

Article

Not peer-reviewed version

Improving Student Participation in a Literature Class through Literature Circles

[GENESIS GENELZA](#) *

Posted Date: 3 June 2024

doi: 10.20944/preprints202406.0111.v1

Keywords: *Literature, Literature Circles, Narrative Review, Student Participation, Teaching Literature*



Preprints.org is a free multidiscipline platform providing preprint service that is dedicated to making early versions of research outputs permanently available and citable. Preprints posted at Preprints.org appear in Web of Science, Crossref, Google Scholar, Scilit, Europe PMC.

Copyright: This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Article

Improving Student Participation in a Literature Class through Literature Circles

GENESIS G. GENELZA

University of Mindanao Tagum College, Philippines, College of Teacher Education & Junior High School
Department; genesis.genelza@umindanao.edu.ph

Abstract: Literature circles create an interactive and participatory learning atmosphere that greatly increases student participation in the classroom. Through literature circles, students can exchange ideas and gain knowledge from one another in a nurturing learning atmosphere. Students feel more at ease taking chances and voicing their opinions in the classroom when there is a strong sense of community among the students. This research study used a narrative literature review as a qualitative method. Relevant literature in this review showed that literature circles can increase students' reading passion and enthusiasm. Students are more likely to be engaged when they can select their own reading materials and facilitate discussions. Thus, by implementing literature circles, teachers may create a more engaging and encouraging learning environment in the classroom, which will ultimately improve student performance and foster a deeper understanding of literature.

Keywords: literature; literature circles; narrative review; student participation; teaching literature

Introduction

A literature circle is an opportunity where participants discuss and offer feedback on a book, they have all been reading (Daniels, 2002). As explained by Cameron et al. (2012), literature circles are directed mainly by students, with the teacher acting as a facilitator and carrying out relatively minimal management tasks. Members of the literature circle are typically given roles to help the group work well together and keep members' attention on the selected book. Educational research has paid close attention to the use of literature circles as an instructional approach, especially when it comes to encouraging student engagement with reading. Literature circles are an essential tool for educators who want to design engaging and inspiring reading programs. Teachers can lead students on a literary exploration, discovery, and ownership journey by embracing the collaborative nature of reading circles and utilizing the potential of role assignments (Talenta & Himawati, 2023). Reading is challenging because there are so many things to take into account. Nonetheless, specific research indicates that there are strategies to help readers become more proficient readers (Federe et al., 2023).

In order to foster critical thinking, creativity, self-motivation, active learning, and communication skills development, literature circles are frequently employed in language instruction (Ivic & Sostaric, 2020). Peer-led discussions of written texts, known as literature circles, allow students—especially second-language learners—to share their thoughts and opinions about the English-language story they have read (Kaowiwattanukul, 2020). Every participant in the literature circle assumes a distinct position, such as facilitator of discussions, master of language, summarizer, or connection. Students in the literature circle are active learners with ideas and knowledge, not passive learners who absorb information (Rahman, 2022). Students who read collaboratively are more likely to actively interact with the material and develop their critical thinking, communication, teamwork, and enthusiasm abilities, especially without discrimination involved (Capurihan et al., 2023).

VanAlstine (2011) stated that literature circles have essential elements: a clear set of instructional objectives, heterogeneous groups, equal opportunity for success, positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, positive social interaction, individual accountability, and post-group reflection or debriefing. Thus, this type of group interaction was vital to my students' growth as learners. Literature circles prepare learners for the type of teamwork and critical interchange vital to being effective participants in their communities and workplaces as they leave school, and this could be a perfect way to give students both the structure and the freedom needed to dive into literature and experience it in a new way. I knew that my students should have the opportunity to explore literature, test their creativity through activities and projects, and, as a result, take ownership of their learning.

