

# Teaching Reading with an Interactive Approach: Using Dialogue Journals as a Practice

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This study investigated the effect of teaching reading with an interactive approach on comprehension achievement of Korean university students. Over a ten-week period, students in two experimental sections wrote dialogue journals as a practice for the interactive approach, and their progress was compared with the progress of students in two control sections who answered comprehension questions as a practice for a transmission model. Results from the data analysis showed that writing dialogue journals improved students' comprehension achievement more than answering comprehension questions, supporting adoption of the interactive approach in EFL reading courses. Supplementarily, involved students' major fields of study each had a noticeable effect on their reading comprehension, and that was statistically significant. Limitations and implications of the study were mentioned.

**Keywords:** [an interactive approach to reading/a transmission model of reading/dialogue journal writing/reading comprehension achievement/  
상호적 독해 접근법/독해의 전수 모형/다이얼로그 저널 쓰기/독해력 성취]

## 1. Introduction

This study investigated the effect of teaching reading with an interactive approach on students' comprehension achievement in a

Korean university. In Korean universities, they have given English reading instruction to their first-year students as a required course. In many classes, instructors have customarily followed "a transmission model of reading" (Zamel, 1992, p. 463) with answering comprehension questions as a practice. As a result, many students have had a passive stance in reading in English, and their comprehension ability has turned out not to be satisfactory enough. So, the current researcher has thought of enforcing an interactive approach to reading with writing dialogue journals as a practice. The researcher has had an expectation that reading instruction with this mode might probably and possibly relieve their problem. The expectation was based on the positive results from some first language studies (Gross, 1991; Walworth, 1990; Wells, 1993; Wolter, 1986), which investigated the effectiveness of the interactive approach with using dialogue journals. However, before enforcement, the researcher decided to conduct an experiment in a university with those two reading modes: an interactive approach and a transmission model. The reason was to see whether the expectation would be realized in a Korean EFL environment.

The research question in the current study was as follows:

Do EFL college freshmen in Korea, who write dialogue journals about their reading content for an interactive approach to reading, improve their comprehension ability, as measured objectively with pretreatment and posttreatment scores on TOEFL reading comprehension section, more than do similar students who answer comprehension questions about the same content for a transmission model of reading?

## **2. Review of Related Literature**

This section discusses, in turn, a transmission model of reading,

an interactive approach to reading, and previous studies related to the current study.

## 2.1 A Transmission Model of Reading

Tierney (1992) discusses that there are two models for reading: a traditional one and a new one. According to him, the traditional model views that reading is receiving, which involves translation of an authors' message and understanding it. Therefore, teaching reading has continued to reflect "a transmission model of reading" (Zamel, 1992, p. 463), which assumes that ideas reside in a text and are transmitted by the text. And those ideas are the ones which all readers can agree upon. Accordingly, the teaching has focused on fostering students' ability to identify and retrieve a set of ideas in a text. And that has led them to rely absolutely on the text for meaning. This aspect is most evident with comprehension questions of display- or test type at the end of each given reading in many of the current texts. And those questions call upon the students to give predetermined answers rather than their interpretations of the reading. Therefore, it is a natural result that those students come to believe "reading is the attempt to memorize a text which someone else selects so that you can reproduce factual information when questioned" (Shannon, 1989, p. 96). The viewpoint and teaching practice of reading were dominant in the U.S. contexts of language education in the 1970s. And English reading instruction in many Korean universities has followed them until recently.

## 2.2 An Interactive Approach to Reading

However, thereafter, the traditional model has been challenged in the U.S. and elsewhere, in Britain, Australia, and New

Zealand, for examples, and a new model has emerged in the 1990s. Scholars (Stotsky, 1983; Tierney, 1992; Tierney & Shanahan, 1991) claim that not only writing but reading are also generative cognitive processes, which involves interaction among participants as communicators. Consequently, teaching reading has needed to reflect the research efforts of some scholars (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1987; Clarke & Silberstein, 1987; Langer, 1990; Marshall, 1987; Rigg, 1991) that reading is an interaction between the language on pages and the purposes, expectations, and prior knowledge of readers. More specifically, as Palinscar and Brown (1984), Walker (1989), and Walworth (1990) claim, readers continuously perform the following four aspects to construct meaning while they are reading:

