

Students' Perspectives towards the Improvement of Reading Comprehension and Self-Assessment via Reading Groups in EFL Context

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Abstract

Recent studies have focused on teaching literature due to its effectiveness in developing students' language achievement and improved peer/ self-assessment. Therefore, there is an urgent need to find a suitable strategy for involving student more actively in the study of literature. This study explores the influence of reading groups on the improvement of reading comprehension and self-assessment of EFL students at the university level. The research uses a quantitative approach to explore the experiences of EFL students in reading circles through using structured questionnaire. The results suggest that reading circles may serve as a site for collaborative learning in which students read actively, by providing their insights on the texts they are discussing and receiving feedback from peers. The interactions that occur in this kind of groups help students better understand the material and improve self-assessment. The study contributes to the understanding of effective strategies for improving reading comprehension and self-assessment in EFL contexts, offering valuable information for educators and learners alike.

Keywords: Reading Groups; Self-assessment; EFL; Reading Comprehension

1.Introduction

In accordance with social constructivism, learning is the outcome of a process that includes interactions between students and peers in groups participating in cognitively planned activities aimed at achieving learning objectives. Assignments must be designed to push students, encourage growth, and foster genuine learning. This study addresses the critical issue of pedagogical change, focusing on changing the conception and execution of pedagogical interventions rather than on altering styles, attitudes, or preferences with regard

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to educational methods. Studying in groups in this context refers to participating in a collaborative process of meaning co-construction .

The application of social constructivism theoretical considerations allows for the assumption that reading groups are becoming more and more recognized as an effective pedagogical strategy, as they promote creativity and self-awareness among students. By engaging in discussions about selected texts within small, student-led groups, this approach creates a collaborative learning environment that promotes critical thinking and self-reflection. Reading groups serve as a means to direct reading and contemplation within the larger context of co-constructing knowledge. It can be argued that reading, reflection, and the co-construction of knowledge occur and take shape within the contexts of global and specific reading. The former involves ongoing feedback regarding essential elements, contributions, and new readings related to the topic ,while the later through analyzing the composition and structure of these texts to understand their arguments, evidence, and overall messages.

Despite the recognized benefits of literature teaching in developing language achievement and enhancing peer/self-assessment, there is an urgent need to identify effective strategies for actively involving students in literature study. This study aims to explore the influence of reading groups on the improvement of reading comprehension and self-assessment among university-level EFL students by utilizing quantitative approach, the research will gather data through structured online questionnaire to examine students' experiences in reading circles. The findings are expected to demonstrate that reading circles can serve sites for collaborative learning, where students engage actively by sharing insights on the text and receive feedback from peers. Ultimately, the current study contributes to the understanding of effective strategies for improving reading comprehension and self-assessment.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Reading Group

Reading groups or circles as named by Daniel Harvey (2002) are a technique for gathering small and diverse groups of students to discuss texts of their choice (Whittakers, 2012). They are also known as book club and literature group discussion. Students gather in groups to discuss stories and books. In reading circles students are free to choose their learning materials (Harvey, 1994). Each group reads and works with a different story to discuss the story theme they generate themselves. Daniel (1994) claimed that the best way to make a reading circle effective is to identify roles to guide student participation (see table 1 Daniels (2002) literature circle roles). These roles facilitate learning for students and they can easily interpret the story and even more assess their work relying on his her role.

Table 1: Daniels Literature Circle Roles

Discussion Director: to develop a list of questions that will facilitate group conversations.
Literary Luminary: to locate sections of the text the group would like to hear read aloud.
Illustrator: to draw some kind of picture related to the reading.
Connector: to find connections or links between the book and something outside the text.
Summarizer: to prepare a brief summary of the day's reading.
Vocabulary enricher: to locate important or unusual words that appear in the text.
Travel Tracer: to track the action that takes place in a story and record as a diagram or map.
Investigator: to find out some background information about the book.

Source: Daniels Harvey (2002, p.103). Literature circles: Voice and choice in book clubs & reading groups.