Teachers and researchers have been concerned about low student performance in literature classrooms for a long time. The lack of interaction with the material is one of the crucial aspects that has been found. Tinto (1993) asserts that student participation is essential to academic performance. Students perform poorly when they find literature difficult or unrelated to their lives, which saps their motivation. Additionally, Applebee and Langer (2011) stress that rote memorization and cursory analysis are standard components of traditional literature education approaches, which do not promote a thorough comprehension and appreciation of literary works. This method of instruction has the potential to alienate pupils, especially those who have trouble understanding what they read or have never studied literary analysis before. Hence, schools can create a learning environment that supports students' development, personal growth, and academic achievement by addressing their particular issues (Dairo et al., 2023).

The diversity of student backgrounds and skills, which can lead to a significant achievement gap in literary classes, is another important factor leading to low performance. Milner (2012) discusses how socioeconomic and cultural variables affect students' readiness and capacity to interact with literature. Pupils from disadvantaged families might not have the same access to reading materials or encouraging classroom settings as their classmates, which puts them at a disadvantage. Furthermore, Dickinson and Tabors (2001) contend that early reading and language experiences are significant in determining how well students succeed academically in the future. Students who lack a solid foundation in language abilities are more likely to find it difficult to understand the challenging texts and analytical exercises that are required in literature classes.

According to Tomlinson (2001), diversified instruction can help meet students' diverse requirements by offering a variety of avenues for learning and comprehending literature. This method improves comprehension and student engagement by customizing instructional strategies and resources to each student's unique learning preferences and skill level. Furthermore, as suggested by Gay (2010), adding multicultural literature to the curriculum can make the subject matter more inclusive and approachable, which will boost student engagement and performance. By identifying and resolving the underlying causes of low student performance in literature classes, teachers can create more engaging lesson plans that foster a more in-depth knowledge and appreciation of literary works.

Meanwhile, in my current position, I am concerned about my student's interest in participating in the class and what effective practices and strategies I will employ to arouse their attention to participate. Teaching literature is genuinely challenging, exciting, and fun as a teacher, yet when it comes to my students, I have this gut feeling that why some of my students are too shy and quiet during my class. This became very frustrating because my students were not participating in the discussion unless I called them or made jokes about the lesson. I knew that I wanted my students to be engaged and active. However, I kept coming to the same conclusions: I was choosing the reading that was in the prescribed syllabus, I was finding and explaining the vocabulary words difficult for them to comprehend, I was coming up with discussion questions, and I was choosing the extension activities. I knew something was missing in my literature lessons and could not figure out what. Because of this, I am aware that there is something wrong with how I taught the discussion in a crowded and heterogeneous class.

Furthermore, the problem is at the researcher's utmost consideration because if it remains untreated, the students might have low academic performance in literature and other classes (major

or minor subjects). The researcher identified the problem by observing the student's records and every classroom discussion. Students under this category are less participative and passive in class. This research is determined to improve the student's participation in a literature class through literature circles and make them productive with a meaningful learning experience they will never forget as part of the literary appreciation by gathering relevant information from reliable published literature reviews available online. This will benefit the students who are passive and have low performance and participation because literature circles display the characteristic features of true collaboration: student-initiated inquiry, choice, self-direction, mutual interdependence, face-to-face interaction, and self- and group assessment.

What is Literature Circle?

Small, student-led discussion groups called "literature circles" gather once a week to read the same book aloud and engage in structured dialogue about it. Literature circles are defined as "small, peer-led discussion groups whose members have chosen to read the same story, poem, article, or book" by Daniels (2002), one of the founders of this pedagogical technique. Encouraging students to take charge of their reading and discussions improves their comprehension and critical thinking abilities while fostering a collaborative learning atmosphere.

Fountas and Pinnell (2001) noted that assigning roles to group members is a crucial component of literature circles. Students are guided to approach the text from many viewpoints by roles like the Discussion Director, Connector, Summarizer, and Illustrator, which ensure a thorough investigation of the content. Along with encouraging active engagement, this framework aids in developing particular abilities pertinent to the roles they have been given, such as questioning, connecting the dots, summarizing, and picturing.