- They coordinate personal knowledge and textual information such as pictures, the letters in words, headings, and the structure of sentences to interpret the author's meaning. Regarding this aspect, Carrell and Eisterhold (1987), Clarke and Silberstein (1987), Fountas and Hannigan (1989) and Kenneth Goodman (1991) describe reading as a selective process involving the use of one's language cueing systems—the phonographemic, semantic, and syntactic—calling this process a psycholinguistic guessing game.
- They elaborate meaning and strategies such as prediction, selection, confirmation and self-correction by using their prior knowledge, that is, they make connections that help them remember and interpret what and how they are reading.
- They check (monitor) their understanding to see if it makes sense and revise their reading strategies when necessary according to their purposes for reading.
- They use the situational context to focus their purposes and frame their attitude toward the particular reading.

In this way, readers construct meaning based on a whole range of cognitive and sociolinguistic factors including the meaning of individual words, and reading becomes a simultaneous top-down and bottom-up process influenced by the reader and the text itself. Accordingly, the teaching has focused on developing students' ability to compose their own meaning within a text. And that has led them to negotiate between the text and themselves for the meaning. This aspect is most evident with pre-, during-, and post-reading questions in some newly developed texts. And those questions call upon the students to use their background knowledge of the given reading, reading skills and strategies, or their ability of applying knowledge from the reading to real world matters. Then, it can be a development of teaching practices for this newer model, an interactive approach, to have students write dialogue journals about their reading content. Why is this so? Prior to reading, the students can write their prior knowledge and expectations of the content and their purposes for reading. And during and/or after reading, they can write their response to the content and then revise it.

## 2.3 Previous Studies

### 2.3.1 Dialogue Journals

Dialogue journals are defined as the use of journals to carry out written conversation between two persons. In school settings, they are regularly written between a student and a teacher for a semester or a school year. Students are required to write in their journal entries a minimum of three sentences each time but, beyond that, they are free to decide what to write, when to write, and how much to write. So, the journal entries are written about student-chosen topics on academic and/or personal concerns, and each entry is responded communicatively. When written and responded, those entries are focused on meaning, typically in an

informal language.

Also, with elaboration on a topic, there is a continuous interaction between a student and the teacher for some time. Here, as Staton (1987) argues, an individual tutorial relationship can be created: The teacher stretches the student's thinking and language skills by asking him/her to consider other ideas and by using language slightly beyond his/her level of proficiency.

Lastly, the journal entries are neither evaluated nor corrected in grammatical points and mechanics.

### 2.3.2 Previous Studies with Dialogue Journals

Gross (1991) examined, at one traditional school over one quarter of a school year, how traditional methods of teaching literature were replaced by more interactive approaches to a text. Data was collected from two teachers and four English classes of intermediate-level eighth and ninth grade, involving over 100 students. He adopted mainly a qualitative case study combined with a quantitative study. Qualitative data included field notes, chart of lesson structures, dialogue journal entries, and individual student interviews. Quantitative data included surveys, teacher tests, student work samples, and gradebook records of student scores. The findings were that student grades increased remarkably with the replacement.

Wells (1993) studied the dialogue journals, in response to reading literature, of eight students at grade eight over one school year. She concluded that dialogue journals contributed to students' reading development, based on their metacognitive responses, connections between what they knew and what they learned while reading, and evaluation of text and author. Her study suggests informally that dialogue journals may contribute to reading comprehension.

Walworth (1990) used dialogue journals as a teaching tool in her literature classes for deaf college preparatory and

freshman-level students. Through examples, she claimed that the students developed their reading ability by heightening the skill of integrating their background knowledge with the given texts, and the skills of interpretation and inference, by participating in a written dialogue with her.

Most interestingly, from the perspective of the current study, Wolter (1986) reported a true experiment with dialogue journals, done as a Masters thesis, involving 77 students at grades seven and eight over a five-month period. The students were assigned to experimental and control groups. Students in the experimental group wrote dialogue journal entries based on their reading; students in the control group completed workbook pages or skillsheets. Students in the experimental group showed greater improvements in reading ability based on the standard score on reading comprehension pre-/posttest, percentile on reading comprehension pre-/posttest, Iowa Test of Basic Skills and Cognitive Abilities Test, statistically significant at  $p < .01$ . The Wolter study is important as a true experiment, and it suggests that writing dialogue journals may lead to measurable gains in reading ability.

