The Effects of Literature Circles on Students' Reading Comprehension Skills

Ahmed Ait Bella[1], Nourddine Binij[2], Professor Redouane Madaoui[3]

[1,2,3]Department of English Studies, Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Ibnou Zohr University, Agadir, Morocco.

ABSTRACT: This experimental research study was conducted to determine the effects of literature circles on 2nd year baccalaureate students' reading comprehension skills. The sample consisted of two classes of second year baccalaureate Arts stream students studying at the same public high school. The classes which were chosen for either the experimental and control group were pretested using a reading comprehension text test. The treatment lasted for a period of eight weeks. After the experiment, participants were then post-tested using the same test scale. Students who underwent the treatment (literature circles) were randomly assigned to groups of seven or eight students, and were given a role to assume and a short story to read. After reading the story independently and completing their role sheets, students discussed the story within their small groups. The data collected were subjected to descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. The results of the study indicated that there was a positive effect of literature circles on reading comprehension skills (*summarizing, inferencing, and paraphrasing*); the experimental group gained higher scores on the short answer-test compared to the control group. The results were interpreted using the t-test for independent samples. The t-test revealed that the difference between students who were exposed to the use of literature circles and those who were taught in the ordinary way was significant.

KEYWORDS: literature circles, reading comprehension, summarizing, inferencing, paraphrasing

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, teaching reading comprehension skills in Moroccan EFL classes has been considered as an issue of pivotal importance to teachers, textbook writers, supervisors, researchers, and the ELT community as a whole. In this regard, text genres, text content, and the instructional way of teaching reading comprehension skills which are incorporated in the current educational system are apparent problems. That being mentioned, when students are faced with reading materials, comprehension difficulties are recognized. In other words, a majority of students have problems comprehending what they are reading. A new reading comprehension teaching method that would help students improve their comprehension skills, namely *inferencing, paraphrasing, and summarizing* is needed. Literature circles as a collaborative instructional way to teach reading comprehension is argued by scholars to help students increase their comprehension skills. Also, it helps shift from old traditional settings to much more learner-centered classes where students become more autonomous (Daniels, 2002). Thus, participating in a literature circle better promotes learner autonomy. Most importantly, LCs require students to be engaged along with their peers in group discussions about the reading material. Teaching students to experience reading comprehension in such a new effective way is reported to impact students' comprehension skills positively (Furr, 2004). For all the considerations mentioned above, this study is conducted to compare the use of literature circles to the usual way of teaching reading, and come up with conclusions concerning the effects of participating in literature circles on 2nd year baccalaureate Moroccan EFL high school students' comprehension skills.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional classroom methods for teaching reading comprehension often involve handing out texts and using various techniques such as answering comprehension questions, identifying the main idea, and reacting to the text, which may not effectively improve students' comprehension skills or motivation. However, literature circles, where students discuss books and texts they read, have proven to enhance reading comprehension, attitudes towards reading, motivation, and overall language skills, including writing, speaking, and listening. We briefly review the literature on reading comprehension and literature circles, highlighting theories that support their use. We also showcase previous research on implementing literature circles and describe their benefits.

The Effects of Literature Circles on Students' Reading Comprehension Skills

A. Historical Overview of Reading Comprehension

Before indulging into the discussion of the importance of reading and the different skills of reading comprehension, it is worthy to briefly shed light on the historical overview of reading.

The bottom-up model of reading posits that reading is a linear process where readers decode text word by word, starting with identifying individual letters, then combining them into words, phrases, and sentences, until the meaning of the entire text is established. This model emphasizes a sequential, part-to-whole approach to processing text (Gough, 1972).

The top-down model of reading emphasizes the importance of the reader's prior knowledge in the reading process. Unlike the bottom-up model, it focuses on what readers bring to the text, viewing reading as an active, cyclical process of sampling, predicting, testing, and confirming. Readers are actively engaged in hypothesis-testing as they progress through the text to construct meaning (Tierney & Pearson, 1983).

The interactive model of reading, proposed by Rumelhart (1977), posits that reading involves the simultaneous interaction of bottom-up and top-down processes. It characterizes reading as both perceptual and cognitive, requiring the use of perceptual capacity and cognitive skills. This model highlights the interaction of various types of knowledge—feature, orthographic, lexical, syntactic, and semantic—in text processing and interpretation. Additionally, Stanovich's (1980) interactive-compensatory model suggests that readers can utilize various information sources, such as phonological, orthographic, semantic, and syntactic, to comprehend text, compensating for deficiencies in any single source.

