Beyond the 'Uh-Oh' Moment: Refusal Strategies in a Young EFL Learner's Extensive Reading Responses

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Abstract. Understanding refusal strategies utilized by young learners in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is essential for teachers to foster more effective interaction in the classroom. The present study explores how a young EFL learner applies refusal strategies when interacting during extensive reading (ER) activities. Data were collected through real-time observations, the learner's diaries, and a parent interview, and further analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed how the young EFL learner applied more direct refusals, influenced by the learner's developmental traits. Indirect refusals, which appeared mostly as avoidance, emerged frequently only during the initial ER sessions. Refusals, regardless, did not appear as frequent towards the end of ER sessions as the learner became comfortable and confident with the teacher's scaffolding. Considering the findings, the current study suggests future studies to investigate how refusal strategies are applied by young EFL learners in a larger group, which may be influenced by different developmental traits, learning situations, and language proficiencies, to further generalize the findings.

Keywords: Extensive Reading, Refusal Strategies, Young EFL Learner

Introduction

In language learning, refusals are more than just simple denials, which may imply different meanings. How learners say "no" can reveal their engagement, development, and interactional comfort, which may signal their confusion, hesitation, or autonomy.

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Young learners' responses specifically reflect their emotional states and evolving cognitive abilities.

When it comes to interacting during the teaching and learning process, refusals used may reflect both a teacher's and learners' pragmatic competence (Nuzulia & Agustina, 2022). This competence requires one's ability to modify the utilization of the grammatical forms and lexicon of a language or languages spoken to be appropriate in any situation considering its alignment with cultural and linguistic rules and to avoid communication failure (Al-Sallal, 2024; Stavans & Webman Shafran, 2018). Moreover, in the classroom, especially for learners, the use of refusals may indicate genuine difficulties in understanding specific materials taught, anxiety to participate, or even limited vocabulary (Al-Sallal, 2024; Nuzulia & Agustina, 2022). Yet, refusals may also act as a mask to hide learners' actual knowledge, which becomes ambiguous to address if the teacher fails to decode the meaning behind refusals that may be perceived as frustration (Fitriyah et al., 2020). It may serve as a subtle indicator of deeper learning dynamics. Thus, understanding these patterns not only enriches a view of learner behaviour but also acts as a guide in supporting and interpreting learners' engagement in reading-focused environments.

In a language learning activity that emphasizes producing pleasure, such as extensive reading (ER), refusals may still appear. ER practices actually seek light in promoting learners' positive attitudes towards the act of reading to further develop reading fluency to reading comprehension, which eventually helps learners to build love towards reading (R. Day & Bamford, 2002). It brings forward enjoyment by putting emphasis on no assessment being conducted afterward. If that is the case, enjoyment is heavily highlighted in this approach to the point that refusals can actually be reduced and even eliminated. Yet, as studies evolve throughout the years, a wide variety of assessments are then developed to further investigate potential skills and benefits developed from ER practices without deriving further from the essence of the approach. The problem then circles around how this assessment may be a means for refusal strategies. Even though refusals are not always negative, some perceive them as a downfall in language learning, as it may lead to no progress being made.

Seen as a valuable approach to developing language proficiency, EFL learners, especially younger ones, regardless, may struggle in expressing their understanding through responding to questions given in the ER. Refusal strategies then appear as a shield in facing this obstacle. Constructing meaning from English texts poses challenges for young learners, largely due to their holistic learning characteristics, which differ significantly from older learners (Mardasari, 2020). They need to interact with their surroundings by relying on their imagination and lively personality in order to have a better comprehension of what they learn (Brewster et al., 2007; Harmer, 2007; Mutiah et al., 2020). The short attention span that they possess may result in refusals to even continue to learn if they are exposed to boredom (Rhalmi, 2019). Aside from internal influence coming from their personalities, external influence, such as how they perceive their early social interactions with those around them, also contributes to the emergence of refusals (Mardasari, 2020; Rowe & Weisleder, 2025). Moreover, young learners are very strict towards things suited to their liking (Puspita, 2021). Refusal strategies such

as "I don't know" and even harsh "No" may appear instead of engaging the teacher's questions.

