

Enhancing Reading Interest and Comprehension through Literature Circles

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Abstract

This paper investigates the impact of utilizing literature circles as an instructional strategy to improve reading interest and comprehension among students. By acknowledging the persistent challenge of cultivating a passion for reading and fostering strong comprehension skills, this study inquires the efficacy of literature circles in creating an interactive and collaborative reading environment. The study aims to provide empirical insights into the tangible benefits of literature circles as a pedagogical tool. The research design employs descriptive quantitative methodologies to analyze the effectiveness of literature circle among students and scrutinize the impact of active engagement in literature circle discussions and subsequent reading comprehension performance. The use of paired t test is crucial to examine the data result. The findings shows that Literature Circle affects students' interest and comprehension of reading. There are significant scores revealing students' improvement. By examining reading result through literature circle participation, this research contributes to the field of literacy education, offering evidence-based strategies to enhance students' reading interest, experiences and comprehension abilities. The findings have practical implications for educators seeking innovative and effective approaches to cultivate the interest for reading while ensuring meaningful comprehension gains among students.

Introduction

Reading activity is not merely about pronouncing the group of meaningful alphabetical composition for others to listen. It is not even to highlighting the accents for others to differentiate. Reading, more importantly, is about capturing and understanding the idea, purpose and meaning beyond a text through intensive comprehension. The apprehension process involves the skill and adequacy in the stages of reading strategy. Johnson (2008: 4) states that reading is constantly a developing skill. Reading skill can be

better by practicing. Additionally, reading is the practice of using text to create meaning. It means that when someone reads a text, the person should put forward the main idea of the text to create a conclusion or understanding as a result. It is such a progressive skill in which people can learn sustainably to be the more skilled readers. Reading becomes a course as communicative as any other form of language (Howard, 2006: 61). It is indeed the crucial part in language adequacy. Reading also is the act linking one idea to another. Putting ideas together to create a sensible whole is the essential part of reading.

The activity also engages human brain, emotions, and beliefs as Weaver (1969: 5) states that reading is a process which very much determined by what the reader's brain and emotions and beliefs, bring to the reading, the knowledge information (or misinformation, absence, of information), strategies for processing text, moods, fears, and joys all of it. Other expert defines reading is an activity in which the readers respond to and make sense of a text being read connected to their prior knowledge (Spratt, Pulverniss, and William, 2005: 21). However, reading is more than about a mere text. It is the sum of its parts. It requires not just the recognition of words, but the ability to make sense of those words in context, to connect them to readers' existing knowledge, and to build new understanding.

As the part of fundamental language skills, to comprehend this skill is surely important. Nevertheless, since the process involves integrating some stages, reading activity tends to be assumed as difficult and tricky. Some studies show that students are not adequately prepared to comprehend relatively complex reading texts they need for their study (Loeneto, 2008; Diem, 2011). The art of it, then, deals with literacy awareness and adequacy brought up in sort of pedagogical activities. The progress is mainly set up by the effective learning activities involving the teaching method of reading strategies.

Nowadays, teachers are unavoidably challenged by selecting a proper method to deliver the understanding of reading in a classroom. The use of traditional approach while transferring the materials seems to be less successful. When it comes to the reading class, most teachers found their students showed less interest to participate in the activities wholeheartedly. Therefore, teachers are fostered to consider more interesting teaching method to engage students' motivation and participation during the lessons.

The method applied does not only involve the strategical ways of explaining the materials in front of the class. But it also needs a deep consideration about what impacts or targeted skills must be achieved by students in the end of class. In addition to mastering the text, the meaningful reading activities is those that stimulate and enhance students' critical

thinking and awareness about all the things beyond the literal meaning. So, the students do not only elaborate the text literally, but also digging the values and core substance beyond the surficial meaning of the text. One of the ways to connect reading with critical thinking skill is by ensuring both teacher and student are aware of literacy and adhesive to literature updates.

A review of the methods and practices for developing reading and critical thinking skill has highlighted the use of literature circle method. Research on literature circles shows that there are studies introducing the cognitive, affective, and social benefits of literature circles to people (Ediger, 2002; King, 2001; Lopez Medina, 2007; Peterson & Belizaire, 2006). Literature circles are defined as a teaching method in groups created in accordance with students' choices of books, where students periodically discuss the parts they read (Daniels, 2002). In Literature Circle, students have the freedom to choose the reading materials they need to elaborate during the activity in the group. Indeed, literature circles usually involve an active collaboration of four or five students. In such circles, students gather to select books to read based on their interests and to discuss them in-depth (Ediger, 2002; Ruby et al., 2003; Schoonmaker, 2014).

