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***Teachers' Perceptions of Implementing  
Literature Circles in the EFL Classroom:  
A Case Study***

**By :**

***Dr. Nagwa Hamza Serag***  
*Faculty of Education Tanta University*

## Teachers' Perceptions of Implementing Literature Circles in the EFL Classroom: A Case Study

Dr. Nagwa Hamza Serag

### Abstract

This study examined EFL teachers' perceptions of literature circles use in authentic classroom settings. As a case study, it sought to explore perceptions of six EFL inservice teachers of the literature circles' potential in their classrooms, and their students' feelings toward the literature circles experience. Another purpose of the current study was to investigate the most important aspects EFL teachers consider when planning and implementing literature circles in their classrooms. Data was collected through two basic sources. These were a semi-structured interview with participant teachers and a teaching journal. Through journal writing, teachers were invited to express their own thoughts and interpretations of their teaching practices as well as their learners' reactions toward the literature circles experience. Findings revealed that the use of literature circles in the EFL classroom has yielded some notable benefits. Besides, participant teachers emphasized the positive effect of literature circles on students' feelings and behaviour. In terms of the study findings, appropriate conclusions and implications have been suggested.

**Keywords :** Teacher Perceptions-Literature Circles - EFL Reading-Student Feelings

"مدركات المعلمين تجاه استخدام "دوائر الأدب" داخل فصول تدريس اللغة  
الانجليزية كلفة أجنبية : دراسة حالة "

مستخلص باللغة العربية :

هدفت الدراسة الحالية الى الكشف عن مدركات معلمى اللغة الانجليزية كلفة أجنبية تجاه استخدام استراتيجيات دوائر الأدب كنموذج يقوم على المشاركة والمناقشة الجماعية للنصوص الأدبية داخل فصولهم الدراسية . ونظرا لطبيعة الدراسة ، كدراسة حالة ، فقد تمثلت مشكلة البحث فى اكتشاف مدركات ستة من معلمى اللغة الانجليزية تجاه المردود الذى يمكن أن يقدمه نموذج دوائر الأدب داخل فصول تدريس اللغة الانجليزية كلفة أجنبية ، كما تناولت أيضا تقييم المعلمين لاستجابات وسلوك الطلاب أثناء تطبيق النموذج . وقد تمثلت مصادر جمع البيانات فى مقابلة شخصية مع المعلمين المشاركين فى الدراسة ، بالإضافة الى سجلات تدريسية دون فيها المعلمون ملاحظاتهم وانطباعاتهم عن الممارسات التدريسية داخل فصولهم ، وأيضا عن طبيعة استجابات ومشاعر طلابهم تجاه نموذج دوائر الأدب . وقد أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن استخدام نموذج دوائر الادب داخل فصول تدريس اللغة الانجليزية كلفة أجنبية كان له مردود ايجابى ملحوظ فيما يخص مهارات القراءة من ناحية ، وازدياد مستوى دافعية واستقلالية المتعلمين من ناحية أخرى . فى ضوء نتائج الدراسة تم تقديم عدد من المقترحات والمضامين التربوية ذات الصلة.

**Introduction:**

Reading is an effective language learning tool that provides students with an opportunity to construct meaning through interacting with a reading text (Lopez-Medina, 2007). Reading engagement is linked to reader's interest and choice. The ability to make choices has the potential of promoting learners' motivation and involvement in the reading process. According to Maraccini (2012), teachers know that students are motivated to read when they are actively engaged in an activity or a task that arouses their interest and enable them to make choices. Therefore, teachers need to search for new effective strategies for engaging their students into meaningful reading.

Fore (2007) argues that the act of reading, by itself, is challenging enough with no additional load of understanding text content. "Before a reading teacher can show students a whole new world in print, they need to show them the world they are familiar with in print (p. 53). Moreover, what the reader adds to the text from his previous personal experiences and feelings contribute in generating a different meaning from the same text (Hillier, 2005).

Teachers have to make sure that they are adopting effective strategies that promote their students' motivation to read (MacDonald, 2008; Ali, 1999). One of the most successful instructional models that have largely contributed in creating an environment of engagement and collaboration among students in the EFL reading classroom is literature circles. Developing positive attitudes toward reading, enjoying reading and becoming real world readers are some goals that can be attained through adopting literature circles within reading classes. Besides, literature circles have the potential of engaging students more fully with reading texts and fostering students' ownership of their own learning (Lee, 2002; Koazk, 2008).

The use of text-to-self connections within literature circles has the potential of motivating students to connect the reading content with their own real-life experiences. Shared experience, rich text, and the personal response are three key elements that are brought together within literature circles. Importantly, this instructional model has been regarded as a great success in terms of student achievement, authentic interaction, and enjoyment in reading (McElvain, 2010; Montoya, 2006; Riggan, 2011).