Several previous studies have unfolded the power of refusal strategies in EFL learning (Chen, 2020; Kasih, 2020; Qadi, 2021; Rusdi et al., 2022; Varışoğlu et al., 2023; Wijayanti, 2017). The results further revealed how refusal strategies commonly used were those with explanation, options offering, and conditions offering with most strategies received as indirect and reflected negative meaningful strategies (Rusdi et al., 2022; Varışoğlu et al., 2023; Wijayanti, 2017). Refusals most of the time appeared as an acceptance to the interlocutor for learners as an indication of cultural grooming (Kasih, 2020; Qadi, 2021). However, if compared to L1 learners, refusal strategies used by EFL learners may not completely be the result of a pragmatic transfer (Chen, 2020). With these results, refusal strategies tend to be seen as something that is avoided or marked as a mask for one to have a successful interaction in learning when in fact, those should be seen as a natural part of learning. Moreover, there is still a lack of studies addressing the use of refusal strategies by young EFL learners in their reading activity, especially in the context of ER practices. Thus, it becomes crucial to delve further into understanding how young EFL learners make use of refusal strategies the most, especially during reading activities using an approach that lures enjoyment such as ER, to encourage rather than discourage learners to be active in responding. The current study then was proposed to fill in the gap by exploring how refusal strategies were utilized to further help the learner respond to a teacher's question during ER activity. Based on the background of this study, this study investigates how a young EFL learner uses refusal strategies in responding to the teacher's questions during a reading activity.

Refusal Strategies and Young EFL Learners' Engagement

To this day, the act of refusing is considered hard to do and hard to face. Refusals are responses that are commonly used to respond negatively to the wishes and/or expectations of someone (Al-Eryani, 2007; Beebe et al., 1990; Hayati, 2024; Retnowaty, 2018). When it comes to refusing, messages transferred may threaten one's desired positive face as they may feel displeased from getting rejected for their questions, requests, or even offers (Brown, 2007; Hayati, 2024). Refusals tend to cause an issue when conversing, as what one intends to tell may be different from how it is perceived. For instance, the response coming out as "I don't know" multiple times from learners, despite previously displaying familiarity with the topic, may reflect either a lack of understanding or a preference for teacher validation before participation (Retnowaty, 2018). Moreover, how one uses and understands refusals may differ across languages and cultures (Al-Sallal, 2024; Retnowaty, 2018). Thus, many feel the need to strategize refusals by using appropriate forms in order to save their positive face. This is where refusal strategies come into consideration.

Refusal strategies are commonly divided based on how straightforward the responses are. Refusals tend to be portrayed as impolite, which are mostly avoided by speakers to be initiated (Dwiana et al., 2021; Susilowatia & Hambali, 2022). Beebe et al. (1990) classified them into two semantic formulas which are direct and indirect refusals. Direct refusals are the act of refusing as one is unwilling to answer and/or do something by saying no or using negative propositions (Félix-Brasdefer, 2006; Kathir, 2015; Rusdi et al., 2022). There are two kinds of direct

refusals, which are performative and nonperformative. Performative direct refusals refer to how one directly refuses by using the actual refusal (e.g. "I refuse") (Felix-Brasdefer, 2006; Retnowaty, 2018). Indirect refusals, on the other hand, are the act of refusing that utilizes phrases to implicitly give refusals as one does not want to upset the interlocutor (Felix-Brasdefer, 2006; Retnowaty, 2018; Rusdi, et al., 2022). There are 11 different kinds of indirect refusals such as; (1) reflecting regret; (2) requesting help; (3) serving reasons, excuses, and explanations; (4) giving alternatives; (5) accepting which functions as refusal; (6) giving promises; (7) stating principles; (8) stating philosophy; (9) criticizing the interlocutor; (10) reflecting self-defense; (11) reflecting avoidance (Retnowaty, 2018; Rusdi et al., 2022). Felix-Brasdefer (2006) added one more strategy, which is an adjunct strategy that is used when one wants to refuse in other styles by connecting the act of refusing to something that is preferred as more important and/or bigger. In this case, refusals may be reflected in a positive feeling as the explanation may contain sugarcoating, such as agreeing before refusing, signaling empathy, using pause fillers, and reflecting gratitude (Felix-Brasdefer, 2006; Hayati, 2024; Retnowaty, 2018).

When it comes to teaching English for young learners (EYL), how teachers engage their learners may or may not attract refusals, especially when English is taught as a foreign language. Teaching EFL to young learners is known to produce more benefits than harm (Cahyati & Madya, 2019; Nufus, 2018). As they are considered at their optimal age to learn and acquire a new language, young learners' skills and knowledge to maintain their language proficiency may stay for a longer term which eventually reduces the probability of failing in learning one (Cadierno & Eskildsen, 2018; Kusmaryati, 2020). Yet, this incredible factor may not restrict refusals from appearing. Many studies even revealed that young learners use more refusals than those older than them (Khasanah et al., 2021; Rusminto & Ariyani, 2022). Young learners of a lower age tend to use direct refusals compared to young learners of upper age who are more comfortable using indirect refusals (Rusminto & Ariyani, 2022). This is due to the differences in characteristics they develop throughout their ages. In learning a language, especially EFL, young learners possess the ability to understand basic concepts and prefer one option that suits their preferences over the other (Pustika, 2021). As they grow up, they may become more curious about their surroundings and understanding of the world around them. This development of engagement, regardless, may come to an end if things they learn do not meet their curiosity. Speech acts may have a more crucial role where refusal strategies become their number one weapon to face their dilemma and/or things that do not suit their liking (Khasanah et al., 2021). Thus, the two aspects, which are refusal strategies and young EFL learners' engagement come as an inseparable matter.