Literature circles have a proven track record of fostering literacy and involvement. Daniels (2006) asserts that literary circles foster a more in-depth interaction with texts and offer a safe space for students to share their understandings and interpretations. As a result of this process, kids' voices are heard and respected in a group context, which fosters motivation and engagement among the readers in the community. Additionally, Almasi (1995) highlights how literary circles' social component can significantly increase students' motivation to read and discuss works. Additionally, because they are using the English language in the classroom, the students need to actively participate in the communicative activities created to improve their speaking performance. In other academic areas, they are encouraged to use English (Genelza, 2021).

Literature circles are also consistent with constructivist theories of learning, which hold that social interaction and discourse are the means by which knowledge is created. The assumption that students learn best when participating in peer discussions is supported by Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism. This is because peer discussion enables students to clarify their ideas and improve their understanding through discussion and feedback. Students' deeper enjoyment of literature is fostered, and higher-order thinking skills are developed through the participatory process of literature circles.

Hence, literature circles are an effective teaching strategy that encourages critical thinking, teamwork, and active learning. Literature circles improve understanding and ignite a passion for reading by allowing students to assume various roles and participate in thought-provoking conversations. Because literature circles are based on the theoretical frameworks of authors such as Daniels, Fountas, Pinnell, and Vygotsky, which emphasize the value of social contact in learning, they are helpful in teaching literacy in the classroom.

Methodology

A narrative literature review was used as a qualitative methodology in this research study. Narrative literature reviews use an integrated analysis of current literature to identify research gaps, summarize material, and develop conclusions about a subject. Understanding the current status of the literature is essential to explaining how new research fits into the larger research picture. A research article in a respectable, peer-reviewed journal is called a literature review. A literature

review's main objective is to objectively report the state of knowledge on a subject based on previously published research. A literature review helps the reader understand the content by providing a comprehensive summary and context (Green et al., A. 2006).

Findings and Discussion

In light of the findings drawn from reading the chosen publications, the following claims and trustworthy data should be emphasized in this article:

Table 1. List of Literature on Improving Student Participation through Literature Circles.

References	Discussions
Daniels, H. (2002). <i>Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups</i> . Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.	Daniels examined how literature circles provide a collaborative learning environment that stimulates more profound knowledge and conversation while empowering students' choices and voices.
Peralta-Nash, C., & Dutch, J. A. (2000). <i>Literature Circles: Creating an Environment for Choice</i> . <i>Primary Voices K-6</i> , 8(4), 29-37.	This study looked at how literary circles affect primary school pupils and found that allowing kids to select their own reading materials and discussion topics increases their engagement and passion for reading.
Blum, H. T., Lipsett, L. R., & Yocom, D. J. (2002). <i>Literature Circles: An Inquiry-Based Approach to Reading</i> . <i>Teacher Librarian</i> , 30(2), 21-25.	Blum, Lipsett, and Yocom explored how literature circles establish an inquiry-based learning environment that enhances student engagement by promoting curiosity and collaborative problem-solving.
McMahon, S. I., & Raphael, T. E. (1997). <i>The Book Club Connection: Literacy Learning and Classroom Talk</i> . New York, NY: Teachers College Press.	This book thoroughly investigated how literature circles and book clubs, with their planned yet flexible conversations that encourage student ownership of learning, affect student engagement and literacy development.
Day, J. P., & Ainley, M. (2008). <i>Enhancing Engagement and Skill Development in Learning through Literature Circles</i> . <i>Educational Psychology</i> , 28(1), 91-106.	Day and Ainley delved into how literature circles affected students' involvement and growth as learners, and they found that there were notable improvements in interpersonal, critical thinking, and active participation.
Clarke, L. W., & Holwadel, J. (2007). "Help! What Is Wrong with These Literature Circles and How Can We Fix Them?" <i>The Reading Teacher</i> , 61(1), 20-29.	By addressing typical implementation issues with literature circles and providing workable alternatives to improve student involvement and participation, Clarke and Holwadel highlight the significance of group dynamics and instructor facilitation.
Almasi, J. F., & Garas-York, K. (2009). <i>Comprehension and Discussion of Texts in Small Groups: A Comparison of Literature Circles, Guided Reading, and Independent Reading</i> . <i>Reading Psychology</i> , 30(3), 243-277.	After comparing and contrasting various reading strategies, this study concludes that literature circles significantly improve student engagement and understanding by encouraging lively group conversations.
Baker, L. (1999). <i>Opportunities at the Intersection of Reading Research and Literature Circles</i> . <i>Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy</i> , 42(5), 356-365.	According to Baker's research, literary circles help close the gap between reading research and classroom practice by promoting community and shared learning experiences, increasing student participation and reading motivation.
Maloch, B. (2002). <i>Scaffolding Student Talk: One Teacher's Role in Literature Discussion Groups</i> . <i>Reading Research Quarterly</i> , 37(1), 94-112.	In examining the teacher's role in leading literature circles, Maloch showed how thoughtful scaffolding can increase student engagement and participation while improving the caliber of talks and encouraging deeper literary analysis.

