

ADOPTING LITERATURE CIRCLE TO GUIDE WORK UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN EXTENSIVE READING PROGRAM: LESSONS LEARNED FROM INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Albeit many works provide insight into EFL's extensive reading programs, relatively few studies investigate adopting literature circles in the extensive program. To fill this void, this phenomenological case study reports on the adoption of literature circle as the instructional procedure in an extensive program in Indonesian teacher education. Thirty-one undergraduate students in the cohort, four students, were recruited as participants voluntarily. Data are derived from classroom observation, focus group discussion, and interviews. Findings revealed that the literature circle enables students to engage in online discussion actively. Pedagogically, this study implied that the literature circle could be adopted as instructional scaffolding in an extensive reading program situated in an EFL classroom. This study implies the teacher educator to provide fruitful feedback to motivate students after discussing it. Practically, undergraduate students are encouraged to practice navigating skills in exploring a wide range of texts for extensive practice in EFL text.

Keywords: *Extensive Reading, Literature Circle, Phenomenological Case Study*

INTRODUCTION

During the past decades, extensive reading has been adopted to build students reading habits and reading for pleasure in the EFL context to boost English learners' proficiency (Aka, 2019; Yoshi, & Lavin, 2017). Prior research on exploring the contribution of extensive reading has been undertaken from a wide range of perspectives such as learners' motivations (Day & Bamford, 1998; Takase, 2010, Nurhadi and Larasaty, 2018), reading comprehension, and reading speed (Beglar & Hunt, 2014; Bell, 2001 and grammatical knowledge (Song & Sardegna, 2014). In ESL / EFL, Bui and Macalister (2021) report that the extensive reading online (ERO) program had provided a fruitful impact in terms of student reading fluency and reading speed up to 20 %. Drawing on the qualitative data analysis using questionnaires and interviews, the research indicates a positive change in participants in terms of ER attitude while enacting extensive reading online.

Another relevant study by Zhou & Day (2021) showed that EFL students' reading attitudes were notably enhanced after they had enacted online reading. The findings also implied, in extensive, the students had shown a wide range of improvement from reading rates, vocabulary, grammar, comprehension, writing to speaking mediated by

online ER. Although the students noted the numerous effects of online ER in various ways for their academic reading, the teachers showed a fruitful attitude toward online ER. While Yang, Chu & Tseng (2021) report that extensive reading material minimizes reading avoidance and promotes literal comprehension while reading ER materials at a level that could increase students' motivation and self-efficacy, The findings also indicated that the level of difficulties enables to enhance reading engagement. This study implied that the teachers need to match the level of text and materials to obtain regular students reading habits. Yanto, Saefullah & Kwary (2020) showed that extensive reading practice via literary text by learning logs enables students to actively engage and independently in terms of text identifying, word defining, class presentation, vocabulary reinforcement, and reflection situated in Indonesian EFL classroom. This finding implied that the adoption of learning logs encourages students as meaning makers and autonomous learners to gain better their reading ability and lexico-grammar.

Despite the myriad of studies that provide the benefits and contributions of the extensive reading program in a broad range level of the school, relatively little study on adopting literature circle as guide work in extensive reading program situated in the higher education context. Against this backdrop, this study focuses on adopting literature circles as peer-led discussions in the EFL teacher education program's extensive reading program. Two research questions are formulated to guide this study:

1. How does the adoption literature circle as the instructional approach guide students in an extensive reading program?
2. To what extent do students engage in an extensive reading group discussion via literature circle?

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is a Literature Circle?

As documented in the literature, a wide range of literature circle definitions has been provided by many scholars. For instance, Daniels (2002) argues that a literature circle is an activity in which members meet to discuss and provide the response to a book that they have read. 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. 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). In small group discussions, the students "meet regularly to share ideas, feelings, questions, connections, and judgments about books (other reading materials) they had read (Daniels 2002, p. 7).

Shelton-Strong (2012) highlights that literature circles are the activity in which "small peer-led discussion groups, engaged in reading the same piece of literature and

who came together on a regular programmed basis to share interpretations of what they have read (p. 214). In the literature circle, a wide range of reading materials can be adopted from fiction or literary texts (e.g, poems, short story and novel) to non-fiction or non-literary texts (e.g journal articles, newspaper articles, and a book chapter); nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that the selected of texts should consider “critical issues and experiences in readers’ lives and ‘provokes deep reflection, questioning, and discussion (Brabham and Villaume 2000, p. 279). Widodo (2016) argues that “literature circle as instructional scaffolding also provides a social space for students to engage in an active reading activity by talking about the text being read, responding to it, sharing what they have learned from the text, and discussing their questions and interpretations of the text within a certain reading circle” (p.2). With this myriad of definitions, “literature circle enables students not merely in reading activities but also in conversational encounters” (Widodo, 2016, p.2).