### **Review of Literature :**

#### **Literature Circles: What Are They?:**

Literature circles are an approach that incorporates reading and discussion of children's literature in small groups. They are one way to engender authentic literacy experiences because using them supports understanding the text, providing personal connections with the text and others, and creating deeper meanings (Lee, 2002, p.iii). Casey (2008, cited in Gall, 2010) defines literature circles as a small group of students reading the same work of literature and working with peers while performing discussions.

Maraccini (2010) defines literature circles as "Just one strategy that incorporates the use of student dialogue and conversation to improve comprehension and reading skills" (p. 25-26). Moreover, literature circles could be one intervention that have the potential of introducing a variety of input for challenging students' thinking and developing their oral production. Besides, literature circles could be considered as an effective cooperative learning strategy that promote students' interest in reading while enhancing their self-perceptions (Hillier,2005; Olsen,2007; Prillaman, 2008; Nolasco, 2009).

According to Fore (2007), "Literature circles are the very embodiment of a community of literacy. Readers come together to share their thoughts, ideas, and questions about a book that they are reading in common" (p. 33). Literature circles are an instructional strategy whereby students can share the reading experience and its associated applications: learning of content, acquisition of language and literacy skills, implementing authentic literacy experiences, and development of social relationships and interactions (Baron, 2000; Wellman, 2000).

It has been quite evident that a literature circle model is capable of engaging learners in their reading process through "providing challenge, enjoyment, personalization and choice. Empowering pupils to make choices about what and how they learn and providing them with ownership of the process is highly motivational and its significance should not be underestimated" (Allan, Ellis, & Pearson, 2005, p. 22). Literature circles could be a method to meet both student and teacher needs as society demands higher literacy skills. (Hillier, 2005).

### **Teachers' Perceptions of Literature Circles**

Teachers' perceptions of students reading motivation are impacted by students' achievement level. These perceptions affect teachers' instructional style and strategies (McDonald, 2008; Kuzborska, 2011). According to the literature circles model, teachers play a role of a facilitator who monitor and encourage their students to formulate ideas and questions about the reading material in terms of their own real experiences. Moreover, through an interactive process, students' understandings are scaffolded in relation to their own needs (McElvain, 2010).

Teachers need to adjust their role while working with groups in terms of their students' experiences of discussing

books (Allan, Ellis & Pearson, 2005). To explain, peer-led reading groups require constant training by a very active teacher to help students develop varied skills like active listening, asking follow-up questions, disagreeing agreeably and more. Teachers need to continue to find ways to promote discussion, sharing, and asking questions during literature circles (Daniels, 2006; Maraccini, 2012).

McDonald (2008) explains that teachers are largely responsible for knowing their students. This knowledge alone will not lead to increased motivation, but increased use of motivating practices may, actually result in a more motivating environment for students. Relatedly, Judge (2011) believes that "teachers who are lucky enough to have literate, independent students ... only have to offer a secure, supportive environment with access to plenty of interesting reading materials and let nature take its course" (p. 179).

Teachers have a significant role in organizing, introducing, and managing literature circles, but once students are engaged in the process, the predominant role becomes one of guided facilitation. However, teachers need to select appropriate texts for students (Kozak, 2008). Besides, teachers have to clarify their own purposes for using literature circles. In this regard, Allan, Ellis, and Pearson (2005) argue that:

Literature circles can develop children's skills in literary analysis; improve their attitudes to reading; help children reflect on, and better understand, their lives; and allow children a social and emotional 'space' to define themselves as readers with distinct preferences. Each outcome is developed by a different kind of talk. Teachers need to ensure that they recognize, promote and support talk that achieves their desired outcomes" (p. 23).

## **Independent Roles for Students within Literature Circles**

The main purpose of literature circles is to give students more responsibility and choice in the classroom, and to inspire a love of reading. As well, literature circles hope to make students more aware of literature and to increase critical thinking skills (Kozak, 2008, p. 14). Brown (2002, as cited in Maraccini, 2012) states that literature circles encourage learners to be active listeners and risk takers through enhancing their communication skills. Moreover, literature circles do provide the opportunity for students to pose questions, argue, reflect, negotiate, develop intellectual abilities, and construct new meaning while working together.

Through adopting literature circles in the reading classroom, students can positively participate in their learning process where they have control over choice of literature, discussion and topics. Also, students take responsibility for providing answers to the questions raised within the group and thoroughly discussing the text to generate profound conversation with their group and with the whole class as well (Gall, 2010). Through literature circles, learners are encouraged to cooperate, reflect, take responsibility of their learning and get insight into the text. Also, development of readers' thought, competence, and critical thinking can be reached (Mostafa, 2002; Maraccini, 2012; El-Maleh, 2006).