Literature circles were first implemented in 1982 by Karen Smith, an elementary school teacher in Phoenix, Arizona. Smith observed that her fifth-grade students were very engaged and enjoyed discussing novels when they loosely organized themselves into reading groups to read books that had been donated to the classroom (Daniels, 2002: 23). The notion of a literature circle is defined as reading groups or groups in which students are allowed to choose their reading sources from a wide range of genres such as books, articles, poems, or text types including narratives, procedure, discussion, then create a small group (Widodo, 2016: 56).

While Cameron et al (2012) contend that literature circles are student center group discussion, while the teacher only facilitates, control, and assign students to different roles in which they have to respond to the assigned role, in this activity, they productively discuss and help the members on understanding the chosen book or sources.

After divided into the groups and chose the reading text, each student gets different role and need to do elaborated understanding about the contents of the text in some amounts of time. Roles given often consist of a discussion leader who prepares discussion questions, a summarizer of the reading, and someone who connects the reading to other events, people, or literature (Shelton-Strong, 2012). Other roles may be assigned, depending on how a

particular text needs to be comprehended and analyzed. Additional roles may include a diction investigator who examines the connotation and denotation of words, a literary analyzer who explores figurative language, and a researcher who scans sources for additional background knowledge needed to understand the text at a deeper level. Because group members depend on one another for the conversations to go well, performing and contributing within a group becomes a motivator for work completion. Also, the roles provide students with the opportunity to construct a deeper meaning of a text; as they gain a better understanding, they want to share what they have learned with the group (Whittingham, 2014). Moreover, assuming individual roles helps students focus on specific reading strategies at a given time, thereby providing necessary scaffolding to break down reading and help students build confidence (Daniels, 2006; Shelton-Strong, 2012).

The next stage after each student gets the role, they have to present the reading result during discussions. In this session, each student respects others' opinions which becomes an important feature highlighted in literature circles. Pitton (2005), also identifies students who felt that they were more involved in the discussion and more challenged thus they learned more from participating in the literature circles.

In this teaching method, however, every student has an equal opportunity to manifest himself or herself. Students who have difficulty in reading or are weak in reading do not stay behind. Such students can also choose roles or activities suitable for themselves to demonstrate their special abilities (Anderson, 2009).

As literacy educators and researchers continually seek innovative approaches to engage students, literature circles have gained prominence for their potential to create dynamic and interactive reading environments. The method, involving small groups of students who collaboratively read, discuss, and analyze a shared text, does not only encourage active participation but also promotes a sense of community, allowing students to collectively explore the richness of literature. According to Furr (2003), literature circles in EFL are magic in that they have the power to transform learners from passive, rather shy, reticent students into students who eagerly point at their texts in order to support their arguments while sharing their opinions in English. At this point, it can be argued that literature circle is able to bridge the way how teachers nourish students' critical thinking and communication ability.

Hence, this paper sets the stage for the exploration of literature circles as an intervention that goes beyond traditional teaching methods. The implementation of literature

circle also involves seven phases of instruction: exploration, explication, translation, modelling, guided practice, application, and closure, integrated within literature circle structured stages. The primary objective of this study is to assess the impact of literature circles on students' reading interest and comprehension levels. Are there any significant changes on students' reading interest and comprehension after implementing literature circles? Additionally, the descriptive quantitative method is used to examine the implementation of literature circle in interpretive reading class with twenty-five students as the participant. In the analysis, the writer uses paired t test to test the data collected. Through a quantitative lens, the writer seeks to measure the tangible benefits of literature circles on students' attitudes toward reading and their ability to comprehend and critically engage with texts. By employing a structured research design and leveraging quantitative methodologies, the writer aims to provide insights into the signficancy and effectiveness of literature circles as a pedagogical tool.

Method

The design of this study uses descriptive quantitative method to examine the significant impact of literature circle implementation toward reading interest and comprehension. The participants are first-semester students of English Education Department in Islamic University in Lamongan. The samples were the interpretive reading class of twenty-five students. The writer tried to get information about the characteristic of the students in the sample before conducting the study. The students have similar ability at reading and they did not take any special ESL courses outside the school's activities.

