

# The Effect of Literature Circles Approach on Students' Reading Comprehension and Narrative Text Analysis

## Running Title: Literature Circles Approach

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### Abstract

**Aim:** The aim of this study was to examine the effects of literature circles practices on students' reading skills

**Method:** An experimental research design was employed in the study. Sixty randomly selected students (30 for the control group and 30 for the experimental group) were involved from Chamo Secondary School, Arba Minch Ethiopia. An intervention questionnaire was employed in order to obtain data required for the study. The data gathered through an intervention questionnaire instruments was subject to quantitative analysis. An independent sample t-test was employed to examine the effect of the intervention between the control and experimental groups.

**Result and Conclusion:** The experiment was conducted for two semesters on the experimental group. The result of the intervention showed that there was statistically significant difference on the students' comprehension and narrative texts analysis. Finally, based on the results conclusions and recommendations were made.

**Key words:** literature circles, extensive reading, motivation, comprehension, narrative texts.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

A literature circle is a reading group involving from five to six students which may have different academic success levels and reading abilities (Daniels, 2002; Karatay, 2015). According to them, the students may willingly come together to read literary texts like a story, an essays, or textbooks they like and to share their reading experiences with each other. The reason why these reading activities are called literature circle activities is that the order of seating is designed either as a full or half circle which allows all group members to see each other's faces when they come together. In literature circles, all members in the group read the same text, involve in the discussion about the text, and each has a different reading task for the presentation to be made at the end of the discussion (Karatay, 2017).

After the students form literature circle reading groups, they select a book or a text determined either by the teacher or by them. Each member reads the book or the text in order to do the individual reading task he has been assigned and starts preparation to discuss the task with the members of the group. Each student does this reading activity individually. Independent reading work is performed at school or at home, depending on the volume of the book/text. After the students complete their independent reading work and do their reading tasks, they participate in

the discussion about the book and share their experiences with the other students. After the discussion, all students present the work they have prepared which is based on their reading task.

Literature circle reading activities are designed to be implemented in four stages:

*Planning:* In this stage the introduction of reading tasks, creating literature circles, and choosing the book/text are performed respectively. In the first place, the introduction of reading tasks to the students is implemented. The students are informed individually about what they will do based on the task while reading the book. Secondly, reading circles are created among students who voluntarily want to work together. If those who come together have different interests, skills, and academic achievement levels, this increases the quality of the learning atmosphere and in-class interaction. In the third place, the students are required to choose one of the books/texts offered or one of their choosing.

*Individual reading:* In this stage, time is given to the students to read the book/text to do their individual reading tasks. In individual reading activities, the students are required to understand the content of the text, take notes, and prepare a presentation to give information about the reading task. For instance, a student who takes over the *Illustrator* task may be required to draw the chain of events and the characters in the story.

*Discussion:* In this stage, the student who takes over the *Questioner* task provides his/her friends with a discussion time for 20-30 minutes to share their feelings and thoughts about the topic of the book, main idea, other messages given in the book, the writer's use of language, and the writer's style of treating the topic. The student also manages the session in a way for all students to participate in the discussion to a considerable extent.

*Sharing:* In this stage, everybody shares their presentations with their friends about the tasks they have done. For instance, the *Passage master* shares the sections s/he likes in the book/text; the *vocabularyenricher/word wizard* shares the keywords the writer emphasized and the words used with new and different meanings; the *Illustrator* shares the visuals s/he prepared about the heroes and concept map of the events with the group members (Daniels, 2002; Karatay, 2015).

The purpose of processes of the discussion of the book/text and sharing thoughts about it is to increase the students' comprehension skills about the theme, main idea, supporting ideas, plot and subordinate plots, and the writer's style of treating the topic and events. These processes improve the students' skills of comprehension and analysis of complex texts they will encounter throughout their lives and increase their critical and reflective thinking abilities (Briggs, 2010; Burner, 2007; Burns, 1998). In addition, the processes of preparation and individual reading help students acquire self-control skills for planning and doing independent reading in their reading and learning processes. In terms of cognitive competence, these processes are the stages of the reading comprehension skill that students need in their academic lives.

