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Benefits of Using Literature Circles in English Foreign Language Classrooms

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Resumen

Esta síntesis de investigación tiene como objetivo analizar los beneficios del uso de los Círculos literarios (LC) en las aulas de inglés como segunda Lengua. Para alcanzar la meta de esta investigación, tres categorías fueron establecidas: los beneficios entre los estudiantes jóvenes y adultos, los roles comunes aplicados en este método, y las obras literarias utilizadas en los Círculos Literarios. Los resultados corroboraron la idea de que los círculos literarios pueden ser implementados en las escuelas para intensificar los hábitos de lectura y mejorar las habilidades de lectura. Primero, los resultados mostraron que el beneficio más importante es el mejoramiento de la comprensión lectora. Segundo, los roles más utilizados fueron facilitador de discusión, conector, enriquecedor del vocabulario, resumidor, reflector, e ilustrador. Finalmente, las novelas, historias cortas, textos informativos, cuentos y poesía son las obras literarias utilizadas en esta estrategia. El análisis de estas categorías mostró que factores como: la edad, los roles, y obras literarias influyen en los beneficios que los estudiantes pueden obtener utilizando los Círculos Literarios.

Palabras clave: Círculos literarios. Roles. Obras literarias.



Abstract

This research synthesis intends to analyze the benefits of using Literature Circles (LC) in English Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. To carry out the objective of this research, three categories were established: the benefits between young and adult learners, the common roles applied in this method, and the literary works used in LC. The results corroborated the idea that LC could be implemented in schools to enhance reading habits and improve reading skills. First, the results showed that the most important benefit is the enhancement of reading comprehension. Second, the most used roles were the discussion director, connector, vocabulary enricher, summarizer, literary luminary, and illustrator. Finally, novels, short stories, informative texts, tales, and poetry are the literary works used in this strategy. The analysis of these categories showed that factors such as age, roles, and literary works affect the benefits that learners can get by using LC.

Keywords: Literature circles. Roles. Literary works.



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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents who have supported me and taught me to be perseverative, brave, and optimistic. Thanks to their love and trust, I know giving up is not an option and dreams come true with effort.



Introduction

Learning English involves a process where the development of the four skills takes place (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Teachers may provide strategies, activities, and methodologies to students in order to improve and to develop those skills successfully. Nonetheless, in Ecuador, reading is one of the most difficult skills to develop because there is not a good culture of readers (CERLAC, 2018).

Understanding that Ecuadorians do not have good reading habits (INEC, 2012), the present research synthesis proposes to analyze Literature Circles (LC), which is a valuable strategy for improving reading skills in learners (Irawati, 2016). To achieve this goal, the main objective of the research is to recognize the benefits, roles, and literary works implied in the application of LC in classrooms.

The project consists of six chapters. In the first chapter, the background, problem statement, justification, and research questions are explained in detail.

The theoretical framework is presented in chapter two. This section shows significant information about EFL classrooms, types of learners, and Literature Circles.

Chapter three describes the literature review. This chapter presents studies that provide evidence for the following aspects about LC: benefits in EFL young learners, benefits in young adult learners, and LC applied in different classrooms.

In chapter four, the methodology used to carry out the synthesis is explained. This section includes the resources, keywords, and categories stated for the analysis of Literature Circles.



In addition, chapter five presents the analysis of the following categories: benefits of LC, roles applied in this method, and literary works used in this strategy.

Finally, the last chapter indicates the conclusions of this research and the recommendations that might be considered for future research.



Chapter I

Background

The Literature Circles (LC) emerged in the United States in 1982. This method was invented by a group of students who met to read books. Those students created the “school version of adult book clubs” (Calzada, 2013, p. 87) that was later adapted to help immigrants, ESL, and EFL students.

This method is a tool that offers some benefits for students, such as getting students’ attention in texts, maximizing the interaction between students, developing cooperation, and providing social consciousness (Aytan, 2018). Literature circles have many forms, but essentially, they are small groups where students are reading the same text. To apply this method, the teacher presents a wide range of books that are compatible with age and English level of the group of students. Then, in the classroom, students make groups to choose a book of their interest. Once students have chosen their books, the teacher should assign a specific role to each student to obtain the main goal of enhancing reading habits (Daniels, 2002).