Those L1 studies, based on data from actual classrooms, support the effectiveness of teaching reading with an interactive approach, for which dialogue journals are used as a practice. They raise one question to be explored in this study: Can those positive results be extended to EFL settings?

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Design and Hypothesis**

For the study, an experiment was conducted on the effectiveness

of an interactive approach, using dialogue journals as a focus, with Korean university students. Four reading classes of freshman English were involved in the experiment. Students in two experimental groups wrote dialogue journals, and their progress on reading comprehension was compared with the progress on the same variable of students in two control groups who answered comprehension questions. To know the effect of each treatment on reading achievement, this study used a Pretest-Posttest Control Group Design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963) and, as a measurement instrument, reading comprehension section of TOEFL (Educational Testing Service, 1984, 1985).

The hypothesis in this study was: The experimental group, which was exposed to writing dialogue journals for an interactive approach as treatment, would show significantly higher gains in reading achievement, from pre- to posttest, as measured by TOEFL reading comprehension section, as compared to the gains in reading achievement shown by the control group, which was exposed to answering comprehension questions for a transmission model as treatment, with the level of significant alpha set at  $p < .05$ .

### 3.2 Subjects and Participating Teachers

The subjects in the experiment signed up for the freshman English reading courses as intact groups by their choice of major field. They were the freshmen who chose to major in pharmacy, law, education, and pre-medicine. Before the first meeting, the intact groups were randomly assigned to either experimental or control groups. Pharmacy and law major students belonged to experimental groups, and education and pre-medicine major students, to control groups. At the outset of the experiment, 207 students made up the initial population and each group was around 50 students in size.



The two participating teachers had similar academic backgrounds (Ph.D. or ABD in English) and teaching experiences in reading (3 years). For the experiment, both taught the one-semester course, each teaching one section each of the experimental and the control group. The teachers agreed that the purpose of the experiment was to compare the effects of teaching reading with the two different modes on students' reading achievement, and both treatments deserved to be tried in an identical manner. None of them were informed of the expected results of the experiment.

### 3.3 Procedures

For this study of one semester length, the subjects met for the reading class once a week for 14 weeks and each meeting lasted for 2 hours. During the first meeting, both groups took a pretest with a form of TOEFL reading comprehension section to measure their reading ability. Then, each practice began. For their both sections, the teachers taught with the same textbook of which the content was mostly theoretical and heavy, and, within a prescribed curriculum, they followed the same systematic sequence in the course syllabus for reading lessons. During those 14 weeks, 6 chapters were covered. Also, they adopted the same instructional mode, the Grammar-Translation Method. Experimental group students wrote their journal entries (see Appendix A for a sample) on the six reading chapters: They wrote about the content with self-generated topics before they read or while they were reading or after they read each given chapter. Those entries were communicatively responded to by the researcher. For response, the researcher focused on the students' personal meaning and content, with no grading and no error correction. On the other hand, control group students wrote their answers to comprehension questions (see Appendix B for a sample) on the same six chapters: They answered to the given content-based questions only

after they read each given chapter. Those answers were evaluatively responded to by the researcher. For response, the researcher focused on the students' errors about the predetermined content, with grading and error correction. Due to the class-time constraint, those subjects wrote dialogue journals or answered comprehension questions as homework, not as a classroom activity.

During the last meeting, both groups took a posttest with another form of TOEFL reading comprehension section to measure their reading improvement.

### 3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected from two different forms of TOEFL reading comprehension section. All the subjects took one form for the pretest and the other form for the posttest. Each form included 5-6 passages and each passage had 5-8 questions. Those questions could be answered by skimming, scanning, or intensive reading of each passage: The questions asked the main idea of the passage, specific information about some point, a synonym or an antonym of some vocabulary, cause-and-effect relationship between sentences, or inference about the probable content which follows the passage. Time limit was 30 minutes for each test, and the subjects wrote their name, field of study, and date for the given test on their answer sheet. All the subjects' questionnaire and answer sheet were collected as soon as each test was finished.

