aimed to explore and understand the effectiveness of literary texts as educational resources in the EFL classroom in higher education through the implementation of a teaching-learning experience using DLGs. The study was undertaken to address the following research questions:

RQ1: Do DLGs have an impact on EFL undergraduates' receptive skills?

RQ2: What are undergraduates' perceptions of the contribution of DLGs to their EFL learning and, in particular, to their receptive skills?

RQ3: What are university teachers' perceptions of the contribution of DLGs to their students' EFL learning and, in particular, to their receptive skills?

Our focus on receptive skills stems from the grounding of DLGs in the collective reading and discussion of literary texts, which directly fosters students' exposure to rich and authentic oral and written input, and encourages active listening and the interpretation of meaning. Also, as shown in the literature review, studies on DLGs are mostly focused on how these have a positive impact on students' interaction and production skills; however, little has been said regarding their impact on students' development of reception skills. This research aims to address this specific gap and provide empirical evidence in this area that, in our view, remains rather unexplored.

4.2. Pedagogical Intervention

The researchers selected the text to be worked on in the DLGs considering language complexity and a plot that addressed social issues. Once several possibilities were studied, the novel *One Crazy Summer* (2011) by Rita Williams-García was chosen. The language used is not complex, as the novel is directed at native-speaking teens. The story, set in the United States in the 1960s, revolves around the trip of three black girls to meet their mother. The context of the civil rights movement is vividly

described through the eyes of the oldest sister, Delphine. The novel, awarded with the Newbery Medal, the Coretta Scott King Book Award and the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction, has been praised for its engaging narrative, well-developed characters and historical accuracy, and offers a compelling depiction of a pivotal era in American history, while informing readers about the Black Panther Party and the broader fight for racial justice and equality. The novel delves into universal and timeless topics such as racism, the civil rights movement, family, identity, motherhood and education, making it significant and valuable for students in the 1st year of the Modern Languages and Translation degree.

The lecturers scheduled one-hour DLGs for each group every two weeks, assigning students several chapters to be read outside the classroom. Students had seven sessions where they were invited to sit in a circle and discuss a sentence or paragraph they had extracted from the novel. The teacher acted as the moderator in the first session to model this role; in subsequent six sessions, students assumed this role on a voluntary basis. It is worth noting that the teachers here do not remain at the forefront, but rather emphasise their role as readers, thus altering the hierarchical relationships in the classroom layout and dynamic.

52

4.3. Context and Participants

The study was performed by the two lecturers who implemented the DLGs, and who are also the researchers authoring this paper, at the Universidad de Alcalá, in the subject English I, part of the first semester of the first year of the degree in Modern Languages and Translation (2022-2023). In this course, students are expected to develop all modes of communication (reception, production, interaction and mediation) to a B2 (CEFR) level. Furthermore, they also learn how to monitor their performance when communicating in English, to identify, define and solve their problems when dealing with the oral and written skills. To assist students in achieving these academic learning objectives, lecturers included DLGs as an educational strategy in their teaching curricula, and students were informed about the study associated with it. Participation in the research was voluntary.

Volunteer participants comprised 39 first-year undergraduates. There were 32 women, five men and two non-binary students. When prompted to self-declare their English language level in the questionnaire, a majority reported having a B2 (21 students) level, followed by C1 (nine students), B1 (four students), A2 (one student) and C2 (one student). Three did not indicate their level of proficiency in the questionnaire.

Concerning their reading habits in their mother tongue and in English, students showed a low frequency of reading. In their mother tongue, most students (n = 22) read 1 to 4 books per year. However, four reported not reading any books,

whereas two students read more than 20. In English, most students ($n = 25$) also read 1 to 4 books. However, eight students reported not reading any books in English, and none read more than 20. Although the patterns are similar, there is a slightly lower engagement in English. When looking into their main motivation to read in English, entertainment was the most prevalent ($n = 19$), followed by vocabulary learning ($n = 11$). They also stated they have problems finding the time and motivation to read more. This information may indicate that students do not generally read literature in English in the classroom; rather, they read for pleasure and with a lower frequency than desired.