Pambianchi (2017) argues that LCs are very useful for EFL students because this strategy improves learners’ reading skills. Therefore, English teachers and pupils must know all the benefits they can achieve by using this method. Thus, this research was carried out to show the analysis of the most important benefits of using LC in EFL



classrooms, the contrast of the roles applied in this method, and the evaluation of literary works that work better in LC.

Problem Statement

In a survey conducted by NOP World (Segal, 2017), it was found that India, Thailand, and China spend more hours reading books in a week; despite the fact that these countries do not have access to a range of libraries, newspapers, and computers. On the other hand, a survey carried out by INEC (2012) shows that people in Ecuador do not read for the following reasons: lack of interest, lack of time, and concentration problems. Therefore, those surveys demonstrate that reading habits can vary in countries due to different factors.

Statistics presented by CERLAC (2018), indicate that Ecuador is the country which has the lowest percentage of readers in Latin America. In one year, about 0,5 books are read by each Ecuadorian. That means that each person reads half of a text, at best. From that percentage, some read for pleasure, and others read just because the curriculum requires it. Indeed, the curriculum establishes that students should read straightforward texts on subjects of interest because, according to Cameron (as cited in Villalba, 2012) if students do not develop literacy in L1, they will not have enough strategies to transfer to the L2/FL. Therefore, it is important that students develop reading skills in the first language to carry them to a second language. Also, encouraging reading in the classroom could be a difficult task, and it could lead teachers at all levels to look for strategies that help to develop reading comprehension, encourage discussion among students, and engage students in the text (Bernadowski, 2013. p.16).

Even though there are many reading strategies such as “Multisensory Strategies for Teaching Reading, Strategies and Practices for Teaching Reading as a Language



Experience and with Shared Books, Oral Reading Strategies and Practices, Comprehension and Content Area Reading Strategies, Practices for Individualization and Recreational Reading, and Text-Based Comprehension Strategies” (Tierney, 1985, p. 1), reading skills in EFL classrooms have not improved. Furthermore, a recent study carried out by Escudero, Fuertes, and López (2018) shows that paraphrasing is a good strategy to develop reading skills; however, there are more effective methods to develop reading skills in EFL classrooms and one of these methods is Literature Circles (LC).

According to Bernadowski (2013), LCs are an effective technique that aids in developing reading comprehension in students and provides valuable benefits to them. This method has been applied in many countries such as Bulgaria, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Turkey, Ecuador, among others (Calzada, 2013), so there is a wide quantity of information about this method. Notwithstanding, in Ecuador, the study carried out by Calderon (2010) is the only paper that shows the application of LC in EFL classrooms. Therefore, it is an important point that needs to be covered to empower EFL teachers and students with this strategy.

Justification

Nunan (2012), mentions that English is important in the educational field as it is present along the educational process. Moreover, this author states that English is included in many professional fields, and people who speak this language will have the opportunity to study abroad, and they will be able to communicate with people from other countries. Therefore, students who are learning English at different education levels should develop four skills; however, not all the skills have the same level of difficulty, and one of them is reading.



Learning English involves a process in which four skills (writing, speaking, reading, and listening) are developed. Those skills are very important; however, the present research synthesis focuses on the reading skill. Understanding that comprehension is one of the important elements of reading and life-long literacy, many instructional approaches have been developed for teaching comprehension (Marshall, 2006). One of these developed approaches is Literature Circles (LC). This approach or method is not new, but it is useful for students because it catches learners' interest in reading. Besides, LC "incorporate collaborative learning, group discussion, and effective participation at many levels" (Aytan, 2018, p. 53). Consequently, LCs have a great power to support classroom reading.

As it was mentioned before, reading is a difficult skill to develop. The lack of papers about the use of LC in the Ecuadorian context does not allow teachers and students to make good use of it. Moreover, reading habits in this context are not well developed, so it is necessary to analyze the benefits that students can achieve while using LC in EFL classrooms.

Research Questions

Based on research, this synthesis proposes to answer the following questions:

1. Which benefits of using literature circles are the most common between young and adult learners?
2. Which are the most applied roles while using Literature Circles?
3. Which literary works are used in Literature Circles?