Schema theory, as described by Anderson and Pearson (1984), refers to the process of interpreting new information based on previously stored knowledge in our memory, known as schemata. Text comprehension occurs when readers modify their existing knowledge to accommodate and assimilate new information. This theory emphasizes that comprehension is the interaction between the text and the reader's background knowledge. Anderson (1997) highlights the crucial role of this acquired knowledge in language comprehension and meaning construction, noting that effective text comprehension requires the reader to activate relevant background knowledge.

According to Carrell (1989), there are three main types of schemata: linguistic, formal, and content. Linguistic schemata involve readers' existing language proficiency, including vocabulary, grammar, and idioms. Formal schemata pertain to the knowledge of different text genres, encompassing text organization, language structures, vocabulary, grammar, and levels of formality. Content schemata refer to background knowledge about the subject matter or topic of a text.

B. Comprehension Test

The three comprehension skills that are investigated in this study are inferencing, paraphrasing, and summarizing, Inferencing is a challenging reading comprehension skill for teachers to instil in students. According to McIntosh (1985), students need to perform "text connecting" and "gap filling" when reading. "Text connecting" involves making logical connections between events in the text, while "gap filling" requires using textual clues and background knowledge to deduce implicit information. Psychologists have identified two types of inferencing: propositional and pragmatic (Chaffin, 1979; Harris et al., 1978). Propositional, or "logical," inferences are explicitly stated in the text and lead all readers to infer the same meaning. Pragmatic inferences, however, are reasonable but not definitively true, requiring readers to read between the lines and rely on prior knowledge rather than explicit textual information (Graesser, 1981; Hildyard, 1979).

Paraphrasing, as defined in The Merriam-Webster dictionary (2013), is a restating of a text or passage in different words and structures. Effective paraphrasing involves understanding and internalizing the original text before rewording the main ideas. A notable paraphrasing strategy to enhance reading comprehension is the "RAP" method (R= Read, A= Ask, P= Paraphrase), developed by Schumaker et al. (1984). This method is used across various educational levels and subjects (Hagaman & Reid, 2008). It involves three steps: reading the material, asking questions to identify the main idea and key details, and paraphrasing the text using techniques such as changing direct speech to reported speech, using synonyms, altering word forms, and modifying sentence structures.

Summarizing, according to Buckley (2004), involves reducing a text to one-third of its original size. Diane Hacker (2008) emphasizes summarizing main ideas "simply, briefly, and accurately" (p. 62), highlighting its importance in reading comprehension (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Many readers struggle with identifying main ideas, often including unnecessary details (Ketch, 2005). Ketch further notes that proficient readers focus on important ideas and avoid unnecessary details for better comprehension and summary writing. Summarizing not only involves identifying main ideas and omitting details but also requires attention to grammar, spelling, and capitalization.

C. Literature Circles

Literature circles involve groups of up to eight students who regularly meet to discuss a selected work of literature. Students rotate roles during each session, and the reading material is preferably chosen by the students themselves (Schlick Noe & Johnson, 1999). Literature circles are learner-centered, with teachers acting as facilitators, and require students to take responsibility for their learning, including reading, preparing roles, and assessing each other (Daniels, 2002). These groups provide an enjoyable way for students to improve their comprehension skills by discussing ideas, voicing opinions, and practicing skills like inferencing,

The Effects of Literature Circles on Students' Reading Comprehension Skills

paraphrasing, summarizing, questioning, and synthesizing. Daniels (2002) outlines eleven key ingredients for successful literature circles:

1. Students choose their own books.
2. Small temporary groups are formed based on book choice.
3. Different groups read different books.
4. Groups meet regularly to discuss their reading.
5. Students use written or drawn notes to guide their discussions.
6. Discussion topics come from the students.
7. Group meetings are open and natural conversations.
8. The teacher acts as a facilitator.
9. Evaluation is through teacher observation and student self-evaluation.
10. A playful and fun atmosphere is maintained.
11. Upon completing a book, students share with classmates and form new groups around new selections.

D. Student Roles

Daniels (2002) proposed several roles for students in literature circles to enhance their engagement and comprehension. These roles include the Discussion Leader, Connector, Visualizer, Vocabulary Enricher, Passage Master, and Summarizer. Furr (2007) adapted these roles for his students at Yokohama City University, introducing the Culture Connector and modifying others. Each role has specific tasks: the Discussion Leader prepares stimulating questions, the Connector makes connections between the text and other texts, personal experiences, and broader world contexts, and the Visualizer draws scenes from the text to prompt discussion. The Vocabulary Enricher explains difficult words, the Passage Master selects and discusses key passages, and the Culture Collector compares cultural aspects in the text with the student's own culture. Finally, the Summarizer writes a concise summary of the main ideas, maintaining grammatical and structural accuracy.