The small groups format within literature circles provide students with the opportunity of reading, discussing, and working together through basic elements of a literary text at their own pace in a non-judgmental, secure environment (Gall, 2010). Furthermore, students can pass through the experience of reading literature as a way of

realizing the world. When the chosen material is connected to their life experiences, they get the opportunity to talk about personal connections in literature with peers (Lee, 2002; Fore, 2007; Pierzga, 2007; Lloyd, 2006).

### **Implementing Literature Circles: Characteristics and Design**

Adopting Literature circle in the reading classroom requires that teachers have to make decisions at each stage of implementation. While making management decision, teachers should take into consideration their purposes of literature circles use, students' past experiences in reading and discussion, the learning environment, and the ways through which they prepare their students for teaching (Allan, Ellis & Pearson, 2005). One basic characteristic of literature circles is students free choice of their own reading texts. Besides, reading independently for pleasure is a type of reading that enrich the literature circles experience and largely contribute in its success (Olsen, 2007).

Literature circles effectiveness lies in the fact that they give students the right to choose what they read and discuss. As a result, students experience feelings of ownership and motivation while they are positively participating in discussion of a text (Stabile, 2009; Kozak, 2008). One of the main aspects of literature circles is that they provide the opportunity for students "to take ownership of their own learning. In any aspect of learning, students are invited to be more engaged when they can be more personally involved" (Riggan, 2011, p. 12).

Collaboration is one of the biggest advantages of literature circles. Characteristics of literature circles that make collaboration so key include the groups holding and sharing clear expectations, not only of each other, but of the texts, the teacher, discussion, and themselves. Each group

member has equal responsibility and accountability to the group, and communication and conflict resolution mechanisms are necessary for success (Daniels, 2002, cited in Gall, 2010). "Teachers should be flexible in the criteria used to form and re-form group and take account of pupils' recommendations for groupings" (Allan, Ellis & Pearson, 2005, p. 23).

As a learner-centered collaborative reading strategy, literature circles bring together the concepts of cooperative learning, independent reading and reader response theory with a view to promoting students' understanding of reading texts, and creating genuine student-led group discussions (Soares, 2009; Su, 2009; Morrow, 2005). In addition, Sandman and Gruhler (2007, as cited in Stabile, 2009) state that there are five basic features of literature circles. These features are student choice, mini-lessons, reading schedules, note-taking skills and assessment.

### **The Problem:**

The current study is an attempt to examine EFL teachers' perceptions of literature circles' use in authentic classroom settings. As a case study, it seeks to describe how individual teachers handle the realities of literature circles in the context of authentic EFL classrooms. Specifically, this qualitative study aims at exploring EFL teachers' perceptions of the literature circles' potential in their classrooms, and their students' feelings toward the literature circles experience. Another purpose is to investigate the most important aspects EFL teachers consider when planning, designing and implementing literature circles in their classrooms. Accordingly, this study addresses two basic questions:

- 1- What are EFL teachers' perceptions of the use of literature circles in relation to:

- a- The potential of literature circles in EFL authentic classrooms?
  - b- EFL students' feelings toward the literature circles experience?
- 2- How do EFL teachers design and implement literature circles in their classrooms?

### **Significance of the Study:**

Teachers today need to cultivate a love for reading in their EFL students to become life-long readers. This goal can be attained through providing varied opportunities through which students can practice real-world reading. The current study introduces an instructional model; literature circles, which may have the potential of establishing motivation, authenticity, and collaboration in the EFL classroom. Importantly, literature circles use can be looked upon as a meaningful contribution to the teaching-learning process of English as a foreign language in general, and to literacy instruction development in particular. Reflecting on her experience of adopting literature circles in her classes, Dalie (2001) argues that literature circles guarantee "a safe and supportive structure within which our students can interact ....Best of all, they inevitably provide our students with proof that they will benefit from the respectful sharing and receiving of each person's unique talents and insights" (p.99).

### **Method:**

#### **Participants:**

Participants in this study were six inservice teachers who taught English as a foreign language. Five were primary school teachers (T2, T3, T4, T5,T6) while one was a secondary school teacher (T1). Participant teachers were all with a teacher education qualification, majoring in English as a foreign language. Teaching experience of these

teachers ranged from one to five years. At the time of experimentation, these inservice teachers were enrolled at the special diploma program. The current researcher participated in teaching some courses in this academic program.

These volunteers: Four male teachers (T1, T2, T3, T6) and two female teachers (T4, T5) participated in this literature circles experience with the hope of enhancing their knowledge of a new, innovative model for teaching reading. Most importantly, within the special diploma program, these participants studied the literature circles model as an integral part of literacy instructional models.

### **Data Collection Sources:**

This qualitative study collected data through two basic sources. The first source was a semi-structured interview with participant teachers held at the end of the study treatment. The second source of data was teachers' journal entries which encompassed their thoughts, observations, and implications about the whole process of implementing literature circles in the classroom. More details on the two instruments are provided below.

