EFFECTIVENESS OF LITERATURE CIRCLES ON STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION

Dini Irawati
IAIN Samarinda
Jl. H.A.M. Riffaddin Samarinda Seberang, Samarinda, Kaltim
Email: dinisukirno@gmail.com

Abstract: This study reports an experimental study to see the effect of literatures circles to improve reading comprehension of English department students of State Islamic Institute (IAIN) of Samarinda. A quasi experimental research using nonrandomized control group pretest-posttest design was conducted to see effectiveness of literature circles on students' reading comprehension. A number of 24 students were taken as sample from the first semester students joining in an intensive English course program in academic year 2011/2012. Using independent t-test, the analysis of the posttest means the finding yielded a t-value of 3.11. The t-value (3.11) is higher than the critical table 1.678 at p=.05 and df=44 (one-tailed). The result evidently shows that literature circles contribute a significant effect to improve students' reading comprehension.

Keywords: effectiveness, literature circles, reading comprehension

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading, one of the four skills, in most tertiary institutions is given a first priority (Armahedi, 2003:1; Nur, 2003:167). Reading as the first priority, especially when students' main purpose of studying English is to be able to access written sources, is understood due to some reasons. First, for college students, their success in academic life largely depends on reading (Adyawardhani, 2003:2; Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009:2). Second, in a country, where the students in general never have the opportunity to converse with native speakers, but have access to written language, reading becomes more important than other skills (River in Sutarsyah, 2008:128). Third, there is a connection between reading and writing (Smith, 2004:178; Cox, 1996:354-355; Braunger & Lewis, 2001:64-65). Reading provides a model for writing and background knowledge important in generating ideas for a wide range of topics. Reading is the input, while writing is the output (Nation, 2009:1).

However, despite the importance of reading, throughout the country many English teachers are wrestling with the issue of why students lack the skills necessary to comprehend English texts. The majority still have low ability in comprehending English texts (Nur, 2003: 170). In addition, Day and Bamford (2000) claim that in general, EFL reading is a difficult process. On top of this, many teachers struggle to have their students actually read the text. The problem is faced by many schools and institutions in Indonesia.

The problem, according to the researcher's point of view, emerges from the students' lack of motivation. Motivation is an important prerequisite for learning (Slavin, 2000:327). When students are motivated, their attention will be greater and the filter will be lowered. This situation will lead to a better learning. This statement is based on Krashen's affective filter hypothesis (Selinker and Gass, 1994:147-148; Cook, 1994:54-55). Related to reading, when the students are not motivated to read, they are not engaged. In this situation, learning does not occur. Engagement in the reading task is a key in successfully learning to read and developing as a reader (Braunger & Lewis, 2001:72-74). Therefore, to solve the problem, the very basic thing for teachers is to make students engaged and motivated to read.

Besides considering students' motivation, teachers should note that they are the ultimate instructional designers. In teaching, teachers have an important role in designing the best activities for their students. The activities should be research-based. Previous researches in the field of reading instruction have contributed to the improvement of the teaching of reading. The findings become the principles of teaching that are worthy of consideration. Therefore, besides considering students' motivation as a key in learning, other principles generated from the research should also be taken into account in designing the lesson plan.

Mazzoni and Gambrell (2003:14), present ten research-based best practices that can provide foundation for reading instruction and are worthy of consideration. *First*, teach reading for authentic, meaning-making literacy experiences. It means that reading is for pleasure, to be informed, and to perform a task. *Second*, use high-quality literature. *Third*, integrate a comprehensive word research or phonics program into reading or writing instruction. *Fourth*, use multiple texts that link and expand concepts. *Fifth*, balance teacher- and student-led discussions. *Sixth*, build a whole-class community that emphasizes important concepts and builds background knowledge. *Seventh*, work with students in small groups while other students read and write about what they have read. *Eighth*, give students plenty of time to read in class. *Ninth*, give students direct instruction in decoding and comprehension strategies that promote independent reading. Balance direct instruction, guided instruction, and independent reading. *Tenth*, use a variety of assessment techniques to inform instruction.

While Mazzoni and Gambrell do not exclusively aim the writing to EFL/ESL reading instruction, O'Malley and Pierce (1996:95) writes that successful EFL/ESL reading program have some components, namely extensive amount of time in class for reading, direct strategy instruction on reading comprehension, opportunities for collaboration, and opportunities for discussion on responses to reading. The four components of successful EFL/ESL reading program correspond with some research-based best practices from Mazzoni and Gambrell; that teachers should give students plenty of time to read in class, give direct instruction in decoding and comprehension strategies that promote independent reading, give opportunities to work in small group, and balance teacher- and student-led discussions.