The study also included a control group (group B), which was composed of 34 students enrolled in the same course with the same teachers a year later (2023-2024). They did not engage in DLGs in any way. The distribution regarding gender was similar (six men and 28 women); and their median English level was also B2. Likewise, students completed a questionnaire on their reading habits, showing the same patterns found in the experimental group, with slightly higher results in the average number of books read in English.

4.4. Research Design and Tools

53

The present study is empirical and employs a mixed-methods research design, incorporating qualitative and quantitative data to gather the necessary information to respond to the research questions. Five different data-collection tools were used in this study. First, a questionnaire based on Jones and Carter (2012) (see Appendix 1) was developed to examine the participants' perception of the use of literature in the EFL classroom. The questionnaire was not formally piloted due to the small and well-defined sample. Yet, to ensure clarity, relevance and applicability, the instrument was created especially for this setting, and verified by earlier studies (Fernández-Fernández and López-Fuentes 2024) as well as expert review by other members of the authors' research team. The questionnaire was administered before and after the implementation of DLGs and was divided into three sections. This first part focused on explaining the main aims of the project and asked students to acknowledge that they had been informed of their participation in the research and given their consent to take part in it. The second section revolved around general information and reading habits. This section included nine questions in which participants were asked to provide information on aspects such as their age, level of English and reading habits both in their mother tongue and in their second language (English). The last section consisted of five questions rated on a 10-point Likert scale (1 being "strongly disagree", and 10 being "strongly agree") where participants had to reflect on their perception of the use of literature in the EFL classroom, its usefulness and their motivation to engage with it.

Second, teachers completed observation diaries in the DLG lessons. While monitoring the activity, teachers took notes on students' perceptions and performance related to the development of their receptive skills in English. Third, students were asked to record a videoblog about their personal experience with this activity in the classroom to collect their general perceptions of DLGs and to evaluate their spoken performance. More precisely, participants were asked to reflect on the impact DLGs had on their development of competences in English and their awareness of salient socio-historical themes depicted in the novel. On a similar note, students also shared individually and privately with their teachers/researchers how the experience had worked for them, to allow them to express their views openly, without the pressure of what other students might think.

The fourth tool was the exam, extracted from the free samples provided by Cambridge ESOL webpage. In the seventh week of the course, that is, towards the middle of the semester, a mid-term exam was held to measure the development of students' receptive skills in English. Similarly, an additional exam was held at the end of the semester again as part of the continuous assessment of students to achieve B2.

Finally, focus groups were organised after the results obtained from the other data sources had been analysed. All participants volunteered to take part in these groups. A thirty-minute group interview was conducted by an external research team member to prevent participants from being reluctant to express their opinions freely, given that the teachers of the subject are the researchers developing this project, and therefore we wanted to avoid any type of bias or reservation, as well as to discourage participants from merely stating what they believed we wanted to hear. The focus group discussion was organised around the following topics:

- The concept of DLGs and their implementation in the EFL class. The discussion focused on aspects such as the classroom atmosphere generated, how the experience of using literature in the class differed from any previous experience with literature in the classroom, and how the experience of reading the selected novel would have been different if not performed through DLGs.
- Usefulness of DLGs for foreign language learning. The guiding questions revolved around the aspects they had improved, the extent to which sharing ideas with their peers had helped them, and what they had gained from working with DLGs in class.
- Difficulties and further work. In the last part of the focus group, researchers were interested in understanding students' difficulties while participating in the DLGs.

4.5. Research Procedure and Ethics

The research was conducted from September to December 2022. The instruments for data collection were applied uniformly to the two groups that participated in the research. At the beginning of the course, the researchers administered the pre-test questionnaire. The post-test, submission of student videoblogs and focus groups took place in the last weeks of the semester in December. The teachers' observation diaries, which were completed throughout the seven weeks, were collected at the end of the experience in December. Concerning data treatment and analysis, researchers gave a code to each participant to preserve their anonymity. The researchers performed statistical analysis using SPSS 28 and obtained graphic representations (tables) using this programme. The qualitative data gathered from the teacher observation diaries, the students' videoblogs and the focus groups were transcribed and then coded and analysed using the software tool NVivo 14. The analysis of the videoblogs and the focus groups was initially performed using these categories: "Comments related to oral reception"; "Comments related to written reception"; "Perceptions of improvement in communicative abilities (overall)"; "Perceptions of the impact of DLGs on their communicative performance"; "Other relevant comments".