Overall, literature circles, as outlined by Daniels (2002), foster autonomous learning by encouraging students to take responsibility for their roles and engage in meaningful discussions. This method not only improves comprehension skills but also enhances students' ability to analyze and interpret texts through collaborative learning and role-based participation.

There are some educational trends that support the use of literature circles for teaching reading comprehension, emphasizing collaboration, cooperation, and learner-centeredness. Among them is the cooperative learning which promotes various skills, such as tolerance of differences, mastery of concepts, inferencing, higher-level thinking, and self-esteem. It is a student-centered strategy where groups are responsible for their learning, and teachers act as facilitators. Group members support one another and are accountable for the group's progress and outcomes. Research shows that cooperative learning enables faster and more effective learning, better recall of information, and positive attitudes toward learning, Felder & Brent (2001).

Unlike traditional classes where teachers direct students, literature circles foster autonomy among readers. Cohen (1983) notes that students' questions during group meetings enhance reading comprehension skills, a view supported by Nelson (1984), who believes that questioning ties closely to comprehension and writing effort. Formulating questions encourages students to invest time in both writing and understanding the reading material.

Short (1990) highlights the importance of allowing students to choose their books, asserting that it empowers them as decision-makers and improves engagement. Atwell (1998) adds that book selection positively impacts reading comprehension. Overall, these features aim to develop independent readers who can manage their own learning with minimal teacher intervention.

E. Previous Research

Before examining the research on the effects of literature circles on students' reading comprehension, it's important to note that beyond early studies by Daniels, most available research consists of unpublished MA and PhD theses. Harvey Daniels conducted a significant study in Chicago schools from 1995 to 1998, implementing book clubs and finding notable results. Daniels (2002) emphasizes that book clubs not only encouraged reading but also helped students become proficient readers.

The primary benefit of literature circles (LCs) is the enhancement of reading comprehension skills. LCs support the development of essential skills such as inferencing, analysing, visualizing, questioning, summarizing, paraphrasing, and connecting (Daniels and Steineke, 2004). These skills are crucial for thorough comprehension during group discussions. Students are required to summarize, ask questions, analyse events, give the chronological order of events, paraphrase passages, and infer meanings. By practicing their roles in literature circles, students refer to texts to support their viewpoints, identify main ideas, pay attention to details, reflect on concepts and content, discuss reasons and effects of events, and clarify points through paraphrasing.

Literature circles can have positive effects on students' writing skills in general. More specifically, LCs support peer reviewing. When participating in group discussions, students tend to exchange their projects. This exchange of papers with peers provides an opportunity for students to give their feedback on each other's pieces of writing. Well- trained teachers on the use of LCs know how to assign engaging and challenging group- writing tasks that encourage students' critical thinking. Such tasks can be done choosing a different ending to a short story, writing a short analysis of a text.

The Effects of Literature Circles on Students' Reading Comprehension Skills

Literature circles (LCs) have been shown to be an effective method for enhancing students' reading comprehension skills. Early studies, such as those by Harvey Daniels, demonstrate the significant positive effects of LCs on students' reading abilities, particularly in urban Chicago schools from 1995 to 1998. His findings reveal that students in LC programs outperformed their peers in reading and writing test scores by a notable margin. LCs not only motivate reluctant readers to engage with texts but also help them become proficient readers. Researchers Brozo and Flynt (2008) and Sandmann and Gruhler (2007) emphasize that LCs foster meaningful and deep learning, enhance students' inferencing skills, and promote a transition from literal to critical discussions, ultimately improving reading comprehension.

The roles within literature circles—such as Discussion Leader, Connector, Illustrator, Summarizer, Literary Luminary, and Vocabulary Enricher—each contribute to the development of specific reading comprehension skills. For instance, the Discussion Leader fosters critical thinking and summarizing, the Connector enhances inferencing by linking the text to personal experiences and other media, and the Illustrator supports paraphrasing and summarizing through visual representation. The Literary Luminary aids in paraphrasing by analyzing and explaining selected passages, while the Vocabulary Enricher improves understanding of complex words. These roles, when practiced in group discussions, ensure that students actively engage with the text, leading to a deeper comprehension and retention of the material.

III. METHODOLOGY

In this section, research objectives, questions, and hypotheses are shared. Also, insights about the design of the study, the participants, the instruments, the experiment, data collection procedure, and data analysis method are provided.

A. Research Objectives

Regarding the questions and hypotheses of this research, two main objectives are set:

To investigate whether literature circles increase students' comprehension skills.

To explore Moroccan 2nd year baccalaureate students' views on the implementation of literature circles.

B. Research Questions

To guide this study investigate the effects of literature circles on students reading comprehension skills, the following research questions were addressed:

Question 1: Do literature circles enhance Moroccan 2nd year baccalaureate students reading comprehension skills?