To identify students role ones should know the key features of reading circles. The following table show what a reading circles is and what it is not:

Table 2: A Comparative Table of Literature Circles

Reader response centered	Teacher and text centered
Part of a balanced literacy program	The entire reading curriculum
Groups formed by book choice	Teacher-assigned groups formed solely by ability
Structured for student independence, responsibility, and ownership	Unstructured, uncontrolled "talk time" without accountability
Guided primarily by student insights and questions	Guided primarily by teacher- or curriculum-based questions
Intended as a context in which to apply reading and writing skills	Intended as a place to do skills work
Flexible and fluid; never look the same twice	Tied to a prescriptive "recipe"

Source: Schlick Noe & 1999(as cited in Boulenouar (2015,p.200)

One of the primary benefits of reading circles is their ability to improve students' self-efficacy in reading. According to Venegas (2018), they can greatly increase the self-efficacy

of reluctant and struggling readers by offering a well-rounded and interesting literacy strategy that empowers students to take charge of their education. This assertion is supported by findings from Karatay Halit (2017), who notes that participation in literature circles not only enhances students' reading desire but also fosters a sense of responsibility for their own learning, thereby increasing their self-confidence. Such self-directed learning is crucial, as it enables students to assess their understanding and progress in a supportive environment.

2.2. What is Self-Assessment?

In social psychology, self-assessment is the process of looking at oneself and assessing aspects that are important to one's identity. It is also considered the process by which students collect information about their achievements and progress. According to Taras (2010), self-assessment is a valuable approach to support student learning, especially when formal self-assessment helps improve student learning and language performance. Oskarsson (1978) described it as a learner's ability to self-assess and monitor knowledge on a particular subject. This means that students need to be involved in monitoring and recording reactions, participating in books, and participating in groups as they meet in each session. The main purpose of involving students in careful self-assessment is to promote learning, achievement and to promote academic self-regulation or the tendency to monitor and direct learning. (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2004). Self-assessment has several other different purposes: assessing comprehension of content, demonstrating achievement of results and goals, and learner self-development. These purposes are linked together and provide different focus on the process of learning.

2.3. Developing Reading Comprehension and Self-Assessment through Reading Group

As previously stated, reading circles give students the opportunity to read and interpret a text or a story independently and without fear of being judged. This safe environment allows students to share their ideas in class by understanding, interpreting, and negotiating their ideas. Self-assessment then takes place within a supportive "learning community" where all participants are involved in learning and negotiating activities that contribute to that learning (Wride, 2017). A research conducted by Wati and Yanto (2022) highlights that literature groups encourage students to engage in various cognitive processes such as making predictions, summarizing, and seeking clarification, which are essential for improving reading comprehension and self-assessment. The interactive nature and the discourse pattern observed in reading circles enhances students' understanding of the material and encourages them to assess their own contributions and learning processes, thereby improving their self-assessment skills.

Faltichicov (2005) describes a process where students were actively involved in determining the criteria for their own assessment. "The criteria were negotiated with the tutor and other students, and then self-assessed in two rounds to allow the students to gain experience." (2005, pp120-125). When making a comparison to reading groups, it was found that these groups allowed for a more personalized and student-centered assessment process. Accordingly, Boud(1995) states that self-assessment encourages student engagement in and

learning about a subject by allowing them to express their understanding, make decisions, and justify their decisions. This learning environment can be provided by reading circles, which allow for the selection of texts, the determination of their interpretation, and the clarification of these choices to other participants. Furthermore, the socioemotional growth that occurs within reading circles contributes to students' self-assessment capabilities as confirmed by Venegas (2019); students develop self-management and social awareness through their interactions. This growth is vital for self-assessment, as it enables students to reflect on their learning experiences and emotional responses to texts. The ability to evaluate student's understanding and feelings about reading is a crucial aspect of becoming more effective and creative learner. (McElvain, 2010).