55

The research project received the approval of the Ethics Committee of the Universidad de Alcalá. Prior to commencing the study, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, its primary objectives and the voluntary nature of their participation. They were also assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time and that their data would be anonymised, and they all signed a consent form that allowed the researchers to use the information provided for research purposes.

5. Results

This section presents the results under each of the research questions. For this purpose, data obtained from the five data-collection tools used in the research is offered.

RQ1: Do DLGs have an impact on EFL undergraduates' receptive skills?

Students completed two standardised B2 reading and listening tests extracted from Cambridge Exams free samples. The purpose was to measure the extent to which DLGs influenced their receptive skills in English. The following are the results obtained by students in the experimental group in the subject English I (Table 2), where they were implemented, both in the mid-term and final exams in oral and written reception tasks:

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Oral reception, mid-term	39	.00	10.00	5.4654	2.72851
Oral reception, final	39	.80	10.00	6.7603	2.52368
Written reception, mid-term	39	1.00	10.00	6.5487	2.36408
Written reception, final	39	2.20	9.50	7.8282	1.48978

Table 2. Results of mid-term and final exams for receptive skills

As shown in Table 2, the average obtained in oral reception in the middle of the course is 5.47 out of 10, rising to 6.76 at the conclusion of the semester. In the case of written reception, students obtained an average mark of 6.55 in the middle of the course, which rose to 7.83 at the end of the semester. To determine whether the improvements in the results obtained were statistically significant, two t-tests for related samples were conducted: one to compare the means in the mid-term versus the final test scores, and the other to calculate the statistical significance (Tables 3 and 4).

Paired samples t-test

		Related differences			
		Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error mean	95% confidence interval
Pair 1	Oral reception, mid-term - Oral reception, final	-1.29487	2.03465	.32581	-1.95443
Pair 2	Written reception, mid-term - Written reception, final	-1.27949	1.68198	.26933	-1.82472

Table 3. T-tests: means in the mid-term vs. the final tests (experimental group)

Paired samples t-test

		Related differences	t	df	Sig
		95% confidence interval of the difference Upper			(2-tailed)
Pair 1	Oral reception, mid-term - Oral reception, final	-.63531	-3.974	38	.000
Pair 2	Written reception, mid-term - Written reception, final	-.73425	-4.751	38	.000

Table 4. T-tests: statistical significance (mid-term vs. final test) (experimental group)

In both instances, the differences between the means are statistically relevant, with a p-value <0.001. Consequently, the results demonstrate a significant improvement in the students' grades from the mid-term to the end of the term.

As a control group, the results obtained in the listening and reading tests were compared with students (N = 34) who completed the subject the following academic year (2023-2024) (Table 5). For both listening and reading, the experimental group shows a greater improvement than the control group (+1.3). The p-value obtained is 0.095; although not statistically significant, this difference may be considered marginally significant at the 0.10 level, indicating a potential positive effect of the pedagogical intervention. These results must be taken with caution, as the samples are small.

	Oral reception, mid-term	Oral reception, end-term	Written reception, mid-term	Written reception, end-term	Diff. oral reception	Diff. written reception
Experimental group	5.4	6.7	6.5	7.8	+1.3	+1.3
Control group	6.3	6.8	6.4	7.3	+0.5	+0.9

Table 5. Average and average differences: experimental vs. control group

57

RQ2: What are undergraduates' perceptions of the contribution of DLGs to their EFL learning and, in particular, to their receptive skills?

Quantitative analysis of the results of the mid-term and the end-term exams shows that 94.87% of the participants improved in oral reception (37 students), and 79.48% obtained higher marks in written reception (31 students). In addition, the participants' perception of the contribution of DLGs to their learning was measured through other quantitative and qualitative data.