Chapter II

Theoretical framework

In this chapter, relevant information about EFL classrooms, types of learners and Literature circles is presented because these terms are an important key to this research.

EFL Classroom.

This research synthesis shows the benefits of using Literature Circles (LC) in EFL classrooms. Consequently, it is important to understand the meaning of the EFL classroom. According to Rahma and Tuzlukova (2010), an “EFL classroom refers to the educational situation of teaching/learning English as a foreign language” (p. 687).

Therefore, an EFL classroom is the place where the teaching/learning process occurs in an area where the first language is different from the target one.

Types of Learners

Darosa (2012) establishes six categories for EFL learners. These are “age, needs, levels, nationalities, learning strategies, and motivational factors” (p. 1). Undoubtedly, age is the most important category for this research synthesis. Thus, in the literature review, the benefits for young, young adult and adult learners will be analyzed. It is necessary to talk about each subcategory regarding age. The previous author states the following subcategories: infants or pre-school (from 3 to 4 years old), children or primary (from 5 to 11 years old), adolescents or secondary (from 11 to 16 years old),



late teens or late secondary (from 16 to 17 years old), young adults (from 17 to 24 years old), and adults (from 25 to beyond).

Once subcategories have been clarified, it is indispensable to define what a young learner is. The word young means “being in the first or early stage of life or growth; youthful, or immature” (Dictionary.com, 2011). Consequently, Nunan (2010), states that a young learner is considered from 3 years to 15 years old. On the other hand, it is also necessary to define what an adult learner is, and according to Martinez, Westenkirchner, and Witte (2011), “an adult is a person considered mature in status and experience” (p. 242). In addition, according to Lutta (2019), an adult learner is an individual whose age is from 25 years and above. He also argues that many of these adult learners study to finish a degree.

Literature Circles

Background and Definition.

Harmer (as cited in Villalba, 2012) states that reading is beneficial for the acquisition of English. She argues that “students can improve vocabulary, spelling, grammar, and punctuation” (p. 22). In addition, studies have shown that reading is more effective in improving learners’ structure and lexis than any other traditional classroom activities (Krashen, 2004; Harmer, 2007). Hence, reading is essential while students are learning a second language. However, it is necessary to choose an effective method to develop good reading habits and skills. Undoubtedly, teachers can apply LC in their classes to improve reading skills in their students (Varita, 2017). As a consequence, some background information and definition of LC is required.

To begin, LCs were invented in 1982 by fifth-grade students at Lowell School, in Phoenix, Arizona. Claire Staab donated a box of books to her friend Karen Smith.



She took the books and left them at the back of her classroom. After a couple of months, her students realized this box and asked for permission to read the books. Smith accepted, and a few days later she noticed that her students had assigned themselves pages to read, and they were talking about the book they chose (Daniels, 2002).

Rogers and Leochko (2002) define LC as “groups of people who meet regularly to discuss stories and books” (p. 5). They state that the main point of the meeting is to talk and share ideas about the text that students are reading. These authors also mention that the Literature Circles method helps students improve aspects of communication, cooperation, and interest in reading. In addition, Perlenfein and Morris (2002) define LC as “student-led book groups that develop students’ ownership and responsibility for their learning” (p. 4). The main focus of this method is the student and the teacher serves as a facilitator. On the other hand, Daniels (2002) suggests that the term Literature Circles should not be confused with a group of students gathered in order to complete any activity based on reading, where the teacher had chosen the story, and students do not have a voice. Therefore, the previous definitions offered a better understanding of what Literature Circles are.

Purpose and key features.

The main purpose of LC is to promote reading. According to Daniels (2002), LC can help in the development of skillful and thoughtful readers. Additionally, this author states that readers improve their skills by participating in LC because all the discussion provided by the student will be significant. Besides, LC function as a “method of helping students generate their own ideas about what they read” (Daniels, 2002, p. 15). Thus, these new ideas help students be more engaged and interested by making comparisons and connections with real-life issues. Finally, LC allow “students to take



responsibility for reading, comprehending, interpreting, developing discussion of text, and engaging in increasingly more complex levels of reading and thinking” (Brabham & Villaume, 2000, as cited in Marshal, 2006, p.10).