Chamblee (2003:271-278), Brassell & Rasinski (2008:126), and Tovani (2000:63-78) supports the fourth component from O'Malley and Pierce; that implementing reader-response approach, in which students give opinion and criticism, make inferences and judgment, ask personal question, make connection (text to self connection, text to text connection and text to world connection), and create ongoing summaries and synthesis as they read, is worthy of consideration based on benefits some researchers found. Meanwhile, Hedgcock and Ferris add that teachers should emphasize vocabulary learning and create a vocabulary-rich environment

(2009:283-322), and incorporate extensive or independent reading (2009:205-241). The second principle from Hedgcock and Ferris corresponds with Mazzoni and Gambrell's; that teachers should balance direct instruction, guided instruction, and independent reading.

In light with the above principles, literature circles, developed by Daniels in 1994, is a reading strategy that draws on some principles mentioned above: students read their self-selected text from multiple texts that link and expand concepts, by which they can be more engaged in reading and be more motivated as well as get a vocabulary-rich environment; share their personal responses in small group discussion; and then share the responses with the whole class. From this point of view, literature circles is a form of independent reading, structured as collaborative small groups, and guided by reader response principles. These three main components underlie literature circles.

Literature circles itself is small, peer-led discussion groups whose members have chosen to read the same reading material. While reading (either in or outside of class), members make notes to help them contribute to the upcoming discussion, and everyone comes to the group with ideas to share. When they finish a reading material, the circle members may share highlights of their reading with the wider community; then they trade members with other finishing groups, select more reading, and move into a new cycle (Daniels, 2002:2).

Literature circles manifest most of these key features (Daniels, 2002:18-27): *First*, students *choose* their own reading materials. *Second*, *small temporary groups* are formed, based on text choice. *Third*, different groups read *different texts*. *Fourth*, groups meet on a *regular, predictable schedule* to discuss their reading. *Fifth*, students use written or drawn *notes* to guide both their reading and discussion. *Sixth*, discussion *topics come from the students*. *Seventh*, group meetings aim to be *open, natural conversations about texts,* so personal connections, digressions, and open-ended questions are welcome. *Eight*, the teacher serves as a *facilitator,* not a group member or instructor. *Ninth*, evaluation is by *teacher observation and student self-evaluation*. *Tenth*, a spirit of *playfulness and fun* pervades the room. *Eleventh*, when books are finished, *readers share with their classmates,* and then *new groups form* around new reading choices.

Literature circles has its beginning in first language classrooms in North America. Now, over a decade from what Daniels called "a pretty nifty little invention that we had created all by ourselves, right here in the rarefied climate of Chicago", literature circles has become a boom in United State. Tens of thousands of teachers are doing literature circles (Daniels, 2002:1).

Many reported and documented a positive effect of literature circles along with a quickly-growing both qualitative and quantitative research on it, in English as a first and a foreign language setting. Sachs (2003), Mark (2007), Sai & Hsu (2007), Stabile (2009), and Muniroh (2010) are people who conducted the qualitative research on literature circles, while Daniels and his colleagues (2002), Klinger and his colleagues (in Daniels, 2002), and Lin (in Sai & Hsu, 2006) are people who conducted the quantitative research.

Sachs, Mark, Sai & Hsu, and Muniroh conducted their research in EFL setting, while Stabile conducted the research in L1 setting. All of them did not analyze the effectiveness of literature circles on students' reading comprehension indicated by their scores. Sachs, Mark, Sai & Hsu, and Muniroh investigated students' attitude toward reading and literature circles

itself. They gave them questionnaire and interview. Meanwhile, Stabile investigated the effectiveness of literature circles through observation, document analysis, self-evaluation, and survey. What it means by the effectiveness in Stabile's research does not refer to the improvement of reading scores.

Different from them, Daniels and colleagues, Klinger and colleagues, and Lin investigated the effectiveness of literature circles on students' reading comprehension indicated by their scores. Daniels and colleagues and Klinger and colleagues conducted the research in L1 setting, while Lin conducted the research in Chinese-English bilingual program. Both quantitative and qualitative researches have common result, that literature circles works. Except Klinger and his colleagues, all of the researchers mentioned used literary texts instead of expository.