The pretest and the posttest were collected only from the 166 subjects who participated in the whole process of the experiment and scored. Scoring was mechanical and objective. When the scoring was completed, whole class data were averaged for the whole class gains, and the gains were subjected to statistical analysis for significant alpha set at  $p < .05$  through the use of SPSS and ANOVA.

## 4. Result

This section reports the results in this study relating to a treatment variable and a supplementary (students' choice of major) variable.

### 4.1 Result Relating to a Treatment Variable

The mean changes from pretest to posttest for experimental and control group were +2.433 and +1.724, respectively, an improvement in both cases. Table 1 indicates the mean changes in reading comprehension, pretest to posttest, for the two groups.

**TABLE 1**  
**Analysis of Reading Comprehension Mean Change Pretest to Posttest by Treatment**

Treatment	Pretest	Posttest	Change (SD)
Experimental G.	16.889	19.322	+2.433 (2.50)
Control G.	16.829	18.553	+1.724 (1.30)

Table 2 presents an overview of the F test of significance for reading comprehension based on the TOEFL reading comprehension section by treatment. In this case, while the treatment effect favored the experimental group, it was not statistically significant,  $F(2, 166) = .8813$ ,  $p = .3492$ .

**TABLE 2**  
**Test of Significance for Reading Comprehension by Treatment**

Source	df	F	Sig of F
Between groups	1	.8813	.3492
Within groups	164		

\* $p < .05$ .

#### 4.2 Result Relating to a Students' Choice of Major Variable

As mentioned before, in this university, first-year students have been enrolled in freshman English as intact groups by their choice of major. For the current study, the students who chose to major in pharmacy, law, education, or pre-medicine were involved. Pharmacy major and law major were allocated to the experimental group, and education major and pre-medicine major, to the control group. Also, pharmacy major and education major were taught by teacher 1, and law major and pre-medicine major, by teacher 2. At the Scholastic Ability Test for the entrance exam, pre-medicine major students scored, on the average, higher than pharmacy major students, and law major students, higher than education major students. It was speculated that, by rule of thumb, the students with higher test scores would take more serious and competitive attitude toward their study than the students with lower test scores. Also, it was expected that law major and education major students might be generally more interested in and more hard-working on the freshman English course than pharmacy major and pre-medicine major students, regardless of their academic proficiency objectively measured by the Scholastic Ability Test. It was thought that these characteristics (academic proficiency level and interest level in freshman English) of students' choice of majors each might influence the effect of each treatment in this study. So, the result of statistical analysis on reading comprehension for each major is reported here.

The mean changes from pretest to posttest for the students' choice of majors were +4.804 (pharmacy), -0.667 (law), -1.300 (education), and +5.084 (pre-medicine), respectively. Pharmacy major and pre-medicine major showed improvement, however, law major and education major, deterioration in this case. Table 3 indicates the mean changes in reading comprehension, pretest to posttest, for the students' choice of majors.

**TABLE 3**  
**Analysis of Reading Comprehension Mean Change Pretest to Posttest by Students' Choice of Major**

Major	Pretest	Posttest	Change
Pharmacy	15.882	20.686	+4.804
Law	18.205	17.538	-0.667
Education	16.500	15.200	-1.300
Pre-medicine	17.194	22.278	+5.084

Table 4 presents an overview of the F test of significance for reading comprehension by students' choice of major. In this case, there is a statistically significant difference between the mean changes for the students' choice of majors. By using Student-Newman-Keuls Procedure, we see that the mean change for law major is significantly different from those for both pharmacy major and pre-medicine major, and also the mean change for education major, from those for both pharmacy major and pre-medicine major at the .05 level.

**TABLE 4**  
**Test of Significance for Reading Comprehension by Students' Choice of Major**

Source	df	F	Sig of F
Between groups	3	32.3439	.0000****
Within groups	162		

\*\*\*\*p < .0001.

## 5. Conclusion and Suggestions

### 5.1 Conclusion

#### 5.1.1 Dialogue Journal Writing and Reading Development

In this case, the analyzed data did not support the hypothesis by showing that, while the treatment effect favored the experimental group, it was not statistically significant ( $p = .3492$ ). Therefore, the greater gains achieved by the experimental group might have happened by chance. However, it is noted that writing dialogue journals about the reading content can be possibly more effective than answering comprehension questions about the same reading content in improving students' reading comprehension. If this finding is accepted as valid, it can be concluded that teachers of EFL reading courses might well consider adopting an interactive approach, using dialogue journals, as an alternative to the traditional model, using comprehension questions, as a vehicle for improving students' reading comprehension. Why is this so? Writing dialogue journals seems just as good for testing "has read and understood"; it may also encourage "think about what you've read" more than traditional questions; it may also encourage higher level responses (like, "Did I enjoy reading this?") rather than lower level responses ("What color is Ivanhoe's horse?").