Prior research on adopting literature circle

During the past three decades, a growing body of research explored the adoption of literature circles in both extensive and intensive reading programs. For instance, Nolasco (2009) found that the literature circle enables to assist fifth graders students to understand non-fiction texts in reading expository and scientific texts. In this study, 26 fifth graders students were recruited as the participants and they engage in literature discussion during the 6-week study. The finding indicates that the literature circle provides an insight in particular to gain better students’ academic reading comprehension situated in the USA context. Another relevant study by McElvain (2010) revealed that experimental research of 75 fourth and sixth graders students through transactional literature circles (TLCs) provide a positive impact, in particular, helping students reading comprehension. The participants also showed a significant improvement in grade-level reading within 7 months. Drawing on teacher interviews and student surveys revealed that students’ participation in reading engagement and motivation provide a fruitful impact in a range of aspects including self-efficacy, confidence, and willingness to engage in class discussions via literature circle.

Widodo (2016) reports that a literature circle enables vocational school students to learn a wide range of lexico-grammar through discussing selected texts with their partners. It also provides students with the opportunity to share and discuss content knowledge and genre and lexico-grammatical features in the vocational school context. This study recommends that the literature circle can provide scaffolding to support students’ content knowledge and language learning enrichment. Recently, Ferdiansyah et al. (2020) examined the adoption of an online literature circle during the outbreak of COVID-19 in an intensive reading program situated in the Indonesian higher education context. Findings revealed that an online literature circle could provide students opportunities in fruitfully engaging intensive reading programs despite using an online platform. This study implied that the literature circle could be adopted both in face-to-face and online learning modes.

Inspired by these previous studies, the author has some reasons for adopting the literature circle in this study. Firstly, despite much work exploring literature circles both in the extensive reading program (Shelton –Strong, 2012) and intensive reading program (Widodo,2016), there is a call for adopting literature circles as scaffolding in a small group discussion in an extensive reading program situated in initial teacher education context.

Secondly, it investigates whether adopting a literature circle based on extensive reading assists students in actively engaging in EFL reading instruction with mixed language students' ability. Duncan (2012) contends that a literature circle enables students to enhance their vocabulary and encourages their agency as meaning makers Widodo (2016) argues that it is a crucial need for shaping students' reading attitude and motivation in which a literature circle serves as instructional scaffolding. Lastly, Engaging undergraduates students to actively discuss the chosen texts and topic in their group and provide the texts through enacting a literature circle enables them to perceive a range of meaningful extensive reading practice.

METHOD

Grounded in phenomenology as the canon framework, this study reports how EFL student teachers lived experiences, particularly critical moments, from their perspective (Moustakas, 1994, Demir & Qureshi, 2019). Grbich (2013) contends that phenomenology is "an approach that attempts to understand the hidden meanings and essence of an experience together with how participants make sense of these" experiences (p. 92). Phenomenology in this context is adopted as the theoretical foundation to capture how student teachers experience while enacting literature circle in blended extensive reading practice amid the Covid-19 pandemic in the Indonesian EFL classroom. Moustakas (1994) highlights that it is crucial to note that phenomenology is attentive in the beginning order aspect in which the world is described as it—driven by Moustakas's theory. In this study, student teachers construct the critical incidents as their lived experiences during the emergency condition due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, anchored in an interpretative phenomenological approach within an embedded case study design driven by extensive reading practice that the participants had engaged during the blended classroom, which combined online and the offline mode was used.

Research context and participants

This research was situated in an Indonesian private university in West Java and captured undergraduate students' lived experiences while enacting a literature circle in extensive reading practice. Out of thirty-one undergraduate students in the cohort, four female student teachers were recruited as the participants in this study. The participants aged 19 – 20 years from the second year of university students were Bunga, Mawar, Melati, and Dahlia (pseudonym). The project lasted from April to June 2021, where the first author served as the instructor. Before the research commenced, the

authors conducted a meeting with the participants to explain the research purpose and the benefits for their academic life. They also are informed that this project is part of the language curriculum for one semester. Following the ethical protocols, the participants were provided with the consent form as the legal document of the research and ensured that their data would keep kept confidential for publication purposes. They were asked to carefully read the consent form and sign to join this project.