Refusal Strategies in Responses of Extensive Reading Practices

The act of refusing is popular to be done in productive skills which are writing and speaking skills. Many studies have analyzed refusal strategies utilized by learners to respond to others' requests reflected through an oral excerpt or writing (Al-Sallal, 2024; Haghighi et al., 2019; Khasanah et al., 2021; Qadi, 2021; Rusdi et al., 2022). Listening skills may also be integrated into responding and equipping refusal strategies afterward (Permataningtyas & Sembodo, 2018). When analyzing refusal strategies in reading, it may be hard to determine, as the act of

reading usually does not produce any open-ended responses. Reading activity is usually followed by reading comprehension questions, which contain options for learners to choose from or short answers based on what they read. In reading, learners usually have definite replies that may not contain any refusals, as the answer has been written clearly in the text in their course book (Riyanti & Rahmawati, 2021). Extensive reading (ER) is one of the reading approaches that may produce diverse answers as learners may tell the story back on their own or respond to questions referring to their arguments and/or opinions toward the text that they read as a follow-up assignment.

ER is a reading approach that lets learners explore their reading on their own with enjoyment based on their topic interests and language proficiency, with flexible time and place to do it (Day & Bamford, 2002). ER may be done supervised, where the supervisor accompanies the learners during the reading activity and guides them to answer questions afterward (Day, 2015). It may also be done independently, where the activity is not accompanied or instructed by anyone and relies heavily on their own motivation to develop their love of reading and the language (Day, 2015; Leung, 2002). To do one, Day and Bamford (2002) proposed the top 10 ER principles that may be equipped as guidelines for teachers to implement for their learners which are: 1) reading is done to comprehend the text as a whole; 2) reading is done as its own reward; 3) reading is done at a faster speed; 4) reading is done independently and in silence; 5) reading materials' selection is easy; 6) reading materials' selection has a wide range of topic; 7) reading is done with the guidance of teacher; 8) the teacher is set as a model of a reader; 9) reading materials are free to be selected based on learners' preferences; 10) reading is done as much as possible. These principles, regardless, act as a guide for ER practices rather than a strict rule to follow. A survey conducted by Day (2015), who reviewed 44 articles related to ER, discovered that many successful ER practices did not apply all 10 principles of ER. The survey further revealed that the most used one was 'learners are free to choose what they want to read', producing positive engagement towards ER. Aside from applying those principles, successful ER practices should also be properly supported by the government and school administration (Firda et al., 2018; Wulyani et al., 2022).

ER may have the top 10 principles of ER to guide teachers and learners throughout the reading process, yet these guidelines can be modified to suit one's condition. Several principles in ER may result in refusals, especially when it is implemented for young learners. Even though the nature of ER is to be conducted without any assignment to be done afterward, as it may disrupt the focus to develop enjoyment, a reading log or questions may be offered during and/or after the activity as a part of the overall ER practice (Lyutaya, 2011). Furthermore, ER could also be conducted through online platforms, such as XReading, that allow learners to interact with the text after reading (Harimurti et al., 2021). During this process, refusal strategies may appear. In one of the top 10 ER principles, it is stated that learners read individually and silently. However, this may be hard for young learners to do, which may result in refusals. If learners are still pushed to do so, reading that is supposedly done faster may be done slower as they are still struggling to read in a foreign language, which may lead to refusals resulting in demotivation (Leung, 2002; Park, 2020). The selection of reading materials also needs to be easy, with a wide range of topics. If the selection served does not meet

young learners' favor, learners may refuse to choose and further read one (Promluan & Sukying, 2021). Furthermore, as young learners are engaged in reading as much as possible to gain overall comprehension better when they are asked about their comprehension by teachers both in a writing prompt in the reading log or an oral question, they may refuse to answer. The reasons behind their refusals may circle around the fact that they do not like repetitions of obvious answers (Pinter, 2019) and they possess the characteristics of having definite meanings of what they like and do not like as well as (Puspita, 2021). For young learners with younger age, they may straightly employ direct refusals (Rusminto & Ariyani, 2022).

