

## Improving Students' Reading Interest through Literature Circle Practices

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### Abstract

This study attempts to examine the effects of literature circles approach on students' reading interest. More specifically, the study addressed the following research question: Is there statistically significant difference in students reading interest between the working reading practice and the literature circles practices? This research work was mainly experimental in design. Sixty randomly selected students (30 for the control group and 30 for the experimental group) were involved from Arba Minch. Pre-test and post-test were employed in order to obtain data required for the study. An independent sample t-test was employed to examine the effect of the intervention between the control and experimental groups. The experiment was conducted for two semesters on the experimental group. The effects of literature circles approach on students' extensive reading was examined through an independent sample t-test. The average scores of the groups are 16.67 and 20.00 respectively for the post-test. The SD in post-test is computed as 5.09 and 3.25 respectively. The t-value is -3.85 and the P-value is 000. The difference between the two scores was found to be statistically significant, indicating that experimental group made significant improvement over its post-test compared to the control group. Therefore, the findings of the tests seem to indicate that the literature circle approach positively affected the students' reading interest of the experimental group. Finally, based on the results conclusions and recommendations were made.

**Keywords:** literature circles, extensive reading, reading interest

### Introduction

Literature circles are small, temporary discussion groups who have chosen to read the same book. While reading, the members calculate the reading assignment, bring notes on their reading, and discuss the text according to assigned roles. The circles meet regularly, with discussion roles rotating each session. When finishing a book, the groups share their reading in some way with the other classmates. They then select a new text, trade, and reassemble with other finishing groups, and move to a new cycle of reading and discussion. It is a method that incorporates "collaborative learning" and "independent reading," both of which are the most important concepts in education today. Literature circles allow students to cooperatively learn and comprehend texts through casual conversation amongst their peers as well as immersion in discussion surrounding purposefully chosen questions that will aid in text comprehension.

Intrinsic interest/motivation is inherent in literature circles because students are encouraged to read, write, explore and reflect. According to Gove and Long (2004), with the help of well-chosen literature, the classroom environment can become one of curiosity and inquiry. Researchers found that literature circles allowed participants to connect with what they were reading and showed emotional involvement in what they were talking about (Gove & Long, 2004). Readers become engaged

when they are part of a reading community where there is an exchange of ideas. Student engagement happens naturally as part of participation and discussion. Not only does this idea of community create engagement, it also creates interest for young readers (Bryan, Fawson, Parker, & Reutzell, 2003). Many believe that literature circles can actually change the classroom atmosphere to be more open, active, cooperative, and responsible. Student choice and student roles create much cooperation and responsibility while the cooperative group discussions lead to an open and active group (Burs, 1998). Burns also believes that student choice and social interaction, inherent in literature circles, lead to interest which creates success. Tompkins (2003) states that interest is affected by what types of activities students are involved in. According to Tompkins, open-ended activities where the students are in control, such as those involved in literature circles, are the most successful motivators. Also, intrinsic interest is linked with social interaction. People want to socialize, discuss ideas, and participate. According to Walker (2003), it is imperative for readers to have opportunities to read text and construct meaning in a social context. "Social interactions, scaffolding, a focus on meaning, and the use of individual differences support struggling readers as they learn to read (Walker, 2003)." These elements, all part of literature circles, create an inherent interest to understand meaning

Interest is an important prerequisite for learning (Slavin, 2000). 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; Cook, 1994). 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). Therefore, to solve the problem, the very basic thing for teachers is to make students engaged and motivated to read. Besides considering students' interest, teachers should note that they are the ultimate instructional designers.

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. In the Ethiopian context, there have not been many researches on the implementation of literature circles. Thus, this research attempts to examine the effect of literature circles practices on students reading interest in Arba Minch, Ethiopia. The following hypotheses are formulated for the current study.

H0: There is no statistically significant difference in students reading interest between the working reading practice and the literature circles practices.

H1: There is statistically significant difference in students reading interest between the working reading practice and the literature circles practices.

### **Methodology**

True-experimental, (pretest-posttest control group) research design was employed in the current study. Pretest-posttest design is one of the most frequently used experimental research designs in which two groups (experimental and control) of research participants or subjects are pretested. Then, some treatment or independent variable manipulation and post tested. The random sampling technique would give each school equal chance of being selected. In this regard, 60 students (30 for

an experimental group, 30 for control group) were subject for the study. The reason for making 30 students within each group is so as to fit with the assumption of the research design.

#### ***Instrument of Data Collection***

To explain the producer how the intervention was conducted, first, pre – intervention test was administered to collect data about the students' states of reading interest. Training was given for selected students about the concepts, importance, and implementation of literature circle approach. Then, an experiment of literature practices was conducted for two semesters. Following the experiment, post-intervention data was collected for comparing the means of the subjects before and after the intervention. Finally, the data analysis was made to examine the effect of examine effect of literature circles practices on students' reading interest.