#### 5.1.2 Students' Choice of Major and Reading Development

From the study, it is noted that students' choice of major had a noticeable effect on reading comprehension mean change. This study involved four different majors, and the effect of students' choice of major was statistically significant, revealing that pre-medicine major students showed the greatest increase. Also, pre-medicine major students' and pharmacy major students' mean change each was significantly different from that of the students in law major and education major each.

Here, it is speculated that probably caused by different academic proficiency levels, pre-medicine major students showed increase greater than both pharmacy major and education major students'; probably caused by different

academic proficiency levels and different treatments, pharmacy major students showed increase greater than education major students'. Here, pre-medicine major students who had higher academic proficiency than education major students', and pharmacy major students who received experimental treatment and had higher academic proficiency than education major students', improved their each reading comprehension significantly differently from education major students'.

## 5.2 Limitations

First, writing journal entries for the experimental group students could not be an ongoing process. Due to time constraint in the class, students wrote their journal entries not as a classroom activity but as homework. As homework, they wrote only one entry about each chapter before they read it or during their reading process or after they read it. And the researcher also could not respond more than once to their each entry. Accordingly, the continuous interaction between a student and a respondent about various topics and elaboration on them for some time, which is customary in dialogue journal writing, could not happen in this study.

Second, concerning the instructional mode, both teachers reported that they taught their classes with the Grammar-Translation Method. In the classes, the teachers were an authority: They prescribed arbitrarily instructional content and most of the interaction was from the teachers to the students seated in rows and columns, with little student initiation. Therefore, most students did not participate voluntarily and learn actively. Also, due to direct error treatment, there was no risk-taking atmosphere in the classrooms. The students just remained in their passive role, conforming to standard, linear, and

sequential transmission of information. They had few opportunities to display their own ideas about the reading content.

However, interactive reading methods are supposed to adopt a learner-centered approach in which a teacher acts as an advisor and facilitator. And, instead of a prescribed curriculum, learner choice of content gains importance in this approach. Therefore, in the classroom, instead of row and column seating arrangements, alternative groupings and peer support need to be activated. These are to encourage cooperative and active learning, shared decision-making, and self and/or joint assessment. In this movable setting, meaningful expression of ideas related to the text can be freely shared and a variety of activities in response to reading can be ranged within a community of positive learners.

Then, who knows? With the newer instructional mode, the results of the experiment could have turned out to be statistically significant, favoring the dialogue journal writing group.

Third, concerning the reading materials, the same textbook was used for the students of most major fields (the humanities, social science, and natural science). The book content was organized suitable to be taught with a transmission model of reading: It had only comprehension questions at the end of each chapter. And most teachers who taught with that book said that its content was too theoretical and too difficult for the average freshmen at that school to understand. So, giving their students translation and helping them understand it was more than enough within the given class time. Also, most chapters in the book dealt with the content which might be interesting only to the students of the humanities and social science.

Finally, concerning the measurement instrument, data collection was severely constrained by the classroom context of the research. To measure reading comprehension, it would have been desirable to obtain the results of a full, one-hour reading comprehension measure and to supplement that measure with a read aloud/ retell



measure obtained individually for the subjects. These additional measures, however, were not possible within the constraints of class time and the resources available to the researcher.

### 5.3 Implications

First, besides dialogue journals studied in the current research, there are various kinds of journals that might be used in the subject classes, for example, learning journals or response journals.

The common features of all these journals are:

- They are not corrected for errors but responded for meaning.
- They are generally informal in their content, format, and language.
- They are not individually graded, maybe graded as a whole later.

The specific features of each journal are:

- For dialogue journals, usually a teacher responds, there is rough disparity in length, and the basic form is question/answer (or solicit/give).
- For learning journals, generally peers respond briefly in the margin and a teacher may respond later, and topics include many things.
- For response journals, generally peers respond briefly in the margin and a teacher may respond later as for learning journals, however, students respond only to their readings in this case.