<i>Pilonieta, P., & Medina, A. L. (2009). Reciprocal Teaching for the Primary Grades: "We Can Do It Too!" The Reading Teacher, 63(2), 120-129.</i>	This study uses literature circles to increase student participation despite focusing on reciprocal teaching. It demonstrates how structured conversations and peer interaction promote comprehension and encourage active participation in the reading process.
--	--

The table presented how impactful integrating literature circles in a literature class is to promote student participation. Because they encourage active involvement and collaborative learning, literature circles—a student-centered reading activity—have significantly impacted student participation in literature classes. As they assume defined roles in literature circles—such as summarizer, questioner, or connector—students are motivated to go deeper into the book and take ownership of their education. Students are more inclined to actively participate when this system instills a sense of ownership and accountability. Students' participation is increased because of the participatory character of literature circles, which promotes a collaborative setting where they feel comfortable sharing their ideas and views.

These debates enhance students' comprehension of the material, allowing them to consider many viewpoints and interpretations. For shy or reticent students, literature circles' casual, conversational style might lessen the intimidating component frequently associated with whole-class discussions. Thanks to this inclusive approach, every kid will have a voice, which also boosts general class involvement.

Consequently, literature circles can increase students' reading passion and enthusiasm. Students are more likely to be engaged when they can select their own reading materials and facilitate discussions. Reading becomes more fulfilling and joyful because of this choice and autonomy, which encourages a lifelong love of books. Students' self-confidence in their ability to analyze and interpret texts increases as they interact more intimately with them and with one another. This increased self-assurance and curiosity frequently result in more enthusiastic engagement in literary lessons, fostering a livelier and more engaged learning atmosphere.

Conclusion

With all the literature in this review being highlighted, literature circles create an interactive and participatory learning atmosphere that significantly increases student participation in the classroom. To promote active participation and accountability, each member of these small, student-led groups is given a designated position, such as discussion director, summarizer, or connector. Every student is encouraged to participate in this structure, allowing them to investigate various viewpoints and hone their critical thinking abilities. Literature circles' participatory format disrupts the conventional structured classroom dynamics and encourages students to voice their ideas more freely.

Additionally, literature circles help students develop a sense of accountability and ownership, which boosts their motivation and interest in the assigned reading. Students are more inclined to read carefully and study well if they know they will share their observations and analyses with their peers. Their active engagement improves their ability to draw connections between the literature and other academic disciplines or their own experiences, promoting a more profound knowledge of the text. Because they must listen to others and build upon their comments, the collaborative talks also enhance students' communication skills.

Literature circles have advantages for students' academic performance and social and emotional growth. Students who work in small groups gain an appreciation for different points of view and learn how to cooperate to achieve shared objectives. This fosters a sense of community and mutual respect. Building confidence, empathy, and interpersonal skills in this collaborative educational setting is beneficial for productivity in and out of the classroom. Literature circles foster a vibrant and welcoming environment that increases student involvement and encourages general development.