#### **The Semi-Structured Interview:**

After completing the whole experience of implementing literature circles, all the participant teachers had to pass through a semi-structured interview (Appendix A). The main purpose of this interview was assessing the teachers' perceptions of literature circles implementation in their EFL classroom. According to an interview guide, two basic open-ended questions were posed. The first question asked teachers to evaluate their experience in relation to benefits, challenges and problems faced while implementing literature circles. The second interview question asked participant teachers about their students' feelings toward the

literature circles experience. Teachers were guided through the interview by providing specific prompts and cues with a view to sustaining their talk about their experience.

**The Teaching Journal :**

For the purpose of determining participant teachers' perceptions of literature circles use in the EFL classroom, they were asked to keep a journal for citing their notes, observations and comments regarding the personal experience they passed through. Teachers' journal entries were constructed throughout the whole experience starting from planning, introducing, implementing and assessing the literature circles process.

The teaching journal is looked upon as a rich resource for generating teaching ideas and reflecting on teachers' successes and challenges in the classroom. In this regard, Maarof (2007) points out that teaching journals help teachers in assessing their teaching and learning and contribute in identifying strengths and weaknesses in teaching, which in turn, lead to a process of self-correction and self-improvement.

Participant teachers were instructed, from the very beginning, to write their entries as much as they could about their teaching experiences regarding the literature circles experience. No specific guidelines or directions were provided for the teachers to adhere to while writing, their entries. Through journal writing, teachers were invited to express in a personal and lively way their own thoughts and interpretations of their teaching practices as well as their learners' reactions toward the literature circles experience. The teachers handed in their journals at the end of the literature circles experience.

**Research Procedure:**

Research procedure began by an invitation to a group of EFL inservice teachers to voluntarily participate in the

literature circles experience. Only six teachers accepted the invitation and agreed to participate in the experience. Participant teachers were motivated by their desire to differentiate their instruction with a view to cultivating an attitude of positive participation on the part of their EFL students. These volunteers were asked to implement literature circles in their authentic classrooms as a learner-centered instructional model that may enhance their students' reading skills.

In order to prepare these participant teachers for the literature circles experience, two orientation sessions were devoted for introducing the literature circles model. During these sessions, participant teachers were fully informed about the literature circles concept and potentiality as an innovative instructional model for enhancing students' competence of text analysis and discussion, and for promoting their reading engagement as well.

All required information about the different stages of introducing, organizing, and managing literature circles in the EFL classroom was fully provided and demonstrated. Moreover, participant teachers were guided and instructed to read about literature circles in the relevant literature. A list of recommended resources, compiled by the current researcher, was provided (Dalie, 2001, Allan, Ellis & Pearson, 2005, Daniels & Steineke, 2004, Furr, 2004, Montoya, 2006).

From the beginning of the experiment, participant teachers were asked to keep a journal for jotting down their notes, observations, questions, and thoughts throughout the whole process of planning, introducing, managing and implementing the literature circles model. Participant teachers met as a group with the researcher at a regular basis throughout the implementation process which lasted for six weeks. Through these meetings, individual teachers were

invited to share their observations of learners' responses to the new experience, and to address questions or comments about the most important aspects and the most problematic issues.

### **Data Analysis:**

Collected data for the purpose of the current study came from two main sources: The semi-structured interview and teachers' journal entries. Regarding teachers' interviews, data analysis procedures began with transcribing these recorded conversations. The transcribed data was then analyzed, coded, and classified with a view to identifying the main themes in relation to the essential research questions.

In terms of the nature of the collected data and previous relevant research, the decision was made to adopt the thematic content analysis method while analyzing the teachers' journal entries (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Patton, 1990; Mayring, 2000; Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Accordingly, these entries were carefully read through and thoroughly examined and organized so as to be coded. An acceptable level of coding consistency was attained through assessing inter-coder agreement between the two analysts (the current researcher and one of her colleagues). Categories, then, were generated and the emerging themes were identified.

### **The Study Results:**

The results included in this part of research reflect participant teachers' responses given to the semi-structured interview open-ended questions and their teaching journal entries. Analysis of the collected qualitative data in terms of research questions, revealed the emergence of three basic categories. These were: Benefits of literature circles; Learners' feelings toward literature circles experience;

organization and implementation of literature circles. A detailed account of each of these aspects is given below.

### **Literature Circles Benefits:**

The first question in the interview asked teachers to evaluate the literature circles experience they passed through. Teachers' responses indicated that while there were some drawbacks, and may be problems, of literature circles use in authentic classrooms, there were great benefits of adopting this instructional model. Training students to fulfill their roles within small groups, keeping students focused on the task, and devoting enough time for literature circles implementation were the most important challenges.