To sum up, a refusal is one of the speech acts that cannot be eliminated in daily conversation and/or activities. Even though refusals may be formed in three different strategies, young learners with younger age tend to do it directly considering the development of their traits at such a young age. Young learners in the upper level of age, nonetheless, prefer to use indirect refusals as they have learned to be more polite and realize differences in their surroundings. Refusal strategies, nonetheless, should not be seen as an obstacle but as fuel for a teacher to further support the learners in developing their learning process in any language skill learned.

Method

The current study used a qualitative case study to delve further into the in-depth process of how a young EFL learner utilizes refusal strategies in responding to a teacher's questions during ER activities. A case study was employed since the researchers aimed to investigate detailed considerations reflected by one in showcasing a profound phenomenon found in a real-life context that is developed over a period of time (Yin, 2008). In this case, refusal strategies used by the young EFL learner were investigated in terms of how it was reflected in their responses in contextual conditions in which ER was conducted. The result of a case study, regardless, may be subjective and cannot be generalized. However, the focus of a case study is to record what is considered important through one's lens in a certain circumstance, instead of obeying a strict ideological pledge in whatever circumstances emerge (Jones, 1994). To reduce such presumable pitfalls, such as potential biases, the researchers triangulated data sources by analysing observation transcripts, learner diaries, and a parent interview. Those were thematically analysed to identify patterns of refusal strategies, their triggers, and their development across sessions, and to enhance the credibility of the findings.

Research Participants

The present study recruited two participants to collect the data from in this study. The primary participant was an Indonesian young EFL learner named Nugraha (pseudonym), aged seven years old. He was in the first grade of primary school and actively learned English outside of school. His father was also recruited as a participant to be interviewed to further support the findings found from the observation and the diary construction done by Nugraha during the ER activities. The present study chose to recruit a young EFL learner as a primary participant due to the fact proven by several studies that a young learner is at an optimal age to develop skills in language learning which may further last longer than those starting later (Cadierno & Eskildsen, 2018; Cahyati & Madya, 2019; Jaskow &

Ellis, 2019). The role of his father here was also needed as the researchers could not interview Nugraha formally due to his personality as a young learner who has a short attention span and is more strict in defining what he likes and does not like (Rhalmi, 2019; Puspita, 2021) which may influence the interview results that may give a lack of information to complete the research. A primary single participant was considered enough to be recruited for this study as the researchers aimed to eliminate differences in each individual's language prior knowledge, topic interests, and language proficiency. Moreover, the limited time, funds, and resources to collect a wide range of English reading materials used in ER activities added more considerations to the decision to have only a single participant. This consideration has been carefully made to further obtain the best result in investigating the objectives of the study.

Data Collection

To address the research question set, the researchers obtained multiple data from real-time observations which were audio-recorded, a diary written by the learner, and an interview done with the learner's father. These data were taken previously to fulfill one of the researchers' research projects for her undergraduate thesis in 2022. Thus, the researchers in the present study utilized unused data gained from previous research by collecting transcripts of the audio-recorded observations, the diaries made by Nugraha, and the interview conducted with Nugraha's father. These data were preferred to be used due to their convenience and practicality in conducting this mini-research. Moreover, these data were not plagiarized and recycled in any way but used to investigate a different objective compared to the previous research which was in the area of investigating the learner's reading comprehension.

The observations were done in real time to directly investigate refusal strategies used by the learner orally. There were 10 ER sessions to observe so that the researchers could investigate how refusal strategies were made and how those were reduced or increased over time. The sessions were in a controlled, child-friendly environment, ensuring minimal distractions. When reaching the tenth ER meeting, the researchers met data saturation, which allowed for no more meetings to be conducted. A diary was utilized as another data collection method to analyze how the refusal strategies made were then reflected in the learner's work in accompanying his ER activities. All diary entries were taken into consideration to further investigate emerging refusals. These were done to achieve an in-depth look at how the learner progressed throughout the ER practices, specifically in using refusals. An interview with Nugraha's father was then conducted to ensure the consistency of the findings found both in the observations and in the diary-making process. Prior to these data collection methods, the researchers asked for the learner's parents' consent as the learner is still below the legal age set in Indonesia, which is 17. This is necessary to give information to the learner's parents about the impacts that might emerge both positively and negatively after the research and how the data collected would be further used and represented in this study. Ethical approval was also secured from the relevant institutional board. Moreover, to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of the research, the learner is referred to using a pseudonym.