Equally important, Daniels (2002) states 11 key features that should be present in Literature Circles. These are:

1. Reading materials will be chosen by the student: LC pretend to catch students’ attention through independent reading. Therefore, a good way to contribute to this goal is to allow students to choose the book of their choice.
2. Groups are formed based on the book: Once students choose a specific book, they are gathered according to that book.
3. Students read different books: The teacher can provide the opportunity for students to propose the books they want to read instead of choosing the books that the curriculum determines.
4. Students gather in their groups at a certain time to discuss the book: Daily and weekly meetings are essential because LC require a good investment of time.
5. Younger students need to take notes that involve drawings and written information to discuss and read the book: Children can use response logs to write information about what they read.
6. Students present the topics that will be discussed: Most of the time, teachers prefer to manage the topics that should be discussed while reading a book. However, if teachers want to get literary independence in students, they should allow students to formulate their own topics.
7. Questions, digressions, and connections are welcomed in each meeting: LC want students to be able to establish a conversation between the members of the group.



8. The teachers are facilitators and serve as a guide: This means that they do not have to give responses to everything. Sometimes the teacher could be a fellow reader. Therefore, the teacher will show how each role should be developed.
9. Self-evaluation and hetero-evaluation: The teacher can evaluate LC by using different methods of grading. Also, there are rubrics that students can use to evaluate themselves.
10. Fun and playfulness should be present in the process of LC: The purpose of LC is to gather students' attention in reading. Therefore, there has to be room for fun at each meeting.
11. After students finish reading a book, they are rearranged into new groups according to the book of their preference: Once students finish reading the book, the process will be repeated.

Roles in Literature Circles.

For this research synthesis, it is important to define the roles that should be present in Literature Circles. It is worth to say that most of the studies apply to the roles provided by Daniels (2002). Those roles are the following:

1. Discussion director: the student with this role has to propose a list of questions to discuss in the group.
2. Literary luminary: the student has to locate specific paragraphs or passages that are considered important to understand the text.
3. Illustrator: the student with this role has to draw a picture of the message of the text.
4. Connector: the job of this role is to compare the novels they read to their lives, in different aspects.



5. Summarizer: this student logically prepares a brief summary of the text.
6. Vocabulary enricher: this person makes a presentation of the unknown and impressive vocabulary preferences in the text.
7. Travel tracer: this person describes where the events take place.
8. Investigator: this student has to look for information such as geography, culture, author's life, or history of the book setting that helps to understand the book better.

Roles in LC should be divided into compulsory tasks and selective tasks. A compulsory task means “something you must do it or accept it because it is the law or because someone in a position of authority says you must” (ReversoDictionary, 2019, p. 1). Meanwhile, selective tasks mean to do something that is optional. In LC, the compulsory tasks are questioner, connector, literary luminary/passage master, and illustrator. And the selective tasks are summarizer, researcher, vocabulary enricher/word wizard and travel tracer/ scene setter (Daniels, 2002). When the group has more than four students, compulsory and selective tasks should be applied.

Methods to Evaluate Literature Circles.

Teachers have many resources to evaluate LC. Daniels (2002) offers teachers a wide quantity of assessment strategies. Those strategies could be:

1. Kid watching/anecdotal records: the teacher can evaluate open-ended questions, narrative observational notes, logs, and records.
2. Checklists: curriculum-anchored observation guides, charts, and records.
3. Interview/conferences: face-to-face conversation, track, and monitor student growth.



4. Portfolios/work samples: writing projects, videos, learning logs, or student journals.

Moreover, one of the key features of LC is self-evaluation. Some rubrics can be used or adapted for each teacher to allow students to evaluate themselves. To conclude, teachers can make good use of all these resources to evaluate Literature Circles.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this chapter will allow the project to accomplish the expected results. The consolidation of the meaning of EFL classrooms plus of the general information of the types of learners plus the specific definition, background, purpose, key features, roles, and methods to evaluate Literature Circles will provide the necessary basis to see the desired outcome: Benefits of using Literature Circles in EFL classrooms.



Chapter III

Literature Review

As it was mentioned before, this project aims to analyze the benefits of using Literature Circles (LC) in EFL classrooms. To do this, three categories were established: the benefits between young and adult learners, the roles applied in this method, and the literary works used in LC. To support this research and make it valid, studies about the topic will be reviewed.