3. Methodology

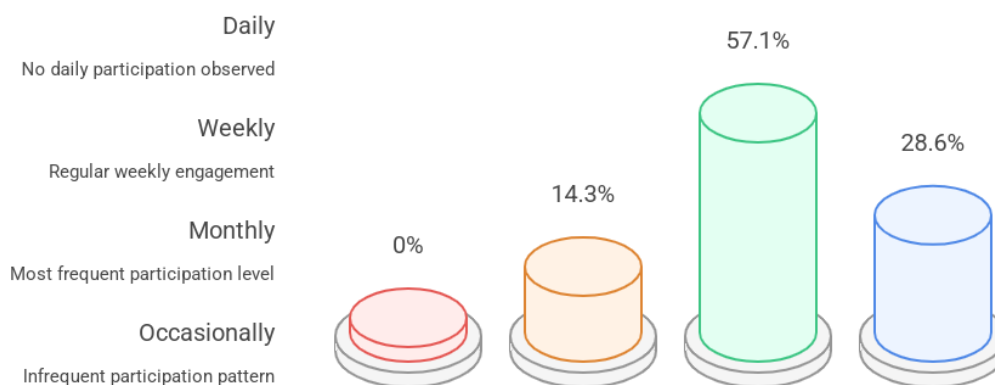
This study employed a descriptive research design to investigate the usefulness of using reading groups on the development of students' creativity and self-assessment in the EFL context. A sample of 30 L2 (LMD) university students from various universities was selected to participate in an online questionnaire, which was delivered to Facebook groups meant for learning. The questionnaire was designed to gather data on students' perceptions of the benefits of reading circles on their self-assessment and creativity. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the questionnaire data, providing insights into the prevalence of different teaching strategies and students' experiences with reading groups. The following question was investigated as a result: what are the benefits of reading circles for the development of self-assessment and creativity in reading comprehension?

4. Data Analysis

This section provides a detailed analysis of the data collected on student beliefs regarding the role of reading groups in enhancing creativity and imagination in reading comprehension, as well as the specific ways in which these groups foster self-assessment. In order to respond to the research question, a questionnaire comprising various questions with a variety of optional and open-ended responses was employed. The following section presents the analysis of the results.

4.1. The Frequency of Participation in Reading Groups

Figure 1: Participation frequency in reading circles



The bar graph above represents the frequency of participation in reading groups, showing how often participants engage in reading groups sessions. A portion of 28.6% engage in reading groups occasionally. This suggest that this strategy is infrequent due to factors like time constraints or lack of interests. The majority of participants 51.7% are involved in reading groups monthly. This indicates that these groups are scheduled or integrated into curriculum structure. A small portion of students 14.3% said they engage in these groups weekly. This regular use might enhance better their comprehension. None of the participants participates in daily reading groups.

4.2. Students' Enjoyments during Reading Groups

Figure 2: Participants preferences in reading groups

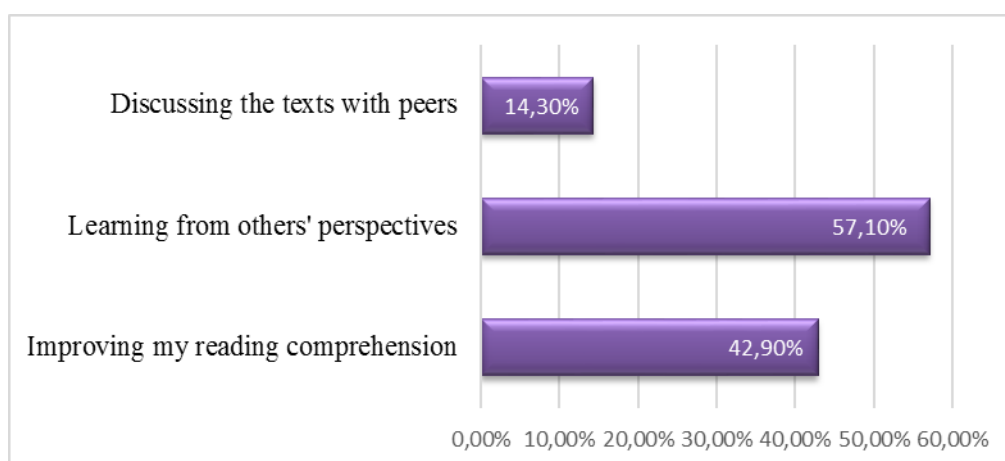
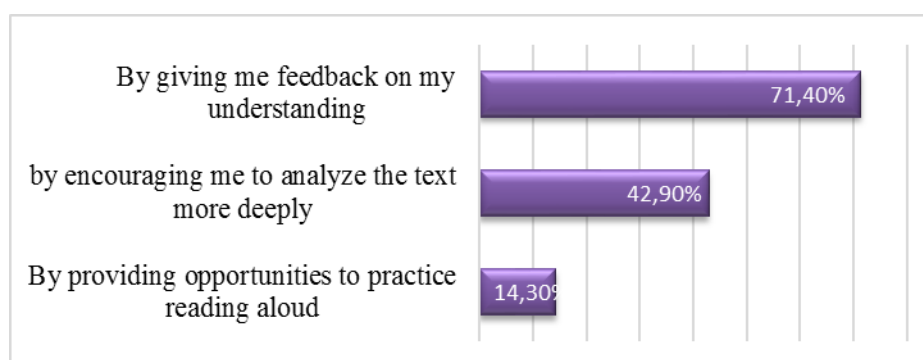