A relevant item in the pre- and post-intervention questionnaire provides information on students' performance in reading literature. Table 6 shows the answers to the question, "If you read literature in English, why do you do it? Choose the strongest reason".

Answers	Pre-questionnaire	Post-questionnaire
For pleasure	20 = 51.28%	14 = 35.89%
To improve my vocabulary and reading skills	9 = 23.07%	17 = 43.59 %
Because it is an assignment	3 = 7.69%	3 = 7.69%
No answer	7 = 17.95 %	5 = 12.82%

Table 6. Reasons provided for reading literature in English (pre- and post- measures)

As Table 6 shows, before the experience, students read in English “for pleasure”. However, after being engaged with DLGs, the majority identified “To improve my vocabulary and reading skills” as their primary reason for reading literature in English. This change, which at first may not seem substantial, reveals deeper insights into their perception of how reading in a foreign language and practising reading through DLGs contributes to the improvement of their lexical range and written receptive skills.

Also in the general information section, students were asked about their reading habits in English and then, in the post-questionnaire, after having experienced DLGs, how many books they planned to read throughout the year. Results show that all the students are now planning to read books in English along the year (Table 7). Also, we found an increase in the number of students who plan to read 1-4 (+1) and 5-10 books (+5). This may indicate a positive effect of DLGs in fostering reading habits in the FL, which may ultimately lead to an improvement in their written receptive skills.

58

	Number of students (pre-)	Number of students (post-)
0 books	8	0
1-4	25	26
5-10	5	10
10-20	2	2
+20	0	0

Table 7. Students’ reading habits in English before and after the pedagogical intervention

Regarding the items participants had to rate, an increase was observed in all of them except in item 4, “Reading literature in English is easy and doesn’t take much effort”, with a slight decrease of 0.23 (Table 8). This result may indicate that students recognise the challenges and intricacies of reading literary texts. Regarding the other items, students recognise the role of literary texts in the EFL classroom (items 1 and 2), even when they are not yet advanced learners. Also, they value the role of reading and discussing literary texts as an activity which will impact their communicative abilities (items 3 and 5).

The Impact of Dialogic Literary Gatherings

	Pre-mean	Pre-std. dev	Post-mean	Post std. Dev	Mean diff.
1. I love the idea of working with literary texts in the classroom.	7.18	2.26	7.47	1.797	0.29
2. I think literature in English can be used even if you are not an advanced language learner.	6.68	2.19	6.82	2.19	0.14
3. I think that reading and discussing literature is an important activity in the classroom.	6.79	2.2	7.05	1.9	0.26
4. Reading literature in English is easy and doesn't take much effort.	6.73	2.2	6.5	2.1	-0.23
5. Literary language is useful for everyday communication.	7.13	2.3	7.21	2	0.08

Table 8. Students' perceptions of the use of literary texts in the classroom before and after the DLGs

A paired t-test was used to compare the means before and after the intervention to determine whether there was significant difference between them (Table 9). Significant positive changes were observed in the importance of reading literature in English as a classroom activity reported by students ($t(37)=3.832$, $p=0.000$). This may indicate that the intervention was particularly helpful in highlighting the use of literary texts in English language learning classes.

59

	Mean difference	t	df	p-value
1. I love the idea of working with literary texts in the classroom.	-0.289	-1.026	37	0.311
2. I think literature in English can be used even if you are not an advanced language learner.	-0.132	-0.354	37	0.725
3. I think that reading and discussing literature is an important activity in the classroom.	0.816	3.832	37	0.000
4. Reading literature in English is easy and doesn't take much effort.	0.162	0.513	36	0.611
5. Literary language is useful for everyday communication.	-0.368	-1.132	37	0.265

Table 9. Paired t-tests. Students' perceptions of the use of literary texts in the classroom (Likert-scale questionnaire)

In addition to these quantitative data, the videoblogs created by the participants provide valuable qualitative information about the influence DLGs have had on the development of their receptive skills in English. Twelve students commented on how they reflected on the ideas they wanted to share in the following DLG while reading the assigned texts. Also, they reported having read the texts in English more carefully (18 students) and having enjoyed the reading and at the

same time experiencing it in a very different way from what they were used to in high school (13 students). In a similar vein, in the focus groups they referred to the experience as something “innovative” and “totally different” from the “boring” and “demotivating” way of reading literature they had experienced as English learners before.