Therefore, the organization needs to ensure that the program adequately incorporates the teaching techniques and real-world activities that improve students' proficiency in the English language. Enhancing student control over what is taught in class and producing positive academic

outcomes are the results of teaching the curriculum subject and being proficient in the language used for instruction. These factors increase the learner's exposure to and opportunity to understand the instruction material (Genelza, 2022).

Recommendations

Since literature circles encourage involvement, establish a feeling of community, improve critical thinking skills, develop communication talents, and increase motivation, they significantly impact students' participation in literature classes. By implementing literature circles, teachers may create a more engaging and encouraging classroom learning atmosphere, ultimately improving student performance and fostering a deeper understanding of literature.

Literature circles provide students with duties and responsibilities within the group, which encourages active participation. Every student is encouraged to engage in this instruction system, which guarantees that more vocal kids have a voice and that more submissive students learn to listen and work together. Students feel more engaged in the learning process and better comprehend the content when they take turns playing discussion leader, summarizer, or connector. It takes active participation to develop a love of reading and enhance understanding of content.

Moreover, during literature circles, students are taught to think critically and examine books from various angles. They can investigate and debate different interpretations and points of view in this cooperative environment, strengthening their analytical thinking capacity. Peer debate and questioning help students strengthen their comprehension and appreciation of literature by teaching them how to cite textual evidence to support their arguments. Their capacity for autonomous and critical thought is further enhanced by expressing and defending their opinions.

Students can practice and develop their communication abilities through literature circles. Regular talks help students develop their ability to speak coherently and actively listen to others. They gain valuable social skills from this process, including empathy, tolerance for differing viewpoints, and teamwork. These abilities are helpful in various academic fields and everyday life and essential for success in literature programs.

In addition, students who participate in literature circles frequently get to choose the texts discussed and the topics covered. Their independence boosts their drive and dedication to their educational endeavors. When students feel they have control over their education, they are more inclined to interact with the content and put effort into reading and analysis. Literature circles have the potential to significantly increase students' excitement and dedication to their studies by making literature more relevant and engaging for them.

Through literature circles, students can exchange ideas and gain knowledge from one another in a nurturing learning atmosphere. Students feel more at ease taking chances and voicing their opinions in the classroom when there is a strong sense of community among the students. Literature circles' cooperative style promotes peer learning and mutual assistance, enhancing students' academic performance and sense of community. Literature circles make a literature class livelier and more enjoyable by establishing a community of learners.

References

1. Almasi, J. F., & Garas-York, K. (2009). Comprehension and Discussion of Texts in Small Groups: A Comparison of Literature Circles, Guided Reading, and Independent Reading. *Reading Psychology*, 30(3), 243-277.
2. Almasi, J. F. (1995). The nature of fourth graders' sociocognitive conflicts in peer-led and teacher-led discussions of literature. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 30(3), 314-351.
3. Applebee, A. N., & Langer, J. A. (2011). A snapshot of writing instruction in middle schools and high schools. *English Journal*, 100(6), 14-27.
4. Baker, L. (1999). Opportunities at the Intersection of Reading Research and Literature Circles. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 42(5), 356-365.