As for benefits of literature circles, as perceived by participant teachers, two basic ones were quite evident. These were: Increased motivation level and learner independence. When asked to evaluate the literature circles experience, four participant teachers expressed their appreciation of the positive effect of literature circles on their students' motivation level. Teacher4 stated, "children were highly motivated and interested in the story. They liked it much and asked for more stories. Also, they were actively engaged through interaction with the story characters".

Making reading an enjoyable and useful activity is a very important part of the language experience. In this regard, teacher 5 mentioned that "it is worth using new techniques and forms for teaching reading and motivating students. They were so motivated for they liked the idea of reading a story only for fun" . Teacher 6, likewise, said, "students were so motivated while choosing their reading material. I think that motivation is the magic key to involve low level and shy students". Moreover, understanding their roles and helping each other were two notable behaviours/

indications that might be attributed to motivated students. In this respect, teacher1 noted that "all the members were so motivated; they fully understood their roles and were helpful to each other".

Another recognized benefit was literature circles' potential capability of cultivating learner independence. Students could take the responsibility of their own learning while working on the literature circles process. Teacher3 pointed out that "literature circles encouraged the students to be more independent, i.e., they could read and discuss the story on their own. I just listened and facilitated the process. Along the same lines, T1 observed the notable effect of literature circles on students' sense of independence. He stated, "students took the responsibility starting from choosing the reading material till finishing reading and discussion". Also, teacher5 talked about how the students liked the feeling of being independent. She said, "students also liked the feeling of independence, as, for the first time, it was their responsibility to choose a book, read it, understand the context, and write their notes".

### **Learners' Feelings:**

Regarding learners' feelings toward the literature circles experience as perceived by their teachers, analysis of the collected data showed that learners' feelings notably changed at the end of the experience compared to their feelings at its beginning. Teacher2 noted, "At the beginning, they felt anxious and confused. They asked how to do the task on their own. Gradually, they became relaxed and more helpful, especially without any fear of grading. They wanted to read more and more stories for pleasure". Along the same lines, Teacher 1 stated, "when we started literature circles, students used to speak in Arabic during the meeting. They did not feel confident enough to speak in front of others.

However, they liked the experience afterwards and liked playing their roles, especially the discussion director who liked her role of asking questions".

Also, Teacher3 observed the students' tendency at the beginning of the experience to listen more than they speak. Afterwards, a feeling of excitement and confidence prevailed. He said, "At first, students tended to listen more than they speak and to ask many questions about the story. After a short period of time, they felt excited and happy. Through literature circles, they could think more deeply about the story".

Talking about students' responses to the literature circles, few participant teachers highlighted the positive effect of literature circles on students' feelings and behaviour. For example, Teacher4 said, "The literature circles experience got them to talk, to express themselves in simple words and sentences. Most of the students asked me to have a story at every session. Some told me that they would go to the library to choose a story to read. Also, peer assessment was successful because students felt happy to play the teacher's role". Similarly, Teacher5 noted, "Learners liked the feeling of being responsible and independent. They asked me to repeat the experience again".

### **Organization and Implementation of Literature Circles:**

The bulk of teachers' journal entries was related to/ devoted to aspects of the design and implementation process of literature circles. Each participant individual experience with literature circles was highly considered to detect the most important aspects of the planning process in terms of participant teachers' responses. Analysis of these responses showed that there were several main aspects that contributed to the process of organizing and implementing literature circles in the EFL classroom. These aspects

included: Setting up a purpose; Introducing literature circles; Student choice; Group formation; Supporting and sustaining discussion; Teacher's role. Following is a detailed description of each of these aspects.

### **Setting up a Purpose:**

Setting up a purpose came as the first main step for initiating a literature circles process. All participant teachers regarded this step of establishing a purpose as the most crucial aspect of the process of planning and organizing literature circles. To illustrate, Teacher5 reported, "I have observed that students read but they don't comprehend the gist of the reading. They only care about memorizing new words regardless of the context or other meanings of these words. Also, they insist on knowing the meaning of each word. So, I found that I have to adopt a strategy that enables students to comprehend what they read and to guess or predict the meaning of unfamiliar words.

Enhancing students' motivation was a main goal that Teacher6 sought to attain through adopting literature circles. He stated, "I felt that I need this new experience of literature circles. My work lacked such model. I think I have to keep trying new strategies and forms that contribute positively in motivating my students". Learner autonomy was another purpose that could be established for implementing literature circles. For example, Teacher 1 noted, "I found it helpful for me to try a new way for teaching stories. Also, literature circles experience was useful and impressive for encouraging my students to be autonomous learners. It was the first time for my students to take the role of the teacher and to manage the meeting on their own".

### **Student Choice:**

Student choice is looked upon as one basic component of the literature circles planning process. To plan for student

choice, the teacher has to take into consideration two main aspects. Firstly, considering the way through which students will choose the reading material. The second aspect deals with the criteria according to which group formation will be conducted. All participant teachers (except for Teacher2) planned for student choice of the reading material through presenting a selection of stories to the groups to choose from. Teacher2 wrote, "Reading for pleasure in terms of students' choice is very important for children to become good language learners. The best way for children to learn how to read is not to be told about the importance of reading but to enjoy reading itself".