The research instruments use pre-test and post-test. The pre-test was administered at the first meeting before Literature Circle stages were started. The students were asked to answer a number of questions in a multiple-choice and essay format after reading three short narrative texts that were presented sequentially. There were twenty questions each with five options (a, b, c, d, and e) and three essay questions related to reading interest and comprehension. The questions of reading comprehension focus on three related reading areas. They are context clues, making inference, and reference. Each correct answer was given five marks. If all questions were answered correctly, the student would score 100, and if none were correct, they would score 0. This pre-test was given to find out their competence in reading comprehension before the researcher gave the treatment by applying the Literature Circles stages.

The post-test was given after literature circle treatment to find out their development in reading interest and comprehension. The writer could do further analysis based on this post-test score to identify whether there is significant change in students' reading interest and comprehension after literature circle implementation.

The data was collected by giving questionnaire, doing observation and interview. Prior to the treatment, the pre-test was given to the class, to find out students' interest and proficiency level in reading comprehension before doing literature circle stages. Then, students or participants in this study were given the treatment of literature circle for six meetings. During these meetings, the writer observed students' participation based on the role given and noted the performances during discussion session. The next step is by doing interview and giving questionnaire with questions related to the pre-activities, main and post activities involving reflection and evaluation. After collecting the data, the writer analyze them by using normality test and paired t-test. Before calculating the t-test, the data was analyzed for normality and for homogeneity. The hypothesis of this study is as formulated as follows:

H_0 : There is no significant impact for the students at reading interest and comprehension using Literature circle strategy

H_1 : There is significant impact for the students at reading interest and comprehension using Literature circle strategy.

The normality test results significant value of pre-test 0.137 and post-test 0.200 which are more than 0.05 and are categorized as normally distributed data. While the result of paired t test is 0.000. It shows that $p < 0.05$ which means that H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted. Therefore, it can be concluded that there are significant effects of using literacy circle in improving students' reading interest and comprehension.

Findings and Discussion

Reading is always associated with passive and boring activity that needs a lot of efforts to understand the meaning of what the text proposes to. Students find the activity to be monotonous and tiring. As the way to encounter the lack of students' motivation in reading activity that affect their reading interest and comprehension, the use of teaching strategy that engages students' passion to learn reading becomes fundamentally important. Literature Circle, then, emerges as one of the solutional strategy that could be implemented in reading class.

The core idea of Literature Circle in language classroom is that the teaching learning activities should be able to enhance students' critical thinking, self-independent learning, and language skills. Through several stages of Literature Circle, students will be able to acquire not merely the language skills, but also the ability to think critically and learn independently.

This study implements literature circle by conducting several structured stages through seven phases of instruction. They are exploration, explication, translation, modelling, guided practice, application, and closure. These phases involved in order to sharpen the result of data analysis and examine the hypothesis. The investigation is conducted in six meetings with the detailed scheduled agenda. Giving pre-test and post-test are conducted in the first and sixth meeting. While four other meetings are used to collect the data through observation and implementing literature circle stages. Interview and questionnaire do help the writer to examine the significant impacts of literature circle toward students reading interest and comprehension as well.

In the exploration and explication phases, the explanation of what literature circle is, the activities that will be done in the six meetings, and the reading task or materials, are delivered to the classroom. The writer asks students to reading the novel entitled *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* as the reading material in this study. Next, in translation and modelling phases, the writer observed the level of students' reading interest and comprehension through practicing reading using context clues, inference, and reference. The issue of literacy awareness is cultivated deeper through the activities. The role division is also distributed to students in these phases. After that, students are given the amount of time to elaborate independently the reading material based on the role given. Later in guided practice and application phases, they need to share the reading result in the discussion session. Last phase before doing the post-test is closure phase. In this phase, students are asked to sum up and make reflection on the learning activities.

All those phases of literature circle implementation always involve the process of observation and doing interview in order to sharpen the analysis about examining the significant impacts of literature circle in enhancing students' reading interest and comprehension. Based on the result of analysis and test showing the significant positive difference between the result of pre-test and post-test mean. The score of post-test mean 72.46 is significantly higher than pre-test mean 57.63. It can be assumed that Literature Circle is effective to increase students' ability in reading comprehension. This was proved by the

t-test. which was higher than the t-table which meant that H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted, that there is significant impact of literature circle implementation in enhancing students' reading interest and comprehension.