Question 2: How do Moroccan 2nd year baccalaureate students view the implementation of literature circles?

C. Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses for the research questions are:

Hypothesis 1: Participation in literature circles would help students improve their comprehension skills.

Hypothesis 2: Moroccan 2nd year baccalaureate students hold positive attitudes to the implementation of literature circles.

D. Research Design

This study is an experimental, pretest–posttest control group design (Gay et al, 2005). The pretest was basically used to make sure the level of the two groups did not differ before the treatment. The schematic design of the study was the following: **G1** stands for control group, **G2** stands for the experimental group, **T** stands for the treatment, **O** stands for the ordinary way of teaching reading, and **X** stands for the results.

$$\textbf{G1} \; O\_X$$
$$\textbf{G2} \; T\_X$$

The objective of this design is to compare the comprehension posttest scores of each of the two groups (experimental and control) to determine the effectiveness of the treatment (literature circles) on the Moroccan 2nd year baccalaureate students' reading comprehension skills. The dependent variable in this study is reading comprehension skills namely, *inferencing, paraphrasing, and summarizing*, which were measured by the scores the students received on the post-test. The independent variable is the experimental treatment (i.e. the use of literature circles as an instructional method to teach reading).

E. Participants

The subjects of this study consist of 76 second year baccalaureate students at Al Majd high school, Agadir. To select the participants, the researcher first sought the approval of the high schools' principal to conduct the study. In order to include students of various Arts stream groups at the high school, a stratified randomization (Hatch & Farhady, 1982) was done. The participants were then assigned to an experimental group and a control group. Randomization would control for all the extraneous variables which the researcher did not consider. However, it does not ensure that the participants would be equally the same with regard to reading comprehension skills, but it guarantees that the two groups are similar on extraneous variables. In an attempt to collect basic information about the subjects, the researcher devised and handed out an information sheet with several questions to the participants (see appendix A). Each group consisted of both males and females, and their age ranges between 15 and 20. Ideally, the participants studied English for four years. The number of English classes taught per week was five. None of the participants were familiar with

The Effects of Literature Circles on Students' Reading Comprehension Skills

literature circles. Therefore, the experimental group received a two week intensive course about the theory and practice of literature circles. The following chart provides details about the information which the researcher collected through the use of the information sheet.

Table I: Demographic Description of the Participants

Number of students in the experimental group			38
Number of students in the control group			38
Gender	The experimental group	Boys	51%
		Girls	49%
	The control group	Boys	45%
		Girls	55%
Age range	The experimental group	Boys	17 to 20 years
		Girls	17 to 19 years
	The control group	Boys	17 to 21 years
		Girls	17 to 19 years
Ideas about literature circles	All the participants		0%

F. Instruments

To reach valid and reliable research conclusions, this study followed quantitative research methods. In order to answer the research questions and attain objectives, the researcher used the following materials: Information sheet, pretest, experiment, literature circles role sheets, posttest, and a feedback questionnaire. Precisely, the posttest was the instrument used to answer the first research question which concerns the effect of literature circles on second year baccalaureate students' reading comprehension skills while the questionnaire was employed to answer the second research question which seeks students' views on the use of LCs as an instructional teaching method.

G. Questionnaire

One questionnaire was administered to the experimental group in order to measure their views towards the use of literature circles in the Moroccan EFL high school context. Generally, the design of the questionnaire is based on the information that the researcher had learnt from the review of literature related to literature circles. The respondents were not required to provide information about their gender or age as these pieces of information do not relate to the analysis of data collected. In the first three sections the participants were presented with questions which they were required to choose between ranges of responses. The scale involves five questions. The first three questions target the following points:

- Participants' feelings towards the stories,
- Participants' views towards literature circles discussions,
- Participants' interest in reading, participants' views about the use of LCs.

In the last section, participants are requested to give their views about the implementation of literature circles; whether they found literature circles valuable and enjoyable, and why. Also, included in this section are the views about the obstacles, if there are any, which might have hindered the use of literature circles in classes.

H. Data Collection Procedures

To answer the two research questions asked in this study, the following data collection procedures were used respectively. First, the researcher sought approval from the head of the school in order to conduct the experiment. Second, random selection of the participants was done. Once the participants were selected, the researcher distributed the information sheet to them asking about the basic information that would help the researcher control some extraneous variables. The next stage after the selection of the participants was piloting the pretest. After the piloting stage, the researcher administered the pretest, and started the experiment wherein 76 2nd year baccalaureate students (38 for the experimental group and 38 for the control group) participated for two months. After the experiment, the posttest and the feedback questionnaire were pilot tested with a group of twenty students from another high school. All the students who participated in the piloting stage were 2nd year baccalaureate students, Arts stream. After analyzing the results of the piloting stage by three practicing EFL high school teachers including the researcher, the following

criteria were reconsidered and revised: clarity of questions for the test and the questionnaire, difficulty of the text, and test duration. Right after the end of the experiment, the researcher distributed the feedback questionnaire to the experimental group. One day later, the participants (the experimental and control group) were tested. The test lasted for 40 minutes. The students were proctored by three teachers including the researcher. After 40 minutes were over, students submitted their sheets to the three proctors. Two days later, the raters started test correction. After 12 days, the tests were corrected for the second time to ensure intra reliability.