Figure 2 displays data on what participants enjoy most about reading circles. A portion of 14.3% among the participants reported that discussing the text with peers is what they enjoy most about reading circles. This suggests that peer discussion is somehow appreciated. The majority of participants 57.1% found that the greatest enjoyment in learning from others' perspectives. This highlights the collaborative nature of reading circles. It may also suggest that participants value exposure to diverse interpretations, which might affect their understanding then their self-assessment. A significant portion of 42.9% reported that they enjoyed the strategy of reading in groups because it helps them improve their reading comprehension.

4.3. The Impact of Reading Groups on Students' Reading Comprehension

Figure 3: Impact of reading groups activities on reading comprehension



The figure above (3) examines the perceived impact of reading groups activities on participants' reading comprehension. A small number of participants (14.3%) felt that practicing reading aloud during group activities influenced their reading comprehension. While 42.9% of students believed that the activities undertaken in reading groups facilitated their reading comprehension by encouraging them to analyze the text in greater depth. This suggests that critical thinking and deeper engagement with the text are highly valued by many participants as essential components of improving comprehension. The majority of students 71.4% felt that receiving feedback on their understanding had the most significant impact on improving their reading comprehension. This suggests that feedback plays a crucial role in helping students correct their misunderstandings, refine their interpretations and gain confidence.

4.4. Students' Strategies to Assess Text's Understanding

Figure 4: Strategies used to assess understanding of texts

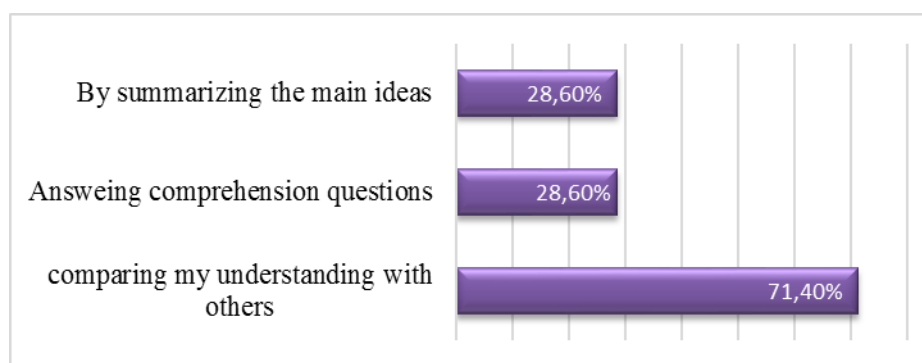


Figure 4 illustrates strategies participants use to assess their understanding of texts. The data reveals that the vast majority of participants (71.4%) consider comparing their understanding with that of others to be the most effective strategy for assessing comprehension. This emphasizes the importance placed on social learning, discussion and the exchange of perspectives. In contrast, answering comprehension questions and summarizing the main ideas (28.6% for each) are less favored, possibly because they offer limited opportunities for deeper reflection or feedback. This suggests that collaborative approaches are more effective in helping participants gauge and deepen their understanding of texts.