Benefits of Using Literature Circles in EFL Classrooms

Benefits in EFL young learners.

Avci and Yüksel (2011) examined the effect of LC in fourth-grade primary students of a private school in Istanbul. The participants were 72 students (3 groups of 24 students each) who were in different classes. Besides, researchers collected opinions of students and teachers about LC. In this study, a mixed-method was applied. The teachers of each classroom chose three books. After each group chose the books, the roles “interrogator, mapper, word-hunter, plotter, connector, summarizer, analyzer, and observer” (p. 1297) were assigned. This study lasted five weeks. The data were collected through a pre-test, a post-test, and interviews. Researchers found out that students improved their reading comprehension and speaking skills. They were also able to analyze specific and detailed information from the books. LC enhanced good



reading habits, and most importantly, this method had a significant impact on social interaction, cooperation, and solidarity.

Calzada (2013) analyzed the use of LC in an EFL classroom. This study applied a qualitative and quantitative method. Data were collected through observational field notes and questionnaires. The participants were 14 students (9 girls and 5 boys) who were studying at a school in Spain. The age ranged from 13 to 14 years old. The groups were formed randomly. Each group had five members; so, the roles discussion facilitator, connector, summarizer, vocabulary enricher, and character analyzer were assigned to all the groups. Due to time, the researcher chose the novel *True Love* by Isaac Asimov, a fragment of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by J.K. Rowling. Students did not pay the interest nor the attention that those readings required. Consequently, the researcher emphasized that teachers should have a wide choice of books, so students could select one of their preferences. The most relevant findings of this study were that LC helped students respect other points of view. Besides, students felt more confident and willing to work in groups.

A qualitative research carried out by Widodo (2016) engaged students in LC. This study lasted 13 months. The participants were 57 students (30 were studying hotel hospitality and 27 were studying accounting) who studied at a vocational secondary school in Indonesia. A vocational school is a school that trains students for specific professions (Mycollegeguide, n.d.). Students arranged their groups. After that, the roles were assigned. In this study, the roles were divided into two main categories: host and guest. The host group had the following roles: text picker, passage master, summarizer, language enricher, and passage enricher, while the guest group had the following roles: test assessor, information seeker, questioner, language observer, and reporter. The participants had to read "accounting topics: the recording process, the accounting cycle,



and financial statements and hotel hospitality: hotel room reservation, international hotel websites, and guest registration” (p. 351). The data were collected through interviews, observations, and focus groups. It presented the next benefits: LC improved students’ reading skills, vocabulary, self-efficacy, confidence, and willingness to participate in class. Students also showed more interest in reading books that matched their vocational careers. Besides, LC contributed to form autonomous students with critical thinking.

Bunga (2018) presented and examined students’ responses about the effect LC had on them. The researcher applied a mixed method to collect data through observation, response journals, interviews, and questionnaires. This study lasted 16 weeks. Forty six participants (24 girls and 22 boys) from a secondary school in Malaysia were arranged in groups of five or six students, and each member was given a role. The roles were discussion director, character captain, word wizard, question writer, the artist, and summarizer. They read a short story called Cheat that was written by Allan Baille. The researcher stated that LC went on better in the second and third weeks, improving teamwork, cooperation, and confidence. She also argued that LC improved listening, speaking, reading, writing, and communication skills. The participants indicated that they felt confident in presenting their ideas. Finally, critical thinking was also enhanced when using LC.

Benefits in EFL young adults and adult learners.

A quasi-experimental study carried out by Shen (2013) analyzed “the impact of the discussion-based approaches (Book Club, Literature Circles, and Instructional Conversations) on students’ high-level comprehension of literary text” (p. 59). The participants of this study were 160 students who were studying at a public university in Taiwan. Students had to write an essay about the themes of the book given by the



teacher. After that, they had to read the story in 50 minutes to take a comprehension test. The stories were *A Day's Wait and Hills Like White Elephants* by Ernest Hemingway, *Secrets* by Judy Troy, *Two Kinds* by Amy Tan, and *The Use of Force* by William Carlos Williams. In the fifth week, the researcher applied a post-test to analyze students' comprehension of the whole story. The roles were discussion director, literary luminary, illustrator, and connector. Data were collected, and the analysis did not show different findings between the discussion-based approaches. Therefore, the researcher concluded that Book Club, LC, and Instructional Conversations enhanced reading comprehension and reading skills.