Data Analysis

The data collected in the present study was analyzed using thematic analysis with the data analysis spiral guideline proposed by Creswell and Poth (2018). The utilization of this specific guideline was preferred as it helped researchers decode every data collected and maintain its coherence while also focusing on achieving the objective of the current study.
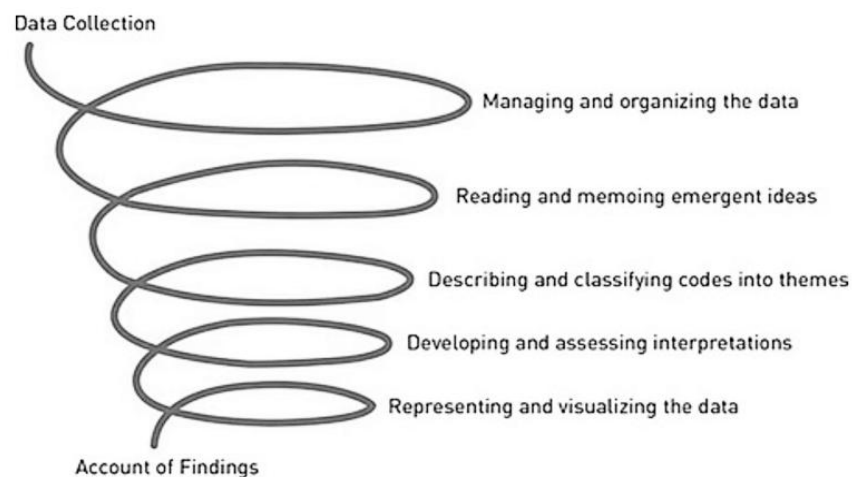
Figure 1. The Data Analysis Spiral Guideline (Creswell & Poth, 2018)

As the researchers had done the organizing and transcribing part of the data, the researchers directly moved to reading and memoing emerging ideas. As the initial transcripts had been highlighted and coded, the researchers copied and pasted several excerpts into a new document to specify them into ones that could be used to answer the research question addressed in this study. The researchers proceeded to do data reduction where they read and reread the transcripts several times to ensure that data compiled were sufficient to address the findings later. The researchers then developed the coding into three different labels which were direct refusals, indirect refusals, and adjunct refusals. Interpretations were further developed to investigate how the researcher came up with instructions which resulted in the use of one of the refusal strategies by Nugraha. The reasons behind the usage of the refusal strategies were also analyzed. Thus, the criteria for choosing suitable excerpts to be presented are ones that reflect instructions given by the researcher during ER activities, the learner responses reflecting refusal strategies, and follow-up responses both from the researcher and the learner after the refusals happened. A gloss is also provided when the Indonesian language is used both by the researcher and the participants as well as when the excerpts in English are broken or need rephrasing to make the meaning clearer.

Findings and Discussion

From the data analyzed, it was found that in responding to a teacher's question during ER activities, a young EFL learner used direct refusals more often with an adjunct to refusals coming in afterward in a few cases. This, regardless, may happen due to the traits that young learners possess. As mentioned previously,

young learners are at the stage where they introduce themselves to new things and learn to develop preferences. As a result, young learners tend to hate or love something and there is no in-between (Puspita, 2021). The younger the learners are, the more holistic they become (Brewster et al., 2007; Harmer, 2007; Mutiah et al., 2020). On the other hand, indirect refusals, interestingly, were not seen to be used as much as how older learners might use them as Nugraha progressed throughout the sessions from the first one up until the last one. Indirect refusals appeared more often at the beginning of the ER sessions when Nugraha was at the main ER activity which was reading the reading material. Most of the time, the type of indirect refusals used was avoidance. Nonetheless, when responding to a request direct refusals strike more frequently.

One of the top 10 ER principles proposed by Day and Bamford (2002) mentioned the teacher's role who supposedly should be a role model of a reader and should guide the learner's reading activity in ER. This principle is received quite negatively by Nugraha at the first and second ER sessions as he heavily relied on the teacher to the point that he refused to do things on his own. He only wanted to respond to a question and do something asked when he could do it together with the teacher. This might also be due to how he was still familiarizing himself with what he should do in ER sessions. Thus, indirect refusals, which was the avoidance type, were used quite often.