4.5. Students' Perceptions about The Impact of Participation in Reading Groups on awareness of strengths and weaknesses

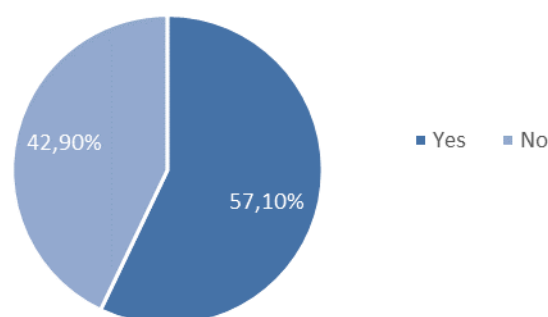
Figure 5: The impact of participation in reading groups on awareness of strengths and weaknesses



The figure above represents student responses to an open-ended question about how participation in reading groups affected their awareness of their strengths and weaknesses. The answers reflect a wide range of impacts on students' awareness of their strengths and weaknesses. The most frequently mentioned benefit was learning to identify effective learning strategies (25%), suggesting that reading groups are particularly effective in promoting metacognitive skills. Other significant areas include improving discussion skills (18.8%) and self-reflection on learning (18.8%), which emphasize the social and reflective nature of group work. However, only a few students (6.2%) mentioned emotional reflection and overcoming the fear of being wrong.

4.6. Students' Beliefs about the Effectiveness of Reading Groups

Figure 6: Students' beliefs about the impact of reading groups on enhancing imagination and creativity in writing

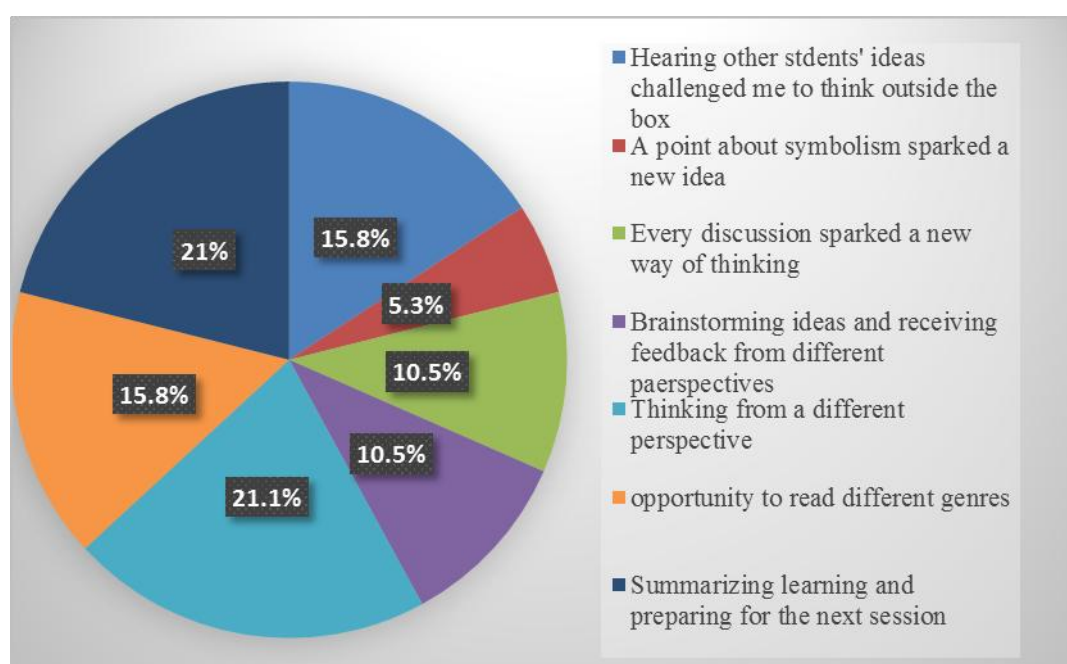


The data shows that 57.1% of students believe reading groups enhance their imagination and creativity in writing, while 42.9% do not share this view. This suggests that reading

groups provide a collaborative environment that fosters creative thinking, likely through exposure to diverse ideas and interpretations. Nevertheless, 42.9% of students asserted that these groups do not contribute to their creativity, possibly because of dynamics or individual learning styles.