In the Indonesian context, there have not been many research on the implementation of literature circles except Muniroh's, in which she investigated the attitudes of senior high school and English department students towards the strategy. In her research, she did not investigate the effectiveness of the strategy on the improvement of students' reading comprehension indicated by their scores and the text used was literary text. Looking at the focus of her research, the researcher is of the opinion that the effectiveness of literature circles needs investigation. The researcher is interested to see the effectiveness of the strategy when it is implemented to the second semester students of Intensive English course STAIN Samarinda. In this program, English serves as a general subject with six credit loads. The subject is offered in semester one and two. The general objective is reading. As regards the second semester students' English proficiency level, based on the proficiency test, they are in intermediate level. Thus, different form Muniroh's, the subject of this research are students of non-English Department and the text used is expository text since it is prescribed by the curriculum. Daniels says that literature circles woks both for fiction and nonfiction texts (Daniels, 2002:200). The result of this research can more validate the findings obtained from the previous research.

Although this research is an experiment, the same with those conducted by Daniels and colleagues, Klinger and colleagues, and Lin, two points differentiate between this research and theirs. *First*, the difference lies in the setting. This research is different from the research by Daniels and colleagues and Klinger and colleagues because they conducted the research in LI setting, while this research is conducted in EFL setting. Although Lin conducted the research in EFL setting, it was conducted in Chinese-English Bilingual program. The generalizability of the finding is restricted to the same characteristics of the subjects. It is possible that a teaching strategy found to be highly effective in a certain place is not equally effective in different settings and subjects (Mazzoni and Gambrell, 2003:12). *Second*, the text used is different. Daniels and colleagues and Lin used literary text, while this research uses expository text like the research by Klinger and colleagues. This research is also different from Sachs's, Mark's, Sai & Hsu's, and Stabile's in which they conducted qualitative research using literary text. Meanwhile, this research is quantitative using expository text.

2. METHOD

To see the effectiveness of literature circles on students' reading comprehension, a quasi experimental research was conducted using nonrandomized control group pretest-posttest design involving two variables. Teaching strategies were the independent variable, and the dependent variable was the students' reading comprehension. The samples were taken from the population of the second semester students of Intensive English Course STAIN Samarinda. There were twelve classes, each class consists of 25-30 students. To choose the experimental and control group, the researcher used simple sampling technique, by which class H (24 students) was assigned to experimental group while class J (24 students) was assigned to control group. The instrument of data collection was a multiple choice test consisting of J30 items used in pretest and posttest.

The procedures of the experiment are as the following: The experimental group was taught using literature circles. At the same time, reading instruction in the control group did not use literature circles. Instead, the researcher used the teaching reading activities usually used in Intensive English Course. The reading materials in both groups were different in terms of the content. However, they were all expository texts. They were different because the students of experimental group were allowed to choose the text; however the teacher chose the reading material for the students of control group. Table 1 shows the teaching procedures for the experimental and control group:

Table 1. Teaching Procedures for Experimental and Control Group

Teaching procedures for experimental group	Teaching procedures for control group
First meeting:	All meetings (eight meetings):
- The teacher introduced the idea of literature circles: that literature circles consists of choosing a text, forming a group around a same text, responding to a text, and sharing and discussing the responses with group members, then sharing and discussing the highlights with all students.	- The teacher brainstormed students' background knowledge related to the topic of a text.
- The teacher brainstormed students' knowledge about different ways readers respond to a text.	- The teacher distributed a same text to all students to read individually.
- The teacher distributed a same text to all students.	- The students read the text and highlighted difficult vocabularies they encountered while reading.
- The students read and jot down their responses either while or after reading.	- The teacher asked one or two students to explain what had been read.
- The teacher put the students in	- The teacher gave reading

groups of three or four.

- The students shared and discussed their responses with their members of the group.

- A spoke person from each group shared with the whole class one thread of the text, one topic their group got interested in, disagreed about, questioned, etc.
- The teacher reviewed the process of the meeting.
- The teacher handed out a list of reading titles.
- The students chose a title of their interest to read at home. Groups formed around the same title.
- The teacher handed out *Discussion Sheet* for each student and *Sharing Sheet* for each group.

Second to eight meetings:
- The teacher offered a mini lesson and simply talked about whether she herself read at home (the teacher participated in literature circles).
- The students discussed their text in group using *Discussion Sheet* as a tool to provide each of them with ideas to share and discuss.
- While the students were discussing and sharing, the teacher visited each group for a few minutes to monitor and participate in the discussion by asking some questions.
- A spoke person of each group took turn sharing the highlights of their discussion to the whole class using *Sharing Sheet* as a guideline. Every meeting had different spoke person to ensure that every student had a chance to present in front of

comprehension questions to the students to answer in pairs.
- To check their answers, the teacher and the students discussed them. The students corrected their answers themselves.
- The teacher asked the students to write the summary of the text.

the class.
- The teacher debriefed the process of the discussion, helped the students to do self- and group assessment, helped the students to choose a title, and handed out *Discussion Sheet* and *Sharing Sheet.*
- New groups formed around new reading choices.