Commenting on the factors that affected students' choice of story books, Teacher6 noted that "the children chose stories that were brightly coloured and full of pictures". Another participant (teacher5) stated that "the children had the opportunity to choose the story that interested them most". Besides, some students had a peer discussion before deciding which stories they would like to read.

### **Group Formation :**

Grouping students in terms of interest (self-forming groups) or ability (multi-ability groups) is a matter of debate in the relevant literature (Riggan, 2011; Maraccini, 2012; McElvain; 2010; Allan, Ellis & Pearson, 2005). To explain, grouping students by interest is more likely to engage members of the group into a reading for pleasure activity that largely contribute in creating a book club atmosphere. On the other hand, grouping students by ability has the potential of having the more extrovert members help the introvert ones.

In terms of teachers' responses, some of them allowed the students to choose their groups (Teacher3 & Teacher4)

while the others formed multi-ability groups (Teacher2 & Teacher6). As for Teacher5, she noted, "At the very beginning, I asked the students to form the groups, but I discovered that the most extrovert students tended to form one group, leaving the shiest students together. So, I decided to form the groups so that I could guarantee having students of varied levels in each group".

### **Introducing Literature Circles**

In terms of the collected data, all participant teachers followed a set of common steps to introduce literature circles in their classes. However, few teachers (Teacher2 & Teacher6) differed in managing the literature circles introductory process in a number of ways. To explain, all participant teachers presented an overview of literature circles that dealt with definition, importance, and basic features of the concept. Also, they all conducted a role-modelling procedure. Every role was modeled through a whole-class practice before assigning students to groups. Basically, there were five roles represented in each literature circles: Discussion director, summarizer, word wizard, illustrator, and connector.

According to participant teachers' responses, the discussion director role is the one that requires creating open-ended questions and facilitating group discussion. While modeling this role, teachers indicated that the discussion director's basic role is not to provide the right answers of the addressed questions. It is to promote deep understanding of the text and to make sure that everyone in the group has an opportunity to participate. After completing the role modeling procedure, participant teachers moved to assigning a definite part of the reading text for the students to read.

As noted above, there were few differences in conducting the literature circles introductory process by both Teacher2 and Teacher6. As for Teacher2, he asked students to keep a reading journal in which they recorded their reactions to the stories they are reading. They could write about and discuss the reading text with others with a view to constructing meaning. In this regard, he noted, "After twenty minutes of reading, I stopped them to write few sentences about the story in their reading journals. I told them that they can write anything, especially about the main character". Regarding Teacher 6, he designed a preparatory session in which students practiced some speaking activities to improve their conversational skills before approaching the literature circles process. He stated, "I got students practice some speaking activities to improve their conversational skills before working on literature circles". It should be noted here that these two modifications adopted by Teacher2 and Teacher6 are quite supported and recommended in the relevant literature.

### **Supporting and Sustaining Discussion:**

One of main responsibilities of participant teachers was to support and sustain discussions within the literature circles process. They tried to get students share their peers and participate in the discussion process. Most of the teachers adopted specific strategies for facilitating and sustaining meaningful discussion. Also, they emphasized the importance of leading the discussion at the first part of the session and guiding students to attain authentic discussion. To illustrate, Teacher4 stated, "I asked Wh-questions to create interaction within groups. For example, I asked them about their opinions of the story; if it is exciting or not. As a result, they started discussions and asked their own questions". Similarly, Teacher2 pointed out, "Students were instructed to take turns in their groups to talk about the

story and what they did. They began discussions, shared ideas, practiced critical thinking, gave their reflections on the story and played their roles. Literature circles stimulated them to ask more questions and be involved gradually in the task".

Another strategy for sustaining and facilitating discussions within literature circles was connecting the reading text to the real world. Through adopting this strategy, a type of world to text talk was generated. This type of talk usually relate children's real-life experiences outside of the text and involve them in considering issues or characters in the reading text in comparison with people or events in the real world. Accordingly, students become more involved with the text and its characters and events. In this regard, Teacher2 noted, "Literature circles helped students become more proficient in responding to the text in different ways and in seeking meaning and answers through real-life experiences. Literature circles, also, contribute to richer understanding of the text and of themselves as readers". Also, Teacher 4 tried to help students connect what they read with their lives' experiences. He said, "I asked the students an important question: what did you learn from the story?. They wrote their answers in their role sheets and discussed it in their groups. Through these discussions, they tried to discover connections between what they read and their personal real experiences.