4.7. Students' Perceptions about Reading Groups for Creativity in Reading Comprehension

Figure 7: How reading groups helped develop creativity



The pie chart shows data on various ways in which reading groups helped students develop creativity. A significant number of students (15.8%) found that hearing their peers' ideas pushed them to adopt more creative thinking. Symbolic aspects of the text has also inspired students (5.3%) to develop creative thoughts. Moreover, discussions according to some students (10.5%) consistently led to fresh their thoughts. Other responses (10.5%) also valued the collaborative aspect of brainstorming and feedback as a way to enhance creativity. The largest group (21.1%) highlighted the importance of shifting perspectives as a major contributor to creative thinking. A similar group asserted that reflecting on their learning and preparing for future discussions help develop creative development. While, 15.8% viewed that being exposed to various genres broadened the students' creative horizons of thinking.

5. Discussion

The present study examines the efficacy of reading groups or reading circles in enhancing reading comprehension and self-assessment in EFL context. The study's findings can be distilled into two key categories. First, the study examined students' beliefs about the utility of reading groups and their strategies for evaluating their learning in this context. The

study reveals that these groups are primarily appreciated for their collaborative and comprehension-enhancing aspects, with students valuing exposure to diverse points of view that affect positively texts interpretation. In other words, the social interaction inherent in literature circles enables students to encounter and appreciate diverse viewpoints, which is crucial for developing a well-rounded perspective on the material being studied (Azizah, 2024).

The second category is students' strategies to assess of their reading, the research shows that students tend to favor collaborative learning strategies, such as comparing their understanding with that of their peers, as means of assessing their comprehension of texts. This preference highlights the importance of social interaction and peer feedback in the learning process. Additionally, reading groups improve students' metacognitive skills, social and reflective skills, and enhance discussion abilities and self-reflection. While these groups are effective for intellectual and social development, emotional challenges may require additional support. The research also points out that these literature groups encourage flexible thinking, deeper reflection, and imaginative horizons by exposing students to various perspectives and genres of texts. Thus, reading groups are powerful tool for cognitive and creative development.

The relationship between reading groups and self-assessment improvement is summarized in Figure 8.

Figure 8: The Cycle of Collaborative EFL Learning



The figure presents a comprehensive and dynamic model that highlights the interrelated processes that are essential for effective language acquisition through collaboration. The cycle commences with the engagement in reading groups, wherein learners collaboratively explore texts, thereby promoting vocabulary development and reading fluency through peer interaction. This approach naturally gives rise to co-constructing meaning, a process grounded

in sociocultural learning theory. In this paradigm, learners negotiate understanding and build shared interpretations, enhancing both comprehension and communicative competence. As students interact and exchange ideas, they begin to enhance critical thinking by analyzing, questioning, and synthesizing information, which are skills essential for academic literacy and autonomous learning. This critical engagement paves the way for self-reflection, enabling learners to evaluate their contributions and develop metacognitive awareness. Consequently, reading comprehension is known to improve as learners consolidate their understanding through dialogue and collective inquiry. Finally, learners are encouraged to enhance self-assessment, promoting autonomy, accountability, and goal-directed learning.

In conclusion, this model succeeds in encapsulating the fundamental principles of collaborative EFL learning. The model demonstrates that interaction, reflection, and active engagement are pivotal in facilitating meaningful and sustainable language development.

6. Conclusion

This research highlights the significant role of reading groups in fostering creativity in reading comprehension among students. Through collaborative discussions, exposure to diverse perspectives, and reflective practices, reading groups not only enhance students' comprehension and metacognitive skills but also promote deeper engagement with texts. The findings suggest that these groups encourage social learning and self-assessment, allowing students to identify their strengths and weaknesses while also develop imaginative thinking. As educators continue to explore innovative teaching strategies, the integration of reading circles into literacy instruction presents a promising avenue for cultivating both self-assessment and creativity in learners. Therefore, it is important for teachers to consider how to share part of the feedback and evaluation process with their students in order to facilitate their learning and to promote self-assessment.

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