5. Blum, H. T., Lipsett, L. R., & Yocom, D. J. (2002). Literature Circles: An Inquiry-Based Approach to Reading. *Teacher Librarian*, 30(2), 21-25.
6. Cameron, S., M. Murray, K. Hull, and J. Cameron (2012). Engaging fluent readers using literature circles. *Literacy Learning: The Middle Years* 20 (1): i–viii.
7. Capurihan, N. M., Dominguiano, K., Palapas, J. A., & Genelza, G. G. (2023). The language paradigm of social prejudice as a factor in the social exclusion of LGBTQI members. *Journal of Languages, Linguistics and Literary Studies*, 3(1), 9-19.
8. Clarke, L. W., & Holwadel, J. (2007). "Help! What Is Wrong with These Literature Circles and How Can We Fix Them?" *The Reading Teacher*, 61(1), 20-29.
9. Daniels, H. (2002). *Literature circles: Voice and choice in book clubs and reading groups*. 2nd ed. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
10. Daniels, H. (2006). What's the next big thing with literature circles? *Voices from the Middle*, 13(4), 10-15.
11. Dairo, G. O., Lazaga, H. K. F., Yaun, L. D., & Genelza, G. G. (2023). OVERCOMING THE REALITY: CHALLENGES, COPING, AND INSIGHTS AMONG FRESHMEN ENGLISH MAJORS. *Galaxy International Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 11(12), 339-366.
12. Day, J. P., & Ainley, M. (2008). Enhancing Engagement and Skill Development in Learning through Literature Circles. *Educational Psychology*, 28(1), 91-106.
13. Dickinson, D. K., & Tabors, P. O. (2001). *Beginning literacy with language: Young children learning at home and school*. Paul H Brookes Publishing.
14. Federe, R. M., Gomoni, H., Jose, J., & Genelza, G. G. (2023). Assessing the comprehension of the students in Philippine fable short stories: Basis for an intervention program. *Journal of Languages, Linguistics and Literary Studies*, 3(1), 37-46.
15. Fountas, I. C., & Pinnell, G. S. (2001). *Guiding Readers and Writers (Grades 3-6): Teaching Comprehension, Genre, and Content Literacy*. Heinemann.
16. Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. Teachers College Press.
17. Genelza, G. G. (2021). Speech apprehension of first year engineering students in the pandemic era: basis for an intervention program. *ACADEMICIA: An International Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, 11(12), 353-371.
18. Genelza, G. G. (2022). Affective Language Learning and English Language Competence of Purposive Communication Students. *Universe International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 2(10), 37-47.
19. Green, B. N., Johnson, C. D., & Adams, A. (2006). Writing narrative literature reviews for peer-reviewed journals: secrets of the trade. *Journal of chiropractic medicine*, 5(3), 101-117.
20. Ivic, V., & Sostaric, B. (2020). Benefits and drawbacks on literature circles in Moodle chat for the students of English as a foreign language. *ALAR: Action Learning and Action Research Journal*, 26(1), 133-158.
21. Kaowiwattanagul, S. (2020). Using Literature Circles to Promote the English Speaking Skills of Engineering Students in English for Specific Purposes Classrooms. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 13(2), 414-425.
22. Maloch, B. (2002). Scaffolding Student Talk: One Teacher's Role in Literature Discussion Groups. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 37(1), 94-112.
23. McMahon, S. I., & Raphael, T. E. (1997). *The Book Club Connection: Literacy Learning and Classroom Talk*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
24. Milner, H. R. (2012). *Culturally relevant pedagogy in a diverse urban classroom*. *Urban Review*, 44(2), 111-134.

25. Peralta-Nash, C., & Dutch, J. A. (2000). Literature Circles: Creating an Environment for Choice. *Primary Voices K-6*, 8(4), 29-37.
26. Pilonieta, P., & Medina, A. L. (2009). Reciprocal Teaching for the Primary Grades: "We Can Do It Too!" *The Reading Teacher*, 63(2), 120-129.
27. Rahman, A. (2022). The effect of literature circle on varied reading comprehension. *Journal of Teaching and Education for Scholars*, 1(1), 7-14.
28. Talenta, P. I., & Himawati, U. (2023). Reading together, learning together: The impact of literature circles on student engagement in reading. *Jurnal CULTURE (Culture, Language, and Literature Review)*, 10(2), 47-56.
29. Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. University of Chicago Press.
30. Tomlinson, C. A. (2001). *How to differentiate instruction in mixed-ability classrooms*. ASCD.
31. VanAlstine, H. Literature Circles: Effective Practices That Promote Participation.
32. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Harvard University Press.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.