Table II: Inter-rater reliability test

	Intraclass Correlation	95% Confidence Interval		F Test with True Value 0			
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Value	df1	df2	Sig
Single Measures	,994	,991	,996	487,847	75	150	,000
Average Measures	,998	,997	,999	487,847	75	150	,000

The results of inter-rater reliability correlation coefficient test shows that the level of reliability between the three teachers is excellent. (ICC=.99 >.05)

I. Statistical Analysis

To analyze the data obtained in this study, two kinds of statistical analyses were adopted. First, the scores were submitted to descriptive analysis. Second, post-test scores were analyzed using analysis of covariance which adjusted post-test scores for initial differences on pretest scores in order to measure whether the groups were homogeneous with regard to their reading comprehension skills. This approach is superior to using gain or difference scores (i.e., post-test minus pretest) to determine the treatment effects" (Gay et al., 2005, p. 269). Then, the t-test was used to compare the post-test scores. Students' views and responses to the questionnaire were analyzed and reported in percentages for qualitative analysis.

IV. RESULTS
A. Mean Scores
Table III: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Short answer test

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Control group	38	10,7105	2,25302	,36549
Experimental group	38	12,3421	2,12166	,34418

The table above clearly indicates, as was anticipated, that the mean score for the literature circle comprehension tests was higher than the mean score for the usual way of teaching reading comprehension T-Test results. The students who underwent the treatment obtained higher mean scores (M=12.34, SD= 2.12) than the control group (M=10.71, SD= 2.25).

To test the significance of the difference observed between the two groups; in other words, to determine if the experimental group did really outperform the control group, and to control the error rate, a t-test analysis was conducted. Results of the t-test are demonstrated in Table 2 below.

Table IV: Results of the independent-samples t-test comparing posttest scores obtained by the select and the control group

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Posttest	Equal variances assumed	,201	,656	3,250*	75	,002	1,63158	,50204	,63125	2,63191
	Equal variances not assumed			3,250	73,735	,002	1,63158	,50204	,63119	2,63197

p<.05

The Effects of Literature Circles on Students' Reading Comprehension Skills

The assumption of the homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied via Levene's *F* test, F (74)=.20, p= ,656. As demonstrated in table 2, the independent-samples t-test which was run to compare the means of the scores achieved on the short answer-test (posttest) yielded a significant difference between the means of the two groups t = 3.25, df= 75 , 002p<.05. This means the researcher was confident that the scores gained at the targeted comprehension skills (paraphrasing, summarizing, inferencing) resulted from the treatment the experimental group received.

B. Feedback Questionnaires

The researcher demonstrated the results of the feedback survey to determine the students' interest in and views about the instructional method used (literature circles). The findings of the questionnaire confirmed the positive results of the study.
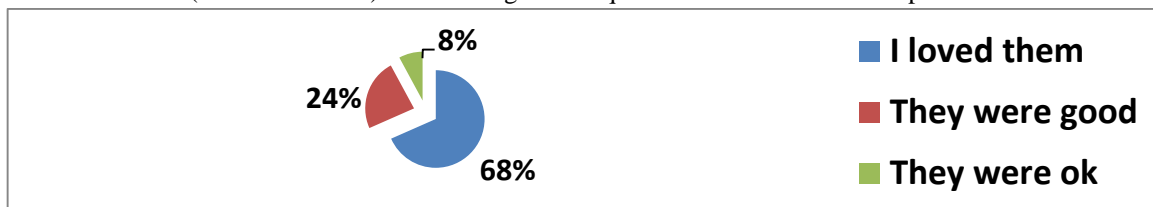
Figure 1: How much did you enjoy the stories?