Instructional procedure

Extensive reading program via literature circle organized through hybrid learning combining online and offline learning in 90 minutes per week. Zoom meeting was adopted as the platform for the virtual meeting, while the offline meeting was conducted on campus twice a week as the campus policy. Extensive reading via literature circle was depicted based on the following procedures: first, the lecturer explained the literature circle in class. Then the lecturer divided the students into six groups consisting of 4 members each group. After that, the students navigated the texts from various sources such as news, short stories, and novel. And then, the lecturer divided each member's roles, which consisted of a discussion director, connector detector, word warrior, and passage picker. They discussed and presented the chosen texts. In their internal group, discuss directly by using WhatsApp to share the text link from each member. Then, they voted on the text from a wide range of sources for presentation. At that time, they chose news texts from "The Jakarta Post" and assigned roles to each member. After that, the lecturer asked them to submit the text via WhatsApp group. As the course was limited, they continued the discussion at home via WhatsApp. Each member tries to understand the task. After that, they discussed and shared the materials, respectively, and if they had a problem, they could ask their lecturer via Whatsapp group. In addition, they also wrote assignments according to their roles.

Moreover, the students send the results to the WhatsApp group to be corrected by other members. After they felt satisfied with the tasks of each member, they copied the results into PowerPoint for presentation. Before the presentation, they re-read and understood the materials to be presented.

The roles in the literature circle

In our hybrid class, the authors had adapted the traditional roles proposed by Daniels (1994, 2002). In this context, each role enables students to explore and discuss the chosen text from a wide range of perspectives (Kilbane & Milman, 2010). The students' roles are as follows:

- Discussion Director: This role's function is to create open-ended questions related to the text read.
- Connector Detector: This role's function is to identify personal connections to the text. Some typical connections include text-to-text; text-to-self; text-to-movie; text-to-experience.

- Word Warrior: This role's function is to identify previously unknown or intriguing vocabulary within the text.
- Passage Picker: This role's function is to identify pertinent passages to review and share with the group (Adopted from Whitingham, 2013).

Miller et al. (2007) argued that several roles had different functions to assist students in understanding chosen texts or constructing a previous connection to the content of texts. Devik-Fry & LeSage (2010) emphasized that dividing specific roles and tasks helps to encourage the many levels of prior knowledge that students fetch to the text. By slighting the learner's target, the role helps as a filter for increasing understanding. In addition, the roles also challenge the students to gain better deeply with their classroom presentation than just reading and comprehending the text.

Data collection

Data were derived from students' reflections which were written after they had enacted different roles of the literature circle in hybrid extensive reading practice. After sharing and discussion, for homework, we asked students to write answers to "What did you do in the online literature circle?" and "What did you learn?" Drawing on students' answers, two emergent themes were proposed as a part of the analysis. Representative excerpts to support each theme and a discussion follow.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Drawing on the reflective journal which was written by students after they had enacted an online literature circle, four participants voiced their experiences as follows:

Bunga (Discussion director) :

"It was my first time, getting the role as discussion director. At the time, I didn't know what I should do as discussion director. I didn't have any idea about it. But, after I reread a file that the lecturer gave, and tried to remember what the lecturer explained. Finally, I got the idea. I knew what I was going to do. I tried to find the topic first, then I need to find the main purpose, tone, mode, main points, etc. I got the problem when looking for the purpose".

Mawar (Connector detector)

"When I received the task as connector detector, the first step I took was to see the definition and example of a summary that was on Google, then I understood one by one about what things should be available in the text. After I understood how to connect the text with our experiences, the next thing I do is read the material that will be discussed by our group, I read the text from start to finish, and I try to understand the gist of the news".

Melati (Word warrior)

"It is the first time I have become a word warrior. At first, I think this role was easy, but in fact, it's not that easy. I had to be thorough and exact to find the new vocabulary

and analyze the grammar. When I find a new vocabulary, I try to guess the meaning by looking at the words around it. But if I also didn't know the words around it, I will check it in the dictionary. Then, I type the new vocabularies in the slide with each meaning in Bahasa because, in the part of the reading log, there is vocabulary learned”.