Table 1. Direct refusals from heavy reliance on the teacher
R (Researcher), N (Nugraha, the young learner)

Session	Subject	Transcription	Refusal Strategies
1	R	From the cover, can you guess what the story is going to be about?	Indirect refusals (Avoidance)
	N	I don't know.	
2	R	What do you think the story's going to be about?	Indirect refusals (Avoidance)
	N	I don't know.	
2	R	Do you think… which one do you think is the bad one? The character.	Indirect refusals (Avoidance)
	N	I don't know	

When it comes to doing ER, the nature of doing one is to do it silently and individually (Day & Bamford, 2002). However, this was a difficult request to do as Nugraha was still trying to read correctly in English. In Indonesia, the alphabet might look similar to English but those were actually pronounced differently. Nugraha might be fluent in reading in Bahasa Indonesia at that age but might not quite be the same in reading in English. If Nugraha was pushed to do it by himself and silently, it might decrease his motivation to read more resulting in direct refusals. Moreover, if doing so was continued, the focus would shift to fixing one's technicality in reading instead of gaining pleasure and better comprehension of what was read which derived further from the actual essence of ER (R. R. Day, 2015; Wagner, 2020; Yulia, 2018). When Nugraha was asked whether he wanted to read by himself or not in several first ER sessions, indirect refusals, which was the avoidance type, appeared. Even when the researcher had rephrased the question

by directly asking him or letting herself do the reading, he still could not decide and chose to do indirect refusals reflecting avoidance. The avoidance was sometimes followed by a statement of alternative. However, in some cases, when he was asked to do something on his own, especially in the post-ER activities, which was the diary-making activity, Nugraha tended to use direct refusals more often which were the nonperformative statement and negative willingness.

Table 2. Indirect and direct refusals from doing things independently
R (Researcher), N (Nugraha, the young learner)

Session	Subject	Transcription	Refusal Strategies
1	R	Do you want to read it by yourself or…	Indirect refusals (Avoidance and Statement of Alternative)
	N	I don't know…	
	R	Do you want to read it together?	
	N	Let's just (do it) together.	
1	R	Can you do it? Yes, you got it! Do you want to cut more?	Direct refusals (Nonperformative statement)
	N	No.	
2	R	Okay, what do you want to write in here and here?	Direct refusals (Negative willingness)
	N	It's your turn.	
3	R	Do you want me to read it?	Indirect refusals (Avoidance)
	N	I don't know…	

Direct refusals also appeared as a protest after Nugraha's indirect refusals were being doubted. When the researcher, who happened to be the teacher in the ER activities, asked Nugraha to do something in the post-ER activities, in the first two ER sessions, Nugraha indirectly refused to do it by using avoidance. The researcher tried to repeat the question several times or rephrase the question but Nugraha tended to refuse it again by giving direct refusals.

Table 3. Direct refusals as a follow-up from indirect refusals
R (Researcher), N (Nugraha, the young learner)

Session	Subject	Transcription	Refusal Strategies
1	R	What do you want me to write?	Indirect refusals (Avoidance and Let the interlocutor off the hook) and Direct refusals (Nonperformative statement)
	N	I don't know… Whatever you like.	
	R	It's up to you.	
	N	No.	
	R	It's your book.	
	N	No.	

Talking about indirect refusals, young learners tend to believe that they are in a safe zone by saying indirect refusals, especially the avoidance type (Chen, 2020; Khasanah et al., 2021). As young learners may not have the capability to decide just yet, they tend to hide behind the sentence "I don't know" and let the other choose for them. However, this avoidance may or may not reflect an answer.

Understanding the meaning that lies behind avoidance may come as tricky but is actually important. To come up with solutions, young learners should be asked an explicit question instead of asking to pick something out of the two. By doing so, saying "I don't know" will probably mean that they want the other thing to be chosen. Young learners may also add an excuse or self-defense when utilizing indirect refusals (Khasanah et al., 2021). For instance, Nugraha was asked to continue to write the diary but he was too used to doing it by taking turns with the researcher as he still heavily relied on the researcher. Thus, Nugraha used an excuse and sometimes self-defense in order to refuse the requests indirectly.

Table 4. Excuse and self-defense in indirect refusals as a follow-up from avoidance
R (Researcher), N (Nugraha, the young learner)

Session	Subject	Transcription	Refusal Strategies
3	R	That's great. I love Earth, what's next?	Indirect refusals (Avoidance and Excuse)
	N	I don't know. Your turn. I got to do something else.	
4	R	Okay, so which one from these three?	Indirect refusals (Avoidance and Self-defense)
	N	I don't know. You choose one now.	

Negative willingness, one of the examples of a nonperformative sentence in direct refusals appeared frequently in several ER sessions in the current study. Nugraha tended to refuse to answer questions that had been asked previously, even when the researcher rephrased the questions. This might come as a contrast with several previous studies as young learners tend to like to repeat what they learn so that they can memorize it much longer (Aaj et al., 2023; García Mayo & Imaz Agirre, 2016; Pinter, 2019) However, repetition might be preferred and more effective when young learners try to learn new vocabulary instead of showcasing comprehension. Young learners may perceive it as boring since they also have a short attention span that proficient others need to make use of the most (Aaj et al., 2023; Azkarai & Oliver, 2019). Young learners may also refuse to do something playfully by indirectly requesting help from proficient others.