Figure 1 clearly displays the percentages of the extent to which students loved the stories. It demonstrates that most participants (68 %) loved the stories, 24 % said they were good, and 8 % reported that the stories were ok.
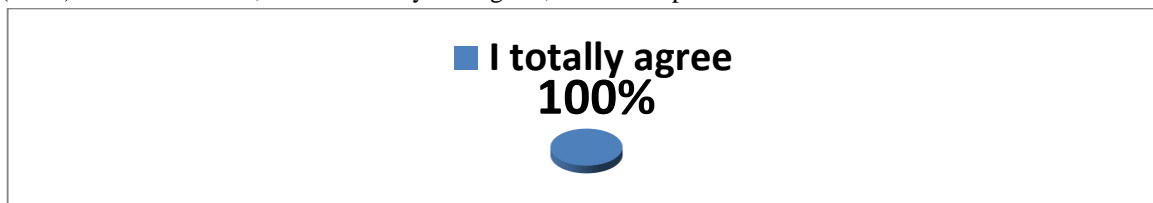

Figure 2: Literature stories helped me understand the stories better

Figure 2 shows that literature circles had helped all the participants better comprehend the stories they read during the treatment (100 % totally agree). The tendency of these results strengthens the impact that literature circles instructional method had on the participants' reading comprehension skills.

Figure 3: Literature circles were enjoyable

As it is clearly shown in the figure above, 100% of the participants totally agreed that literature circles are enjoyable
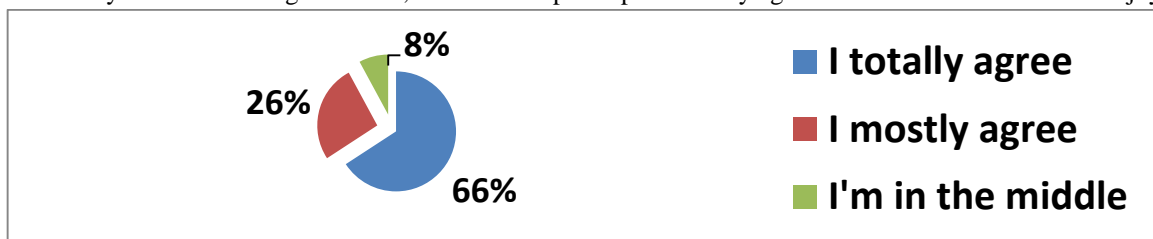

Figure 4: The extent to which literature circles made students think about things beyond the story.

As it is shown in figure 4, more than the half of the participants (66 %) totally agreed that the use of Literature circle discussions made them think of ideas and meanings that were not explicitly stated in the stories. 26% of the participants said they mostly agree, and only 8% stated that they were in the middle. No participant disagreed.
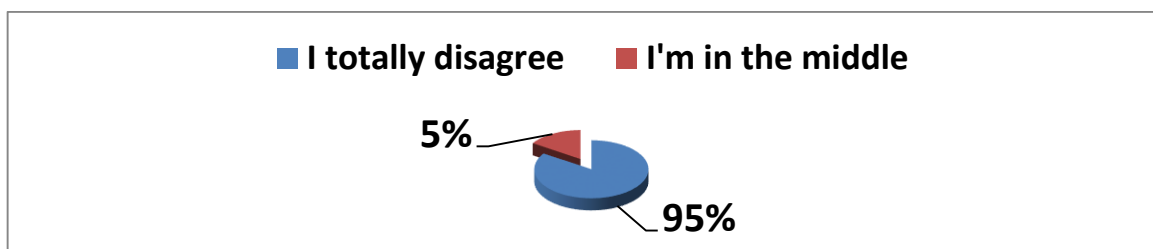
Figure 5: The frequency of which literature circles made students feel pressured to keep up with the reading and do their homework.

The results in figure 5 have shown that only a small portion of the students (5%) said they were in the middle; that literature circles made them feel pressured to continue reading the materials and do their assignments at home. On the other hand, most of the participants (95%) totally disagreed. No participant mostly or totally agreed.
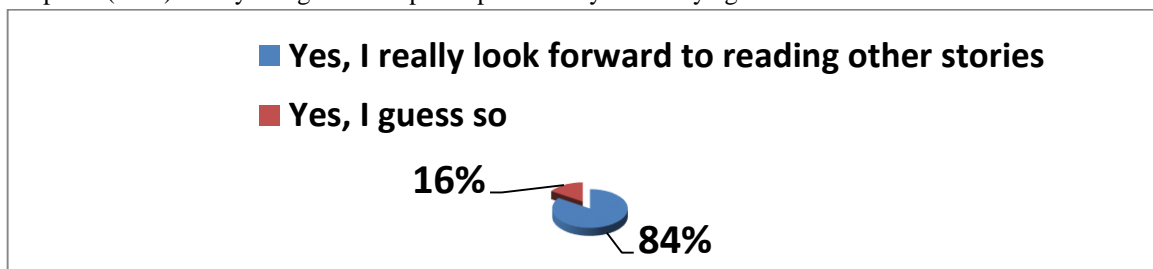

Figure 6: Did literature circles spark your interest in reading?

The percentages in figure 6 displayed that 84% of the students reported that literature circles triggered their interest in reading and that they were going to read more books and stories. Only 16% said that they were not certain whether or not they are going to read more stories.