Subsequent to the experiment, the posttest was administered to both experimental and control groups.

Data in this research were students' reading comprehension scores. In data analysis, the researcher used independent *t*-test. The equation of independent *t*-test is described as follow:

$$t = \frac{\overline{X}_1 - \overline{X}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{SD_1{}^2}{N_1} + \frac{SD_2{}^2}{N_2}}}$$

Where:

$\overline{X}_1$ = Mean for experimental group
$\overline{X}_2$ = Mean for control group
SD_1 = Standard Deviaton for experimental group
SD_2 = Standard Deviaton for control group
$N_{\square}$ = The number of students

(*Adapted fromBrown & Rodgers*, 2003: 206)

This equation is used because the group size between the experimental and the control group is the same (24 students for each group).This equation reads as *t* equals the mean for experimental group minus the mean for control group divided by the square root of the standard deviation squared for experimental group divided by the number of the experimental group plus the standard deviation squared for control group divided by the number of the control group.

The result of the analysis became the empirical evidence to accept or reject null hypothesis. The criterion for the acceptance or rejection of the null hypothesis was a level of significance .05. (95% confidence) one-tailed.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
3.1. Result of Pretest for Experimental and Control Group

The following table presents the result of the pretest:

Table 2. Pretest Scores Summary

	Experimental Group	Control Group
Number of Students	24	24
Highest Score	73.33	76.67
Frequency of the Highest Score	1	1
Lowest Score	33.33	30.00
Frequency of the Lowest Score	2	2
Mean Score	53.91	52.75
Standard Deviation	10.34	13.36

Table 2 shows that the highest score for the experimental group reaches 73.33, while the lowest score is 33.33. The frequencies for the highest score and the lowest score are 1 and 2 respectively. It means that in the experimental group there is one student got 73.33 and two students got 33.33. The mean score is 53.91 with 10.34 for the standard deviation. Meanwhile, the highest score in the control group is 76.67 and the lowest is 30.00. The frequency for the highest score is 1, while the frequency for the lowest score is 2. The average score is 52.75 with standard deviation 13.36. The mean difference between the experimental and control group is 1.16 point.

Looking at the mean difference, the groups are not too different in their ability. However, a deeper analysis using statistical computation should be done. Thus, to check the experimental and control groups' equivalence before the experiment, a *t*-analysis was conducted using independent *t*-test. The result became the basis in choosing the appropriate inferential statistics for the posttest scores.

Based on the analysis, the *t*-test analysis yielded a *t* of 0.33 with 44 degrees of freedom (*df*). The critical value for *df* 44 at the level of significance of .05 one-tailed is 1.678. *T*-value of 0.33 is lower than the critical value of 1.678. Therefore, it is concluded that the experimental and control group are not significantly different in their reading comprehension before the experiment. They have an equivalent starting point. The condition was the basis of choosing independent *t*-test for the final data analysis. Table 3 shows the summary of the result of pretest scores analysis.

Table 3. Summary of the Result of Pretest Scores Analysis

Degrees of Freedom (df)	*T*-Value	Level of Significance	Critical *T*-Value
44	.33*)	.05	1.678

*) not significant at p<.05

3.2 Result of Posttest for Experimental and Control Group

The following table presents the result of the posttest:

Table 4. Posttest Scores Summary

	Experimental Group	Control Group
Number of Students	24	24
Highest Score	90.00	86.67
Frequency of the Highest Score	1	1
Lowest Score	50.00	36.67
Frequency of the Lowest Score	3	3
Average Score	68.70	56.81
Standard Deviation	12.27	13.64

Table 4 shows that the highest score in the posttest is 90.00 for experimental group, and 86.67 for the control group. Only one student got 90.00. In the control group, the highest score was achieved by only one student as well. Meanwhile, the lowest score falls to 50.00 and 36.67 for experimental and control group respectively. The frequencies for the lowest score in the experimental and control groups are 3. The average score for experimental group reaches 68.70, while the control group reaches only 56.81. The standard deviation for experimental group is 12.27 and 13.64 for control group. If the posttest mean scores of both experimental and control group are compared, we will get that the mean score of the experimental group is 11.89 point higher than that of the control group.

The result of the posttest shows that the average scores for both groups increased. Compared to the pretest, the mean score gain for experimental group is 14.79 point and 4.06 point for the control group. The difference is 10.73. Looking at a glance, literature circles is more effective. For further analysis, a statistical analysis using independent *t*-test was conducted.