Participant teachers held positive attitudes toward using literature circles roles. These roles were necessary for organizing work and sustaining successful discussions within literature circles. Teacher1 reported, "The director started to break the ice by telling students that they have to listen carefully and follow her instructions because she is the boss. They all laughed. She asked them about their feelings toward the story. Then, she asked the summarizer

to give the main points, the illustrator to show her picture and the connector to tell her story". It may be notable that an atmosphere of interest and playfulness prevailed through these discussions. Few teachers emphasized the importance of allowing students to prepare their roles at home before starting discussions in their groups. For example, Teacher 5 stated, "As students could not finish their work in time, I guided them to prepare their roles at home and devote class time to discussions. They were more organized and gradually stopped asking for help. Members of the same role exchanged their notes to evaluate their work and develop their text analysis skills".

### **Teachers' Role within Literature Circles:**

Participant teachers played varied roles within literature circles implementation. The first basic role was that of a facilitator. To illustrate, Teacher5 noted, "Literature circles gave me an opportunity to deal with my students in a different manner. Here, they were responsible for their own learning and I was for them a facilitator rather than the instructor that have the answers for all the questions". Another role for the teacher was to support and encourage students for successfully fulfilling their group work. Teacher4 said, "While talking and discussing, I walked around listening to them, giving support when needed, and encouraging them to ask more questions". Likewise, Teacher2 noted, "At the beginning of the experience, they asked for support especially for "word wizard" role to identify word meaning. So, I guided them to reflect on the pictures which may indicate the meaning. Sometimes, I directed them to ask an elder brother or a parent".

Teacher1 played a role of an observer through which he could provide help when necessary. He reported, "Through the experience, I was near them, observing their behavior and attitude. I was ready to help them but they did not ask for

help". Similarly, Teacher 6 talked about his role as an observer. He noted, "I began observing my students as they were engaged in full class discussion. I kept anecdotal observations that helped me draw conclusions about who they were as readers and group members".

**Discussion:**

This study investigated EFL teachers' perceptions of literature circles use in real classroom setting as well as the main aspects they take into consideration while designing and implementing literature circles. The study findings revealed that the use of literature circles in the EFL classroom has yielded some notable benefits. Specifically, two main benefits were cited. Firstly, literature circles use positively contributed in enhancing students' motivation. Besides, it was evident that implementing literature circles has remarkably enhanced students' sense of independence.

Increased motivation was a natural outcome of giving students the freedom to make choices in relation to what they like to read, the members they would want to work with, and the roles they might wish to play. In this regard, Riggan (2011) pointed out that students' increased motivation comes as a result of being given a choice. Moreover, literature circles provide an opportunity for students to read what they would like to read. Along the same lines, when teachers support students' ownership through providing many choices, the students are more likely to positively respond with more motivation for reading (McRae & Guthrie, 2009; Broz, 2003).

Regarding students' feelings toward the literature circles experience, findings showed that these feelings have gradually changed throughout the different stages of the process. To explain, when the literature circles experience started, some students, especially the shy ones, felt anxious

and confused to a great extent. They seemed unable to participate in a discussion about the reading text. However, when they got familiar with the process, they began to feel more comfortable while undertaking varied tasks and roles. Moreover, they gained more confidence to interact with peers and to share their thoughts and ideas about the text. In this respect, Stabile (2009) pointed out that "the small setting literature circles provide allow students to feel comfortable and confident sharing their thoughts and ideas regarding literature" (p. 56). Moreover, Casey (2008, cited in Gall, 2010) claims that literature circles do have the potential of bringing individual reading for pleasure back into the language classroom and into individual lives.

The second research question dealt with the aspects EFL teachers considered while designing and implementing literature circles in their classrooms. Results indicated that setting up a purpose, student choice, group formation, forms of introducing literature circles, supporting and sustaining discussion, and teacher's roles within literature circles were the aspects that EFL teachers counted as the most crucial elements of the literature circles process. This finding seems to be quite related to a considerable body of previous research that mainly dealt with the basic aspects of literature circles design and implementation process (Dalie, 2001; Lee, 2002; Daniles & Steineke, 2004; Furr, 2004; Allan, Ellis & Pearson, 2005; Gall, 2010; Riggan, 2011; Maraccini, 2012).

As a result of working in small groups, students felt that they could connect deeply with the text as well as work together and help one another. Also, they liked the feeling of being responsible for their own learning while successfully playing their literature circles reading roles. Besides, they were excited to ask questions and to assess each other's comprehension of the text. As illustrated by

Dalie (2001), "When we provide (students) with support and encouragement, and trust in their ability to rise to our expectations, we can step back and watch true learning in action" (p. 99).

In terms of participant teachers' responses, the literature circles experience has positively affected students' motivation to read. This positive effect may be interpreted in terms of some specific factors. One basic factor may be the principle of learner independence that is naturally adhered to while adopting literature circles in authentic classrooms. Students liked to be treated as mature persons who can lead discussions, ask questions, and take personal ownership. Also, literature circles succeeded in providing an authentic reading experience and building reading confidence (Byrd, 2004). Moreover, students viewed reading as a pleasurable experience where they had the freedom to make choices in relation to the reading text, the group they work in, and the role they would like to play.