For the last two questions, students declared that literature circles were so valuable to the teaching of reading comprehension, and that there were a few obstacles that impeded the implementation of this instructional reading comprehension method. For the reasons the participants provided in support of the utility of literature circles, they were as follows: "Literature circles really helped me read books and understand them. Not only this, but they helped me get prepared for the national exam", "I think that literature circles is a very important teaching method that makes students discuss the books they have read in a very comfortable way", "Literature circles motivated me to read more and more; I liked the discussions with my classmates. Everyone was engaged in the conversation and made the reading so enjoyable". These responses amongst many others plainly proved the importance of the instructional approach in question. Concerning the question about the obstacles, the participants agreed on the following main hindrances:

- Work not returned in due time; there were some students who did not finish their assignments on time.
- Classroom size; the classroom was smaller for the huge number of the participants.
- At the beginning, students found it very difficult to listen to each other in the group.

V. DISCUSSION

This study demonstrated that literature circles (LCs) significantly enhanced participants' reading comprehension skills, specifically in inferencing, paraphrasing, and summarizing. The experimental group achieved notably higher scores in the posttest compared to the control group, highlighting the effectiveness of LCs in improving these essential skills. This improvement underscores the potential of LCs as a pedagogical tool in fostering deeper understanding and retention of reading material among students. The positive outcomes suggest that LCs can play a crucial role in enhancing reading comprehension.

A. Related Case Studies

The results of this study are consistent with Barbara Brown's (2002) findings, where 8th graders using LCs showed significant improvement in reading comprehension compared to those receiving traditional instruction. Similarly, Vaughn, Klinger, and Schumm (1998) reported that 4th grade students who engaged in peer-led group discussions achieved higher comprehension scores than the control group. However, Rascher (2015) found no significant difference, likely due to a shorter duration and less intensive training in LCs. These comparisons highlight the importance of adequate training and sufficient time for LCs to be effective.

The Effects of Literature Circles on Students' Reading Comprehension Skills

B. Short Answer-Test Results

The experimental group's superior performance in the short answer-test indicates that LCs effectively enhanced their comprehension skills. The study controlled for variables such as prior exposure to summarizing, inferencing, and paraphrasing techniques, as well as text difficulty, through randomization, piloting, and teacher intervention. These measures ensured that the observed improvements were attributable to the LC intervention. The results affirm the value of incorporating LCs in educational settings to boost students' reading comprehension abilities through structured and collaborative discussions.

C. Students' Role Sheets

Analysis of students' role sheets revealed significant improvement in pragmatic inferencing skills, particularly through the "Culture Collector" role. This role required students to compare cultural aspects in the texts with their own experiences, fostering intelligent guesses and deeper understanding. The feedback questionnaire indicated that 66% of students felt that LCs helped them make inferences beyond the explicit text. This finding suggests that role-specific tasks in LCs can effectively develop critical reading skills, enabling students to engage more thoughtfully with reading material.

D. Students' Views

Students expressed overwhelmingly positive views towards the implementation of LCs, reporting increased interest and enjoyment in reading. This was particularly significant among weaker readers, who showed heightened engagement and enthusiasm for reading activities. The feedback suggested that LCs not only improved comprehension skills but also motivated students to read more actively and collaboratively. These findings highlight the potential of LCs to transform reading instruction by fostering a supportive and interactive learning environment that caters to diverse student needs and promotes lifelong reading habits.

VI. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

A. Implications for In-service Teachers

The findings of this study have come up with important implications for the teaching of reading comprehension at Moroccan high schools. Generally, it is apparent that literature circles are beneficial in helping to improve students' comprehension skills, namely summarizing, inferencing, and paraphrasing. Therefore, it is highly recommended that teachers implement literature circles with their students as this instructional approach is effective to meet students' needs in all areas of language; specifically in reading comprehension. When teachers implement literature circles, they provide students with a true purpose for reading since they will be engaged in the discussion of books, stories, text, etc. with their classmates. On the other hand, teachers may have worries concerning large classes. However, large class size should not discourage high school teachers from implementing literature circles in their classes. It was indeed observed during the study that the size of the class was beneficial; the group discussions extended beyond the same group members, the large class size led to whole class discussion, which provided students with more chances for interaction and therefore more opportunities for comprehension. This suggests that all the students are engaged in the learning process; specifically in comprehending the reading material. To sum up, the outcome of this study revealed that the participants improved their comprehension skills, which proves that literature circles is an effective teaching method EFL teachers should use in their reading comprehension classes.