On the other hand, Daniels (1994) endorses 4 required roles: a discussion director—carrying the official responsibility to start the discussion with good questions and solicit comments from other members, a literary luminary—choosing memorable passages of text that are interesting, powerful, puzzling, thought-provoking, or important to read aloud, a connector—showing relationships of people, places, and events in the text to home life, school life, personal concerns, other literary works or other writing by the same author, and an illustrator—adding a graphic dimension to the text by sketching, drawing cartoons, diagrams, stick figures or flow charts. The other members get to speculate

what the pictures mean and connect the drawing to their own ideas about the reading. Only then can the illustrator share what he/she thinks the pictures mean, where they come from, or what they represent (Daniels, 1994). These 4 roles offer students 4 different reactions to the text: analytical (discussion director), oral (literary luminary), associative (connector), and symbolic (illustrator).

From the above paragraphs, we can easily understand that the literature circle practices can positively affect the students' extensive reading skills. In this regard, the current study attempts to examine the effects of literature circles approach on students' extensive reading in Ethiopian context.

Literature circles attract students' reading interests more than the traditional reading of literary works and summarizing activities and arouse their reading desire for literary works because the students in literature circles find a collaborative and cooperative social learning atmosphere. In addition to helping students improve their ability to understand the deep structure of texts, this environment contributes to the improvement of students' ability to talk about a literary text, self-confidence, and self-acceptance which even adults even experience difficulty in (Allan, Ellis & Pearson, 2005). This especially increases the reading desire of male students who are reluctant to do reading because when the students themselves determine the amount of reading they will do, this makes them bolder and more eager in the reading process.

Numbers of studies, for example, Briggs, 2010; Daniels & Steineke, 2004; McElvain, 2010; Wilfong, 2009 show that literature circle reading activities which are done in one class hour are more effective than traditional reading activities used in the acquisition of skills such as text analysis, making a guess, drawing a conclusion, critical thinking, speaking, writing, enhancing vocabulary, and improving independent reading motivation. This is because these activities offer students not only a collaborative learning atmosphere for socializing, but assigning a different reading task to each student helps them improve their individual reading skills and learning strategies as well. In this respect, compared with the traditional reading education activities, literature circle reading activities provide students with an indirect learning atmosphere for both socializing and cognitively learning reading comprehension strategies.

The study by Briggs, 2010; Burner, 2007; Williams, 2009 also stated that for learners who participate in literature circles discussions, not only does their reading desire increase, but their vocabulary also improves; reading and analyzing expository and narrative texts the students chose by themselves in literature circles are more effective in improving their vocabulary. Reading authentic literature can improve vocabulary, reading comprehension, reading ability and language growth.

In the Ethiopian context, there is no research on the implementation of literature circles. Thus, this research attempts to examine the effect of literature circles practices on students reading skills in Arba Minch, Ethiopia.

### **1.1. HYPOTHESES**

The following hypotheses are formulated for the current study.

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

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

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

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

## **1.2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this research is to examine the effect of literature circles approach on students' reading comprehension and narrative text analysis in Arbaminch, Ethiopia.

### **1.2.1. SPECIFIC OBJECTS**

The current study has the following specific objects

- ✓ To examine the effect of literature circles practices on students analyzing narrative texts.
- ✓ To examine the effect of literature circles practices on students reading comprehension.
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## **2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND 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. Particular to this study, this design was the most preferable design to achieve the objectives of the study. At this point, Johnson and Christensen (2004) stated that an experimental (pretest-posttest control group) design is the best fitting design to administer a treatment and to compare if the difference between pre-intervention test and post- intervention test is significant in the same group.

### **2.1. POPULATION OF THE STUDY AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES**

Grade 11<sup>th</sup> students were selected employing sampling random technique from Chamosecondary school, Arba Minch, Ethiopia. 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.

### **2.2. INSTRUMENT OF DATA COLLECTION**

In order to gather data for this research intervention questionnaire was employed.

### 2.2.1. Questionnaire

. The questionnaire was administered for students both in the experimental and control groups. The reason for employing questionnaire is that questionnaires are cost effective to gather more comprehensive data as compared to face-to-face interview. Besides, they are easy to analyze as data entry and tabulation that will be done with computer software packages. They further elaborate that response or answers are summarized to obtain a numerical value that represents the characteristic of the subject. Moreover, they are familiar with most people because they have experiences in completing questionnaires.

### 2.3. 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 standard deviation was used to compare students' mean score in pre-test and post-test. Paired-samples t-tests were run to measure differences between responses of pretest and posttest. Paired-samples 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).