#### ***Method of Data Analysis***

The data collected through questionnaire was organized and analyzed with the help of a computer program (SPSS version 20). With the help of SPSS version 20, mean and slandered deviation was used to compare students' mean score in pre-test and post-test. Independent t-tests were run to measure differences between responses of pretest and posttest. Independent t-tests used to see whether there was a significant difference. The magnitude of the intervention's effect was calculated employing eta squared which commonly used as effect size statistics of Cohen, (1988).

#### ***The Experiment***

- Pre – intervention test was administered to collect data about the students' states of extensive reading.
- Training was given for 10 selected EFL teachers about the concepts and implementation of literature circle approach.
- Training was given for selected students about the concepts, importance, and implementation of literature circle approach.
- An experimented of literature practices was conducted for two semesters.
- Post-intervention data was collected for comparing the means of the subjects before and after the intervention.
- The data analysis was made to examine the effect of examine effect of literature circles practices on students' reading interest.

#### **Results and Discussion**

The findings of this study are presented based on results of each objective of the study. The following table presents the findings under each objective.

**Table 1. Results of Statistical Analysis of the Independent Sample T-test, the Students' Interest in Reading**

Intervention	Control Group			Experimental Group			D/f	T-Value	P-Value	Significance
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD				
Pre- Intervention	30	16.10	4.47	30	16.03	4.54	58	-.458	.649	Not Significant
Post- Intervention	30	16.67	5.09	30	19.97	3.25	58	-3.85	.000	Significant

Table 1 shows the average scores of the Control and Experimental groups in Pre- intervention test and post- intervention test. As noted above, the average scores of the control group of 30 and the Experimental group of 30 students are 16.10 and 16.03 respectively for the pre-test. The standard deviation of the control group and experimental group is computed as 4.47 and 4.57 respectively for the pre-test. The t-value is -.458 and the P-value is .640. Therefore the students' interest in reading in both groups did not significantly differ. The experimental and control groups have similar interest in reading in pre-intervention test.

The post- intervention test scores of the Control and Experimental groups are also shown in table. The average scores of the control group of 30 and experimental group of 30 are 16.67 and 20.00 respectively for the post-test. The standard deviation of the Control group and Experimental groups in post-test is computed as 5.09 and 3.25 respectively. Moreover, the above table shows the t-value is -3.85 and the P-value is 0.00. The difference between the above two scores was found to be statistically significant, indicating that experimental group made significant improvement over its post-test compared to the control group. Therefore, the findings of the tests seem to indicate that the literature circle approach positively affected the students' reading interest of the experimental group.

To see whether the effect size which is symbolized as ( $r$ ) is small, medium or high, it must be calculated and the results should be known. The effect size is calculated by the square of t-test score over the square of t-test square plus a degree of freedom. Hence, the effect size is

$r = \sqrt{\frac{3.85^2}{3.85^2 + (30 + 30 - 2)}} = 0.19$ . The effect size is 0.19, which means that the subjects of the study scored better results in the post- intervention test than the pre-intervention-test. This is considered as the moderate effect size. As a result, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. It is concluded that students' text analysis skills score showed effect due to the intervention.

### Conclusions

The results of this study showed that literature circles contributed to the students' reading interest. The contribution of literature circles is that they improve the students' interest in reading. Literature circles increase the reading interest of the students who are reluctant and indifferent to reading. The book discussions in literature circles activate the students' desire for participation in discussions and stating their opinions socially. This situation increases their desire and interest for independent reading. In this study it was understood that reading a book as a group and talking about it afterwards was more enjoyable than individual reading. Moreover, it was observed that literature circle activities not only reinforced the students' existing reading habits but also turned those who didn't have the habit of reading into more interested, more willing, and self-confident individuals when it came to reading. This finding of the study corroborates the findings of similar other studies conducted at different times (Allan, Ellis & Pearson, 2005; Certo, Moxley & Miller, 2010). The students quite liked the implementation of literature circles which supported their reading skills and which were conducted to make the reading classes more enjoyable. The students thought that literature circles should be given a time of their own and be made widespread since they provided support for their academic and personal development. Literature circles stimulated the students' desire to communicate with each other, developed their text analysis skills to actively read and participate in class discussions, aroused their independent reading desires and interests in reading, and developed their self-confidence in speaking.

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

The results of this study on the effect of literature circles show that book discussions held as different from traditional book reading activities make the reading process more entertaining and more conscious. In Ethiopian contexts, literature circles practice should be implemented. This may improve the poor reading habit of the Ethiopian secondary school students. Also, English language teachers should be aware about the concept, importance, and implementation of the literature circles practices.

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