B. Implications for Trainers at EFL Training Centers

It is recommended that trainers at the EFL training centers introduce their trainees to literature circles as an effective strategy to teach reading comprehension skills. Once the pre-service teachers (trainees) are fully equipped with the theoretical backgrounds and practical practices of this approach, they should be given the chance to practice them. Providing teacher trainees with the opportunity to experience literature circle group discussions as participants will help them grasp the dynamics of a literature circle group setting, and allow them to successfully implement them with students.

C. Implications for Supervisors

Literature circles is new teaching practice that has always proved to yield satisfactory results on reading comprehension. But for teachers to successfully implement this method as a way to teach reading comprehension skills, they need educational training and coaching through practice on the implementation of this new teaching strategy. Therefore, it is highly recommended that Moroccan ELT supervisors organize regular pedagogical meetings through professional learning communities and peer-coaching on the incorporation of literature circles in classes. Also, study days focusing on workshops and mini lessons on the use of LCs can be organized. In-service teachers are in need of such trainings and study days which focus on new strategies of teaching different skills; especially that nowadays students belong to the era of technology. According to Hall (2009), "elementary teacher education programs are faced with the challenge of preparing pre-service teachers to provide high quality literacy instruction to an increasingly diverse student population" (p. 298). Thus, students need to be equipped with the skills that will enable them become critical reader and critical thinkers. The idea of providing trainings on the use of LCs can be spread national wide, i.e. ELT supervisors might deliver presentations and/ or conduct workshops targeting the incorporation of literature circles in Moroccan EFL classes.

The Effects of Literature Circles on Students' Reading Comprehension Skills

D. Implications for English Club Coordinators

Another important category of teachers who are concerned with the implementation of literature circles are English club coordinators. Every school has a resource center or a club for students to practice extra-curricular activities. Now more than ever, club coordinators should integrate literature circles in their club activities. Club coordinators might devote at least one hour per week for LCs. This way, clubs are going to provide an efficient platform for both students and teachers to read. More importantly, incorporating LCs in clubs is a chance for teachers to target the reading comprehension skills that are necessary for students to comprehend texts. Also, club coordinators can target literary texts, short stories, and novels to stress the comprehension skills students will need at the university level. Thus, using LCs in English clubs can bridge the gap between the university and high school system, especially for students of Arts stream.

E. Implications for Book Designers

Another implication for implementing literature circles in Moroccan EFL classrooms concerns textbook writers. We all agree that ESL and EFL students need not only grammatical rules and functions to learn a language, but they also need openness to a variety of literary texts which reflect the culture of the English speaking countries. In this regard, Moroccan textbook designers are recommended to accompany at least each two units with a section that integrates literature circles to teach a chapter from a well-known book or short story. This will help students both understand the target culture and practice their comprehension skills. Other skills can also be practiced, but the main ones should relate to reading comprehension as LCs is used to teach reading comprehension in the first place.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study investigated the effects of literature circles on students reading comprehension skills, and revealed significant results. To attain its objectives, the study used an experimental, pre-test post-test control group design wherein the participants were randomly assigned to one of the experimental and control groups. 76 participants who participated in the study were randomly divided into two groups: the experimental group underwent the treatment while the control group was taught in the ordinary way of teaching reading comprehension at high school. The two groups filled in an information sheet that provided demographic information about the participants. Also, both groups took a pretest and a post-test. The pretest showed that the groups were equal to reading comprehension skills (inferencing, paraphrasing, and summarizing). The post-test was used as a tool to assess student's answers after the treatment. A feedback questionnaire was administered to the experimental group to explore their views towards the use of LCs to teach reading comprehension.

The selected text for the short answer-test is one-page. It consists of 9 short paragraphs of similar length. The text contained a total number of 429 words with no pictures or graphs. All students who participated in the experiment were required to submit their tests within the time limit of 40 minutes. Students were allowed to go back to the text to answer the comprehension questions which targeted inferencing, paraphrasing, and summarizing skills. The feedback questionnaire used to explore students' views contained five questions; the first three ones required students to choose between ranges of responses, and the last two ones were open-ended questions. It was distributed to 38 Moroccan EFL 2nd year baccalaureate students at Al Majd high school in Agadir.

The findings of the present study demonstrated that literature circles significantly improved students' reading comprehension skills (summarizing, inferencing, and paraphrasing), and helped them get higher mean scores (M=12.34, SD= 2.12) compared to the control group (M=10.71, SD= 2.25). Additionally, the independent-samples t-test produced a significant difference between the means of the two groups t (3.25) =, 002p<.05. This comparison between the scores of the two groups strongly implies that LCs is an effective teaching method. The feedback questionnaire also served as a back up to the successful implementation of literature circles. It indicated that the participants hold very positive attitudes towards the use of LCs as a teaching method. Besides, the subjects reported that LCs aided them improve their comprehension skills.

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