Along similar lines, several participants in the focus groups noted how the process of sharing the reading had enhanced their comprehension of the themes presented in the book. Through active listening to others’ contributions, participants were not only encouraged to critically engage with perspectives that contrasted with their own understandings, but also to refine their own interpretations. Consequently, their engagement in the DLGs also played a key role in enhancing their oral receptive skills, as it required them to process and evaluate information in real time, fostering both comprehension and a deeper cognitive assessment of others’ ideas. Therefore, students demonstrated an evolution in their communicative and language abilities in EFL, and a development in their use of HOTS, which enable them to analyse and evaluate their reading experiences.

60

Regarding their attitudes, students were at first somehow reticent and found it difficult to participate in the discussion. This may be explained because, as participants commented on in the focus groups, they had not experienced DLGs before. In addition, students were not familiar with the use of literary texts, as they stated when rating the statement, “While I was learning English at school and high school, we worked with a good number of literary texts” before the intervention. On a 10-point Likert scale, only one participant (1.95%) scored 10, and just eight of them (20.51%) agreed with the statement with more than five points. However, as they became used to DLGs, they were more participative: throughout the first weeks, just 5 or 6 students participated actively while the rest just listened and nodded, showing understanding. In contrast, in the last weeks, students were more autonomous: they led discussions, organised turn-taking and interacted freely without expecting the teacher to guide them. Also, there was much more interaction, with nearly all students participating except for two or three students, who continued to refrain from participating, likely due to either a lower level of English proficiency or affective factors, such as extreme shyness.

Another influencing aspect is that participants were first-year university students. Even though the teachers had worked with some classroom dynamics and activities to make the group homogeneous and create a suitable environment prior to working with the DLGs, it took time until most students felt comfortable in the group. The fear of feeling judged and of the possibility of being criticised by

their peers were the two main reasons given by students in their videoblogs as to their low degree of participation. Despite this, as the course progressed, we could notice how the environment created during the DLGs gave way to a much more cohesive group, as expressed by participants: “It has helped us to get to know each other better as people, because we listened to each other’s opinions” (22-23_E1B_15); “Above all, it brings closer ties within the group” (22-23_E1B_7). Similarly, at the end of the course, students also said they had felt safe to express themselves and talk about both their ideas and feelings during the DLGs: “It has been an environment in which to speak freely and express emotions” (22-23_E1B_18); “The atmosphere of sharing the reading has increased my motivation to be part of the activity” (22-23_E1B_7); “I liked having the freedom to express my opinion and not feeling judged even when I shared my crazy theories” (22-23_E1B_5); “There’s been a good feeling among us, you could say anything without any problem, and this is the first time this has happened to me” (22-23_E1B_13).

RQ3: What are university teachers’ perceptions of the contribution of DLGs to their students’ EFL learning and, in particular, to their receptive skills?

Concerning evolution, information about teachers’ perceptions was obtained from their observation diaries. The teachers recorded their perceptions of the impact of DLGs on students’ receptive skills. However, while analysing their reports, other categories emerged, which comprise the following areas: participation and motivation, and students’ perception of literature as a learning resource.

Their perceptions were positive and were generally related to the level of engagement of students with the activity, and how they were eager to read and listen to their students, as proved by comments such as, “When I entered the classroom, all the students had already prepared the U-shape layout and were holding their books, ready to share” (22-23_T1). Comments on engagement appeared in entries written in the first two weeks but can also be found in the last entries of both teachers, hinting at a sustained positive effect of DLGs: “The passion and engagement of some of the students was clearly contagious. More and more classmates engaged in reading just because they observed the enthusiasm of their peers” (22-23_T1); “One student proposed reading the second book of the trilogy together. I was surprised because a group of them volunteered to create a reading club and invited me to join” (22-23_T2).