Table 5. Direct and indirect refusals from repetitive questions given
R (Researcher), N (Nugraha, the young learner)

Session	Subject	Transcription	Refusal Strategies
1	R	So, what happens if there is no forest? Like, should we chop down the trees…	Direct refusals (Negative willingness)
	N	I already told you the answer.	
4	R	Oh wow, you're doing such a great job. One more.	Direct refusals (Negative willingness)
	N	It's your turn.	
	R	Your turn.	
	N	I (have) already done this.	

5	R	Okay, one more, okay?	Indirect refusals
	N	Why don't you pick? One last pick. Last but not least.	(Request for help)
6	R	What is reuse?	Direct refusals
	N	I already told you the answer.	(Negative willingness)

The refusals made, however, decreased over time as the learner felt more confident in doing things asked and/or answering questions given to him. Even though in most cases Nugraha would use direct refusals first, after being convinced by the researcher, Nugraha then accepted the request without any refusal made both directly and indirectly. This solely did not only happen because of the existence of proficient others (Vygotsky, 1978) How they may help young learners to read more and read faster due to the easy reading materials given and selected as mentioned in several principles of ER also comes as important (Day & Bamford, 2002). Nugraha could read together faster and more from what was targeted to be done in a day. Previously, the researcher planned to finish 10 ER sessions in six weeks with the first week being only the introduction to how the session was going to be. Each week was also targeted to have two meetings with one ER session per meeting. However, Nugraha could do two ER sessions in one meeting in a week which resulted in the ER sessions being conducted only for four weeks. Moreover, in each ER session, in the first four sessions, the whole ER sessions were done more than what was expected in terms of the time constraints which were around 30 to 40 minutes each. Yet, in the last six meetings, the time got way shorter which were around 20-30 minutes each, even shorter than what was expected. Nugaraha willingly wanted to continue the ER sessions and could even read four books in a day which was why the weeks got shortened into four. Compared to the first two weeks of four ER sessions, Nugraha seemed to doubt what he was doing and could barely do anything by himself resulting in a lot of refusals.

Table 6. A decrease in refusing throughout ER sessions
**R (Researcher), N (Nugraha, the young learner)**

Session	Subject	Transcription	Refusal Strategies
5	N	Okay, your turn. What is your color?	Direct refusals
	R	Oh, you do it all.	(Negative
	N	Okay.	willingness)
7	R	Do you want to read the title?	-
	N	The title? Okay.	
7	N	Your turn.	-
		You can do it!	
		Okay…	
8	R	And how did the solar panel work? Do you mind to tell it again?	Direct refusals (Nonperformative
	N	No (He meant yes as he actually wanted to reject the request).	sentence)
	R	Why?	
	N		

		Okay… the energy from the sun being sucked by the solar panel and being made to electricity. It's science.	
8	R	You still remember it, right?	Direct refusals (Nonperformative sentence) with Adjunct to refusals (Statement of positive opinion)
	N	No. I think you should write it first.	
	R	You can do it. I know.	
	N	Okay.	
9	R	Can you make a story from that, like from here to here to that to that? Or you just want to do it randomly?	-
	N	Story of course!	

The decrease in refusals used was also acknowledged by Nugraha's father. It was found that previously, Nugraha refused to read and preferred to watch something as he was more engaged in visual learning. His father, however, said that after the ER sessions, Nugraha started to ask questions on how to read a certain thing and did not refuse to read something when he was asked by his father. His parents engaged him to read not only stories both printed and digital but also authentic stuff he met every day such as road signs. The help from proficient others then proved to support him in increasing his love of reading to the point that he was willing to do it on his own.