### 2.4. 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 experiment 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 literature circles practices on students' extensive reading.

### 3. Findings

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

**Table 3: 1. Results of Statistical Analysis of the Independent Sample T-test, Students' Text Analysis Skills**

Intervention	Control Group			Experimental Group			D/f	t-value	P-value	Significance
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD				
Pre- Intervention	30	65.83	13.44	30	66.53	13.26	58	-439	.661	Not sig.

Post- Intervention	30	69.27	11.80	30	89.83	23.28	58	-3.94	.000	Significant
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Table 3.1 indicates the average scores of Control and Experimental groups in pre-intervention test and post-intervention test. As shown above, the average scores of the control group of 30 and the Experimental group of 30 students are 66.83 and 67.53 respectively for the pre-intervention test. The standard deviation of the control group and experimental group is computed as 13.44 and 13.26 respectively for the pre-test. Regarding the t-value, it is -439 and the probability value (P-value) is .662. Therefore the difference between the above two scores was found to be statistically insignificant difference over its pre-test compared to that of the control group ( $P > 0.05$  i.e. .662).

The post- intervention test scores of Control and Experimental groups are also shown in Table 1. The average scores of the control group of 30 and experimental group of 30 are 68.27 and 88.83 respectively for the post-intervention test. The standard deviation of the Control group and Experimental groups in post-intervention test is computed as 11.80 and 23.28 respectively. Besides, the t-value is -3.94 and the P-value is below 0.05 (i.e. .000). Thus post-intervention test scores were found to be statistically significant indicating that the Experimental group made significant improvement over its post-intervention test compared to the control group. Therefore, the findings of the tests seem to indicate that literature circles approach had considerable contribution in affecting students' text analysis skills

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  $r = \sqrt{\frac{3.94^2}{3.94^2 + (30+30-2)}} = 0.20$ . The effect size is 0.20, 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 highest 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.

**Table3.3: Results of Statistical Analysis of the Independent Sample T-test, Students' Comprehension Skills**

Intervention	Control Group			Experimental Group			D/f	T-Value	P-Value	Significance
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD				
Pre- Intervention	30	18.27	5.12	30	18.07	4.35	58	-.198	.844	Not Significant
Post- Intervention	30	18.53	5.33	30	22.60	4.22	58	-4.09	.000	Significant

The above Independent sample t-test table displays that the average scores of the control group of 30 students and the experimental group of 30 students are 18.27 and 18.07 correspondingly for the pre-intervention test. The standard deviation of the control group and the experimental group are calculated as 5.12 and 4.35 respectively for the pre-intervention test. Regarding the t-value and the p-value, the t-value is -.198 and the p-value is .844. Thus, the difference between the above two scores was found to be statistically insignificant indicating that the experimental group made no significant difference over its pre-intervention test compared to that of the control group.

The post- intervention test scores of the control group and the experimental group are also shown above. As can be seen from the table, the average scores of the control group of 30 students and experimental group of 30 students are 18.53 and 22.60 respectively for the post- intervention test. The standard deviation of the control group and the experimental group in the post- intervention test is computed as 5.33 and 4.22 respectively. Besides, the above table shows that the t-value is -4.09 and the p-value is .000. The difference between the two scores was found to be statistically significant indicating that the experimental group made a significant effect over its post- intervention test compared to that of the control group. The findings of the tests thus seem to indicate that the literature circles approach could have statistically significant effect on students' comprehension skills.

#### **4. Conclusion and Discussion**

The results of this study showed that literature circles contributed to the students' reading extensive reading in three areas. The first of those is the contribution of literature circles to the students' text analysis skills. It was determined that literature circles were effective in *improving the students' text analysis skills* such as finding the theme, main idea, and keywords in a text. The data show that reading strategies which were taught through traditional reading education could be realized in a more entertaining and attractive social learning atmosphere through literature circles. The views obtained from the students and the findings of other studies support this conclusion.

The second contribution of literature circles is that they improve the students' comprehension skills in reading. To statistically examine the gains made in comprehension, a composite pretest comprehension score was computed and a composite posttest comprehension score was computed. An independent sample t test revealed that the gains made in comprehension were statistically significant t-value is -4.09 and the p-value is .000.

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. 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.

**Conflict of Interest:** None

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