Successful literature circles lead to deeper understanding and higher reading comprehension. Rather than having the teacher provide the knowledge, students actively seek, through their assigned roles and collaborative discussions, a deeper understanding leading to their creation of new knowledge.

The use of literature circles has become an increasingly popular pedagogical approach in recent years, aimed at boosting reading interest and comprehension. This discussion delves into how literature circles foster reading engagement, improve comprehension, and develop critical thinking skills, drawing on recent research.

Boosting Reading Interest through Social Interaction

Literature circles create a socially interactive reading environment that enhances student motivation. Students are empowered by being given responsibility for different roles within the group, such as discussion leader, connector, or summarizer. Research by Miller et al. (2022) found that this structure increases reading motivation, particularly among disengaged readers, by allowing them autonomy and choice in their reading materials. Literature circles encourage students to view reading as a collaborative activity rather than a solitary one, which can lead to greater engagement (De Naeghel et al., 2022).

The role of peer influence is also critical. When students engage with literature in a group setting, they are more likely to feel invested in their reading because they are sharing and exchanging ideas. This type of peer-led learning aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism, which suggests that learning is most effective when it happens in a social context. The research by Powell et al. (2020) echoes this, indicating that students are more likely to engage deeply with texts when they can discuss them with peers.

Enhancing Reading Comprehension through Group Discussions

Literature circles not only increase interest in reading but also improve reading comprehension. In these discussions, students engage in in-depth conversations about characters, themes, and plot elements, which strengthens their understanding of the text (Worthy et al., 2021). By interacting with peers, students are exposed to different

perspectives and interpretations, which allows them to develop a more nuanced understanding of the text.

A recent study by Vasquez and Jablonski (2021) demonstrated that literature circles are particularly effective in helping students comprehend complex texts, as they encourage students to ask questions, make predictions, and clarify their understanding through discussion. This aligns with other findings, such as that of Robinson et al. (2020), which showed that the collaborative aspect of literature circles supports higher-order thinking and deeper comprehension.

Promoting Critical Thinking

Literature circles also promote critical thinking skills by encouraging students to analyze and critique texts from multiple viewpoints. Recent studies highlight the importance of critical literacy, where students question and evaluate the underlying messages in the text (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2021). The roles within literature circles, such as the “connector” and “questioner,” push students to make connections between the text and real-world issues, as well as critically assess the author’s intent and message.

Friedland and Truscott (2021) showed that students involved in literature circles were better able to articulate and defend their viewpoints, enhancing both their analytical and communicative skills. These findings suggest that literature circles offer an opportunity for students to engage in critical discourse, developing their ability to think critically about what they read.

Addressing Challenges in Literature Circles

Despite the benefits, literature circles are not without their challenges. One common issue is ensuring equitable participation, as some students may dominate discussions while others remain passive. Research by Reynolds and Wood (2022) suggests that careful role assignment and teacher facilitation can help address this challenge by ensuring that each student is responsible for contributing to the discussion.

Another challenge is selecting texts that are both engaging and accessible to all students. Research by FitzGerald et al. (2023) highlights the importance of choosing culturally relevant and age-appropriate texts to maintain student interest and foster engagement. Teachers must also provide scaffolding and support, particularly for students who may struggle with more challenging text.

Conclusions

In the landscape of education, fostering the interest for reading and developing robust reading comprehension skills are perennial challenges. Reading interest and comprehension can be improved among students by using literature circles practices in different disciplines. Literature circles are an effective method for increasing student engagement in reading and improving comprehension. Through peer-led discussions, students become more motivated to read, develop deeper comprehension, and enhance their critical thinking skills. While there are challenges in implementation, such as managing participation and text selection, these can be mitigated with careful planning. Overall, literature circles offer a dynamic and interactive approach to reading that supports student learning and engagement. In this present study, literature circles were practiced with first-semester student of English Education Department.

Additionally, Literature circle discussion groups offer opportunities for students to improve themselves in social interaction and higher-order critical thinking through their contributions to each other's learning. Moreover, literature circles help students construct active learning through a reflective and collaborative social environment.

Recognizing the fundamental role of literature in cultivating these skills, this quantitative paper explores the efficacy of using literature circles as an instructional strategy to improve both reading interest and comprehension among students. In this context, this study was conducted to determine the influence of the literature circles method on reading interest and comprehension of Interpretive Reading Class. The findings of this study inform educational practices, offer educators evidence-based strategies to enhance literacy instruction in a way that captivates students' reading interest and deepens their understanding of literature.

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