Based on the analysis, the *t*-test analysis yielded a *t* of 3.11 with 44 degrees of freedom (*df*). The *t*-critical value with *df*= 44 and p=.05 one-tailed is 1.678. The *t* value (3.11) exceeds the critical value (1.678). It means that mean difference between the experimental and control group is significant. Table 5 shows the summary of the result of posttest scores analysis.

Table 5. Summary of the Result of Posttest Scores Analysis

Degrees of Freedom (df)	*T*-Value	Level of Significance	Critical *T*-Value
44	3.11*)	.05	1.678

*) significant at p<.05

Based on the analysis, *Ho* stating that there is no difference in achievement between students who are taught using literature circles and those who are taught using conventional teaching reading activity is rejected. Thus, the research hypothesis stating that the students who are taught using literature circles achieve significantly higher reading comprehension than those who are taught using conventional teaching reading activity is accepted

The finding suggests that literature circle is effective. Some possible causes support the effectiveness of literature circles. *First*, literature circle is effective due to the fact that students can choose what they want to read. It is this ownership of their own learning and reading that makes the students motivated and engaged to read. Utilizing literature circles allows teachers to extend beyond the prescribed curriculum and allow students to connect to text through their own personal choice.

Second, group discussion, in which students talk about text with others, allows students to confirm what they understand and add their insights. There is also a negotiation for meaning that can improve students' reading comprehension.

Third, by working collaboratively, students gain access to each other's thinking processes and teach one another effective reading strategies. Thus, learning metacognitive skills from each other occurs.

Fourth, literature circles allows students to give their personal responses to reading. Reader response can improve reading comprehension in that students are allowed to bring their personal experiences and background knowledge to their reading. When they relate new information in the text to their prior experience and knowledge, they may have error interpretation. However, through discussion, they can refer back to their first interpretation. As they refer back, they are able to see errors they may have made and learn about how and why the errors occurred. Then, they learn to reconsider that initial interpretation. From this point of view, students are helped to view their errors as a natural part of the reading process. Reader response also allows students to recognize that reading means not only having the right answer or pronouncing every word correctly, but also making connections with text. Thus, students become engaged and reflective readers.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the result of data analysis using independent *t*-test, it is concluded that applying literature circles has positive effect on students' literal and inferential reading comprehension covering identifying directly stated main ideas, finding explicit information, determining subject matter, identifying implied main ideas, understanding pronoun reference, and drawing inferences. Students who experience literature circles tend to comprehend

expository text better than those who do not experience it. Put another way, literature circles is more effective than conventional teaching reading activity. The result of *t*-test proves this. The *t*-value (3.11) is higher than the critical value (1.678). Hence, the research result gives English teachers/instructors evidence that literature circles is worth considering in the teaching of reading.

Recommendations are addressed to future researchers and English teacher/ instructors as follow:

First, while the finding of this research suggest that literature circles played a significant role in improving the experimented students' reading comprehension of expository text, it would be beneficial to conduct another follow-up research to further validate the effectiveness of literature circles on EFL/ESL students' reading comprehension of expository text.

Second, the collection of data through another type of reading test such as cloze procedure, open question, short answer, and so on may yield different result. Therefore, the use of these instruments would be appreciated.

Third, the collection of data through video and/or audio recordings of the students' conversations during the discussions would allow for a measure of students progress. It potentially provides a deeper analysis of students' conversation and level of participation. Also, using questionnaire or interview asking students' opinion allow for an in-depth analysis of possible cause. This would aid researchers to avoid bias and allow them support and enhance the validity of the finding.

Fourth, since the present research is only limited to the second semester students of Intensive English Course who learn English to enable them to access information, the researcher recommends other future researchers to involve bigger population and use random assignment in selecting the sample.

Fifth, literature circles allow students to become reflective and critical readers. Therefore, the researcher also recommends other future researchers to conduct a research on the effectiveness of literature circles on students' critical reading since this research only touched on the literal and inferential reading.

Sixth, the micro skills of reading comprehension in this research are identifying directly stated main ideas, finding explicit information, determining subject matter, identifying implied main ideas, understanding pronoun reference, and drawing inferences. Thus, conducting a research investigating the effectiveness of literature circles on other micro skills is also recommended.

For English teachers/instructors, it is suggested that they consider applying literature circles in their classroom. One of biggest hopes of English teachers is to make their students fall in love with reading and become consummate readers so that the vocabulary and the ideas for writing or speaking increase. Also, in literature circles, students need a variety of reading materials on a wide range of topics. Therefore it is recommended to provide this. The last, since literature circles is easy to modify based on the situation and the students' need, teachers can adapt instead of adopt the procedure.

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