> "He doesn't really talk about what we learn, but he starts to ask me about how to read this, in English, of course, and when he sees something in movie like, how is this read, daddy? Like how to spell world, some kind like that." (Meeting 4, Nugraha's father)

How refusal strategies kept on decreasing from one meeting to another was also reflected in the diary that Nugraha made. As presented previously, at the beginning of the meeting, he did not have the confidence to do anything in the ER activities by himself and he then refused to do things on his own. The diary-making was then needed to be done with the help of the researcher. However, as the meetings progressed, Nugraha could finally manage to do the diary by himself. He even managed to make full and long sentences reflecting his comprehension with his own willingness compared to the first meeting where he only copied a short phrase he found from the book.
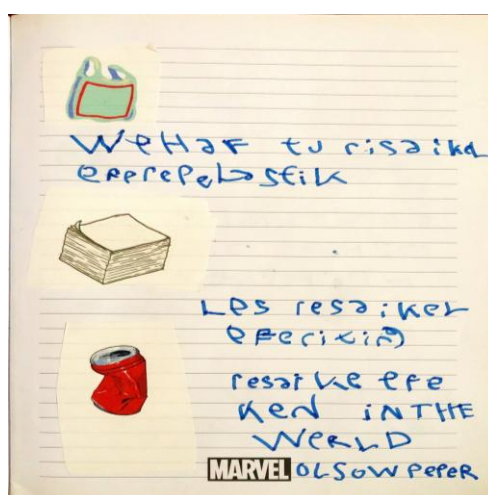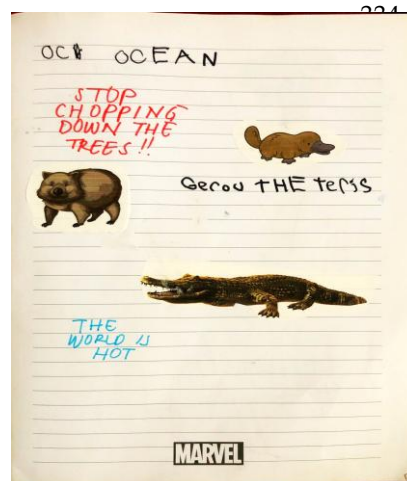
Figure 2. The Decrease in Refusals in Diary-Making

As seen in the previous tables and an excerpt from the interview, Nugraha built his confidence and could finally choose between the two options offered. Refusals rarely appeared directly without adjuncts and indirect refusals did not appear at all, especially in three last ER sessions. The researcher had successfully scaffolded Nugraha throughout the ER activities by taking notes of instructions that Nugraha tended to refuse resulting in failed communication and/or understanding of what Nugraha really meant. In this case, the young learner in the current study used more direct refusals when he was asked to do something in the diary-making activities. He also used it for refusing to do things that he was asked to do it again. Repetition was something that Nugraha felt uncomfortable with as he did not perceive it as how it was done to check back on his comprehension but rather as how the researcher doubted his answer. Indirect refusals also appeared even though their appearance did not show up as frequently compared to the direct ones. Indirect refusals tended to be used by Nugraha as a shield for him to avoid answering questions that had too obvious answers, he did not know the answer to, or he did not know which one to choose. These findings further highlight the need for teachers to adapt questioning strategies to minimize resistance and support engagement. Despite how young learners are often perceived to need more repetition throughout their language learning, their level of proficiency should be taken into account first to avoid overly repetitive questions or binary choices and maximize open-ended prompts or indirect scaffolding. Modelling enthusiastic

reading behaviour and integrating learner interests into material selection can also mitigate refusals. Recognizing the pragmatic intent behind refusals, such as avoidance, self-defence, or negative willingness, can help teachers respond constructively and supportively.

Conclusion

The present study has unfolded how a young EFL learner used refusal strategies in responding to a teacher's questions during ER activities. It was found that the young learner tended to use direct refusals more often compared to indirect refusals and adjuncts to refusals. Young learners with younger age possess strict rules in defining what they like and how they express their lively and imaginative selves. Indirect refusals are used when they have felt comfortable with their surroundings which are in line with findings from several previous studies mentioned in the previous section. However, instead of worrying about why young learners do certain refusals, teachers should further investigate the instructions used, resulting in those refusals. In the current study, the researcher used a lot of repetitive questions to check back on the learner's comprehension and make sure that the learner was still paying attention. The questions also contained requests for the learner to choose between the two options given. These requests were aimed at gaining a more learner-centered approach during the ER activities. However, the young learner received it differently as he received the questions as boring or as a way for the researcher to doubt his answers, leading to a decrease in his motivation to keep on reading. Based on these findings, teachers need to observe and interpret young learners' refusal strategies not as disciplinary issues or disengagement, but as communicative cues that warrant responsive teaching. Teachers should also minimize repetitive questioning, allow flexible response formats, and offer choices aligned with learners' interests. Integrating more collaborative activities during ER, particularly in early sessions, can gradually shift learners toward independence and sustained engagement. This study, regardless, came not without limitations. As there was only a single participant employed, it was hard to generalize the result and compare how it might be with different learners, considering different traits they have. Future research may examine a wider participant group to explore variations in refusal strategies across different learners' profiles and contexts.

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