Dahlia (Passage picker)

“I got a role as Passage Picker in Literature Circle. I thought it was easier rather than another role in the literature circle because the role was just picking a text. That was what I thought at first, so I just picked random text to be discussed. At the time, I chose a short story, but when I showed the text to my group via WhatsApp group, I got feedback or response from the group. They suggested choosing another text because our class has agreed to pick recent news”.

Drawing on students' reflective journals while they were enacting numerous roles in the literature circle, it successfully engaged students to discuss in their group. As the participants noted that each role has challenges in which they had to understand the role and how to operationalize it. This finding corresponded with the previous research that the task provides students an option besides the traditional literature circle (Serafini & Youngs, 2013 and a path to explore previous research regarding the adoption literature circle in a wide range of multimodal texts (Whitin, 2009). In addition, the blended model also encourages students to actively elucidate their comprehension and literary analysis of a text. (Dalton & Grisham, 2013). What amazed us students on adopting a wide range of digital media to support the research and share information in the extensive reading program. In this respect, students may have acquired how to utilize tools in learning. For instance, students navigated a wide range of sources on internet search engines, visited online newspapers, digital stories, online dictionaries, and created a fruitful powerpoint for group presentations.

While they were engaging with the text, each participant expressed their experience, for example:

Bunga noted that:

Because the text is news, the idea that appeared in my brain was 'the news is a text to inform someone'. I thought, most of my class friends were thinking in the same way. I asked on group chat, asking their opinion about the purpose of the article, and they said the news is to inform the reader. Then, I also asked for their suggestion about another purpose of the text, but they didn't give me any suggestions. We just agreed that the purpose is to inform.

Drawing on Bunga's reflective journal, she tried to lead the discussion via chat group and ask her friends' opinions about the chosen text. This activity enables her to be the leader of the discussion. In addition, the discussion shaped her agency and identity as a student-teacher.

Another participant Mawar voiced that:

Because I am a connector detector I must understand the meaning of the topic, after I understand, I try to rewrite the material that I understand more concisely and only at the important points. That is my experience for summarizing a material, that's all and thank you.

Regarding the vocabulary Melati (word warrior) noted that:

In the reading log, we have to add the meaning in Bahasa. So that they understand what the words mean, but it is different in the literature circle. The teacher told me not to add the meaning directly to the slides. Thus, we can discuss the meaning of the vocabulary in class. I also forgot to add part of the speech description in each vocabulary. Another job as a word warrior is to analyze grammar in a sentence. Our group chooses the article that occurred in the past, so the sentence patterns use a lot of past tense. It makes it easier for me to analyze the grammar. My experience as a word warrior for the literature circle was exciting. For me, the benefits of being a language enricher are gaining a lot of new vocabulary and having a better understanding of sentence patterns and good grammar.

While Dahlia (passage picker) told her experience:

As the passage picker, I looked for another text, particularly a text that was related to recent news. After finding the suitable text, I sent the link to the news through the WhatsApp group. Then, we discussed whether the members agreed with the text or not, and whether the text was relevant or not. I asked for some suggestions from them. At the end of the discussion, they agreed with the text I picked. The title of the text was Shootout reported at National Police headquarters that was retrieved from The Jakarta Post.

Drawing on the sharing from students' experience enacting literature circle, the participants expressed that the news item text enriches the vocabulary and the grammar of the text. In addition, engaging the extensive reading via news text and literature circle could expand their digital literacy and English skills such as navigating, grammaring, intertextualizing, and viewing. The new skills are very crucial while they engage in a wide range of multimodal text in the digital era

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Drawing on the findings, the authors concluded that the literature circle enables undergraduate students to discuss and explore news items and digital resources. In addition, enacting the roles of the literature circle could encourage to be autonomous learners This finding corresponded with the previous research that blended instruction with multimodal text and new literacies can stimulate and encourage extensive reading engagement in the EFL teacher education context (Lapp, Moss, & Rowsell, 2012; Whitin, 2009). Thus, pedagogically, this study implied that teacher educator needs to provide intensive guidance and fruitful feedback while the students enact the discussion. Practically, students argued that they need to have navigating skills to explore a wide range of multimodal texts for extensive reading practice. Therefore, collaborating

between students and the teacher educator is crucial to obtain not only achieving navigating skills but also training students to be critical readers as well.

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