Teachers also perceived that students valued the role of literature in the classroom. This can be found in 15 entries throughout the experience. Also, they reported being surprised by students’ proactive behaviour to initiate new shared reading activities: “We had already finished the DLG, and a group of students commented

on how they enjoyed the experience, and how different it was from their past experiences with literature. They said that DLGs had been an eye-opener for them” (22-23_T1).

We can find instances where teachers deal with the experience of having students act as moderators. It seems that students were reluctant to take on this role but, when they did, the experience was more fruitful. This is reported by both teachers in different comments from week 5 until the end of the experience. “Today a student volunteered to become the moderator. I noticed more students were participating this time, and they were more relaxed and confident when they were invited to share their perspectives. Also, one student told me that she liked when I was participating as a reader, rather than as a teacher. I found this interesting, as DLGs seem to create a different power relationship with students” (22-23_T1).

Researchers perceive this experience as positive for the development of students’ receptive skills in English. When observing their work, most of the students had read the indicated fragment before class, some of them even had notes stuck on the pages or had sentences underlined in different colours containing ideas that they wanted to share in class. In addition, the atmosphere created during the exchange of opinions and the sharing of ideas and interpretations was characterised by respect for each other and for each speaker’s turn, thus following the guidelines of DLGs provided at the beginning of the subject. This was supported by careful attention to each participant’s comments, to be able to agree, disagree or otherwise react to the ideas of their peers. Because of all this, we can say that all the previous work and the development of the debates in class, together with other strategies, helped develop students’ receptive skills. Their comments in class indicated an understanding of the ideas in the text and, at the same time, the responses they gave to their peers were coherent with what they had explained, demonstrating they had adequately understood what their interlocutor was saying.

6. Discussion

This study aimed to determine the extent to which DLGs have an impact on students’ receptive skills in English in a higher education EFL context as well as to ascertain both students’ and teachers’ perceptions of the contribution of DLGs to the development of receptive skills. Our findings indicate that DLGs may positively affect students’ development of receptive skills. Although our sample is small, and these results need to be taken cautiously, our outcomes are consistent with the findings by Camús Ferri et al. (2019), who also reported substantial improvements in reading and speaking abilities in higher education after DLGs were implemented.

The improvement of students' written receptive skills is not solely reflected in their exam performance, as in the focus groups students also recognised DLGs had increased their motivation to engage with literary works in English in their original form. Several students described this activity as new and challenging; hence, we can assert that the DLGs fostered academic growth and encouraged a sustained interest in reading and discussing literary texts in English.

Another particularly relevant finding is the change in students' perception of the reading process. Participants had traditionally experienced reading as an individual activity. However, and in the light of our pedagogical intervention, this perception has evolved and, in line with what Lozano et al. (2019) claimed in their study on the use of DLGs in higher education, students now recognise the value of sharing their opinions and interpretations of a text in a supportive classroom atmosphere guided by care and respect, where they can feel free to share their ideas without feeling judged. Hence, this shift to a dialogic learning environment enhances the reading experience and encourages them to be more open to discussion, critical thinking and collaborative learning. The development of these competences is in line with the idea of the foreign language learners as social agents, as put forward by the CEFRL (Council of Europe 2020).

63

Higher education EFL students' improvement of their receptive skills is also identified in the results of the exams and in the discussions. Obviously, during the course, students were exposed to other learning strategies that may have helped them improve; however, when it comes to their perceptions, they acknowledged having practised active listening during the DLGs. According to them, listening carefully to what other classmates said helped them sharpen their ability to understand spoken English. The teachers noticed improvements in most of the students' abilities to understand complex ideas, comprehend different perspectives and extract key points from their classmates' input, which contributed to developing students' confidence in their receptive skills.