Therefore, it would be useful to implement the other kinds of journals as a classroom procedure and to test their effectiveness.

Second, concerning the instructional mode, it might be useful for the school to explore alternative instructional modes other than

the customary Grammar-Translation Method in the reading class. As discussed, group work on reading activities in movable settings can be recommended. However, as Gebhard, Gaitan, and Oprandy (1987) point out, there is little proof that any one way of teaching is better than another in all settings. Since students in one setting have needs and academic abilities different from those of the students in another setting, a single method or technique does not equally work for the students in all settings. Accordingly, in case of the school where the current study was performed, where students of a field of study take freshman English mostly together in one class, it seems desirable to conduct a classroom-centered research. And based on the needs and abilities of students of each major field, it is recommended to adopt an instructional mode appropriate for them. Even for those homogeneous groups, trying an eclectic method that chooses the best from various methods in a compromise might be effective, which reflects current thinking in language teaching methodology. For this, training and continuing education of teachers who teach freshman English at that school might be necessary.

Third, concerning the reading materials, based on both academic proficiency level and aptitude of students of each major field at that school, selecting authentic materials which include pre-, during-, and post-reading activities needs to be done.

Finally, concerning the measurement instrument, There should be more powerful reading instrument than that used in the study for measuring subjects' reading comprehension achievement.

Considering all those limitations and implications, the current study might be called teaching reading with a "modified" interactive approach.

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**Appendix A**  
**A Sample of an Experimental Group Subject's Dialogue**  
**Journal Writing**

Note: A student journal entry is printed flush left. Investigator response is indented 5 spaces. Marginal comments by the investigator are inserted in the text, and bracketed.

After Reading What Every Yale Freshman Should Know

This article says the importance of curiosity and the responsibility to communicate discoveries. I agree on the preciousness of curiosity. In modern society, only the man with creativity can survive and it is connected directly with curiosity. Curiosity to everything and to the world make him possible to think freely and richly, this is the foundation to be the creative person. <Very interesting and smart discussion!>

But I think curiosity has to always consider its consequences. In this writing, it is said the consequences are usually incidental to the satisfaction of curiosity. However it may bring to the immense influence to mankind either affirmatively or negatively. Therefore the pursuit of truth should be thought over to the point of view of religion and ethic. If it were not for some considerations for the consequences, curiosity might be dangerous. <Well, how about thinking in this way? How many things in this world deserve to be tried by people if they can know the result of the trial? Anyway, Euiyoung, I like your entry very much. You develop your own opinion logically which is based on the text and you have very good command of written English. Keep on developing!>

Ordinary people tend to avoid the particularity. The world may not much like curiosity truly, but I believe it is the motive power for the society development. <Good! I agree with you at this point.>

**Appendix B**  
**A Sample of a Control Group Subject's Comprehension**  
**Questionnaire-Answers**

Note: Comprehension questions are printed flush left. Student answers are indented 5 spaces. Investigators grading and error correction are not marked in this print.

Comprehension Questions on What Every Yale Freshman Should Know

Please answer with full sentences in English for each question.

1. According to the author, what's the difference between the world and the university?

The world say that curiosity is idle so it hostile curiosity but the University, curiosity is what a university is for so it defy the worlds hostility to curiosity.

2. Whats the difference between the scholars answer to the world and that to the Yale Freshman to why they study their field? Answer in your own words.

The scholars answer to the world is that contain utility but the answer to the Yale Freshman is not that contain utility. They say that they want to know the thing they dont know.

3. Why does the author call curiosity a dangerous quality, especially when it is related to a desire for truth?

Because the search for truth has overturned institution and beliefs of long standing and has disrupted society.

4. According to the author, whats the scholarly vice at its worst, why does it happen, and how can it be overcome?

The scholarly vice is the wariness of commitment. It happens because, they want preserve their university as a sanctuary.

5. What are the two qualities that make a scholar? What does one lead to, and what are the two methods of the other?

The two qualities that make a scholar are curiosity and communication. The two methods of communication are writing and speaking.

6. Of those two methods mentioned in question 5, to which one does the author show his preference and why?

The author prefer writing because it is more than an instrument of communication and an instrument of thought.

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