**Conclusion:**

This study was mainly concerned with examining EFL teachers perceptions of literature circles use in their authentic classrooms. Findings of the study gave insight into how EFL teachers perceived the literature circles experience. These perceptions of participant teachers can enlighten and support EFL teachers and teacher educators through literature circles use in authentic classrooms and emphasize the importance of establishing student choice and collaboration opportunities within reading instruction practices. Moreover, through literature circles use, there is an opportunity to listen to students' voices and to direct teaching performance toward "the creation of more supportive environments where the students express freely, take critical positions and become thinkers of life, not only for the English class" (Lopez- Medina, 2007, p. 260).

Significantly, literature circles have the potential of enabling readers to realize that real reading is to make connections with the text and with the real world as well. Therefore, teachers have to continue to search for ways with a view to enhancing discussion, sharing, and posing questions through literature circles. In addition, teachers should specify the practices that particularly contribute in involving students in reading and empowering them with cognitive strategies (Stabile, 2009; Maraccini, 2012; Chilcoat, 2003).

Teacher identity is a crucial issue that may be discussed in terms of the study findings. According to Castaneda (2011), teacher identity refers to how teachers define themselves in relation to their professional tasks and regarding educational and teaching relationships. The notion of identity is so obvious in participant teachers' responses and behaviour. It seems that these participant teachers have developed a sense of professional identity; a way to see themselves as teachers. In this respect, Maarof (2007) rightly believes that "in telling their stories, the teachers are taking a step towards discovering themselves and of the potential of their teaching and learning" (p. 215).

Nevertheless, these results should be cautiously approached due to some specific limitations. Specifically, this study adopted the case study format through which description and analysis of the collected qualitative data were conducted. Accordingly, it is difficult to generalize the study findings. Another limitation is related to teachers' journal entries. While analyzing these entries, assessing reflection was not a main concern of the study. In particular, keeping a teaching journal aimed at providing a context through which teachers can function their educational experiences to construct an understanding of their teaching (Shin, 2006).

Significantly, further studies into literature circles area may lead to establishing best practices that promote students' engagement in the reading process. Meanwhile, there is a need to examine the effect of adopting literature circles on developing varied skills and strategies that are more likely to be attributed to good readers. It is also helpful to consider/ investigate specific roles that highly engaged students may take to facilitate their peers' participation and understanding within literature circles.

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## (( نموذج اشتراك في مجلة دراسات عربية في التربية وعلم النفس ))

سعادة / الأستاذ الدكتور : رئيس تحرير مجلة دراسات عربية في التربية  
وعلم النفس السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته وبعد ،،

أرغب الاشتراك في المجلة لمدة : ( سنة واحدة □ )

على أن تصلني نسخ أعداد المجلة على عنواني البريدي الموضح بهذا النموذج.

الاسم .....

الوظيفة .....

جهة العمل .....

الجنسية .....

عنوان المراسلة .....

البريد الإلكتروني .....

الهاتف/ الفاكس .....

اسم المشترك : .....

التوقيع : .....

- 
- قيمة الاشتراك السنوي للأفراد بالدول العربية : ( ٥٠٠ ريالاً ) .
  - قيمة الاشتراك للأفراد بباقي دول العالم : ( ٢٠٠ دولار ) .
  - قيمة الاشتراك للمؤسسات بالدول العربية : ( ٧٥٠ ريالاً ) .
  - قيمة الاشتراك للمؤسسات بباقي دول العالم : ( ٣٥٠ دولار ) .
  - قيمة الاشتراكات هذه شاملة تكاليف البريد العادي ، ومن يرغب في البريد الممتاز يتحمل الفرق .
  - يمكن سداد قيمة الاشتراكات بالجنبيه المصري مباشرة لكتب المجلة بجمهورية مصر العربية ، أو بحواله بنكيه باسم رئيس التحرير ( أ. د / ماهر إسماعيل صبري ) على بنك فيصل الإسلامي المصري فرع بنهارقم الحساب ١٨٥٠٦
  - ترسل صورة من قسيمة تحويل الاشتراكات على البريد الإلكتروني لرئيس التحرير [mahersabry2121@yahoo.com](mailto:mahersabry2121@yahoo.com)
  - يرسل هذا النموذج بعد تعبأة بياناته عبر البريد الإلكتروني لرئيس تحرير المجلة ، أو عبر البريد العادي على عنوان رئيس التحرير الحالي : المدينة المنورة ، جامعة طيبة ، كلية التربية ، قسم المناهج وطرق التدريس . أو على عنوان مكتبنا بمصر : اش أحمد ماهر متضرع من ش الشعراوي، أتريب ، بنها .