There are other positive outcomes derived from the implementation of DLGs. The first one is that these favourable experiences with literature in English influenced students' view of literary texts as educational resources, increasing their value as learning opportunities for professional and personal development, in line with previous results (Fernández-Fernández and López-Fuentes 2024). Our findings also suggest that learning in an interactive atmosphere can be beneficial to the learning process as a whole, as indicated by Mercer et al. (2016). In this context, the teacher is no longer 'the sage on the stage' and plays the role of a learning facilitator, observing students' individual needs and catering to those throughout the learning process. Dialogic practices, in particular, play a crucial role in

enhancing students' responsibility for their own learning. Finally, DLGs require more complex language and cognition, as highlighted by Fernández-Ortute et al. (2021), opening more opportunities for rich communication in the EFL higher education classroom.

7. Conclusions

The present study attempted to shed light on the use of DLGs in an EFL context in higher education. Our interest was to find out whether the use of this pedagogical practice had any effect on students' reception skills in English. Based on the comprehensive evaluation of students' performance, our results demonstrate a statistically significant improvement in students' communicative abilities in reception at the end of the intervention. Also, their perceptions about the use of literature as an educational resource in an EFL context improved, as students stated that literature can help them develop a better command of English and that they value the use of literary texts as a class activity. Moreover, the student participants found the experience of shared reading rewarding and enjoyable and claimed to have learned new perspectives on the reading experience thanks to their classmates' interventions. Finally, the use of DLGs also seems to have a positive effect on students' motivation to read in English, as they planned to read more books after the intervention in comparison with the number originally intended.

Although the study has produced promising results, it needs to be acknowledged that it was carried out in a particular context with a modest number of students. It is necessary to do more research with EFL university students to ascertain whether this pedagogical practice shows similar results. Also, it would be interesting to measure its impact on other modes of communication, such as production, interaction and mediation. Another area of potential research is that of discourse analysis, as sessions can be recorded and transcribed to obtain information about the type of exchanges DLGs promote and how these can have pedagogical value. Furthermore, we encourage teachers and researchers of other additional languages, or even those who are working in translanguaging or plurilingual contexts, to use DLGs, as to compare results when other languages and cultures come into play. Finally, the positive results obtained in this piece of research underscore the learning benefits of collaborative and reflective practices in foreign language learning, as they support learning and empower students to be responsible for their own learning process together with their peers.

Author Contributions

In the present paper, both authors were equally involved in all the steps of the process. They actively participated in study planning, data collection, qualitative and quantitative analysis, manuscript writing and revision of the final version of the paper.

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Appendix 1

Dialogic Talks - Questionnaire

Este cuestionario está dirigido al alumnado matriculado en las asignaturas Inglés I del Grado en Lenguas Modernas y Traducción, perteneciente a Universidad de Alcalá. El objetivo de este cuestionario es recoger datos para el proyecto de innovación “Evaluación de la puesta en práctica de tertulias dialógicas en contextos de aprendizaje de inglés como lengua extranjera en Educación Superior”. Cumplimentarlo no le llevará más de 10 minutos, y la información que nos proporcionará es de vital importancia para nuestro trabajo que, más adelante, esperamos, podrá contribuir a mejorar la formación de nuestros estudiantes. ¡Muchas gracias por su colaboración!

He sido informado/a de mi participación en la investigación y doy mi consentimiento.

1. Your full name:
2. Date:
3. What year were you born?
4. What is your level of English?
5. How many literature books IN YOUR MOTHER TONGUE do you think you will read in 2023?
6. How many literature books IN ENGLISH do you think you will read in 2023?
7. Would you like to read more in English? If so, why don't you do it? Choose the strongest reason, in your view.
8. If you read literature in English, why do you do it? Choose the strongest reason.
 - For pleasure
 - To improve my vocabulary and reading skills
 - Because it is an assignment
 - Others:
9. While you were learning English at school and high school, did you work with literary texts? (Rate your level of agreement from 1 to 10)

Rate the following sentences from 1 to 10 according to your level of agreement:

1. I love the idea of working with literary texts in the classroom.
2. I think literature in English can be used even if you are not an advanced language learner.

3. I think that reading and discussing literature is an important activity in the classroom.
4. Reading literature in English is easy and doesn't take me much effort.
5. Literary language is useful for everyday communication.

Would you like to comment anything else about the use of literary texts in the English classroom?