Another study carried by Karatay (2017) explained the effects of LC in students. In this study, the participants were 92 pre-service Turkish teachers (36 male and 56 female). They were third-year students who were studying at a university in Istanbul. This study lasted 14 weeks. In the first week, students did some brainstorming about the books they wanted to read, and from that brainstorming, 20 books were chosen. In the second week, the roles summarizer, questioner, connector, and illustrator were assigned, and the groups were formed between 3 or 4 people. In the next 12 weeks, students read one book by week, and they developed their roles. At the beginning and the end of this study, the researcher analyzed reading comprehension levels through Reading Comprehension Test (RCT) version 1.1. This version, which analyzes collected data, is a standard deviation developed by Karatay (2017). Once the researcher analyzed the quantitative and qualitative data, he concluded that: prospective Turkish teachers improved the ability to find the main theme, the main idea, and the keywords in the text. Besides, data showed that students' reading comprehension skills, speaking, and self-confidence increased. Finally, LC helped them analyze the books from different perspectives and grab learners' interest in reading. Despite all these benefits, some



problems were found in this study. The author stated that teachers should have been aware that some students did not read the book, did not respect others' opinions, talked too much and others too little, and noise was present while applying LC. Therefore, teachers should have been conscious that these problems could have happened, but it did not mean that these problems minimized all the benefits that students got through LC.

Additionally, Aytan (2018) tested the effectiveness of LC. In this research, a qualitative case study design was applied. The participants were 46 pre-service Turkish teachers (29 female and 17 male), who were studying at a state university in Istanbul. The average age of those students was 18 years old. They were arranged in groups in order to assign the compulsory (relation builder, interrogator, chapter and paragraph expert, and writer) and selective (summarizer and word genius) tasks. The participants read four novels. After the groups were formed, they had two months to develop their roles. At the end of that established time, the groups had to perform a presentation in the classroom, which lasted six weeks. Afterward, data were collected through unstructured interviews. Those interviews were conducted with 16 students, and the results were subjected to content analysis. After the analysis, the findings were the following benefits: participants stated that they saw a good variation regarding cooperation and solidarity. This method also contributed to revealing student's hidden talents, such as drawing, speaking, and developing specific roles. Moreover, while they read the book, they acquired different perspectives, analyzed the novel, improved the ability of capturing details, and got aesthetical pleasure. Finally, students indicated that LC enhanced their vocabulary and increased self-confidence in shy or introverted students.



Benefits of Using Literature Circles in other Classrooms

Certo, Moxley, Reffitt, and Miler (2010) analyzed children's perceptions about LC. The participants were 121 students who were studying at Otto Elementary school in the United States. However, from those 121 participants only 24 students were selected to participate in the collection of data. Before the study started, teachers attended workshops to learn about the application of LC. The researchers applied the following roles: discussion director, connector, vocabulary enricher, and travel tracer. Students read narrative, poems, and information books. This study lasted 4 months. Data were collected through journals, semi-structured interviews, and recordings. Researchers indicated that students learned to socialize, they felt more confident and created new friendships. In addition, LC improved reading comprehension, reading skills, speaking, writing, and critical thinking of students.

Another study carried out by Pearson (2010) focused on the manners to promote conversation in LC. The researcher worked with 28 students. Sixteen of them had English as an additional language and three had learning difficulties in literacy. They were studying at a state primary school in Scotland. The range age was 9-10 years old. One of the LC groups was supported by an ESL teacher. The researcher and the teacher assigned the roles passage picker, artist, question asker, word wizard, and connector. A survey was applied to identify the favorite author and book of the class. The books were Ivan the Terrible, The Robe of Skulls, and Dark Isle. Therefore, it helped the teacher and the researcher to set groups according to children's preferences. This was a case study, and data were collected through audiotapes, notes, and interviews. The findings presented by this researcher were that LC helped students improve their critical thinking, and speaking skills. Also, the researcher found that children were very creative because they began to imagine and give voice to the characters from the books.



McElvain (2010) examined how English language learners improved reading comprehension. The participants were 75 students from fourth and sixth grades who were studying at two low-income elementary schools in Northern California. Those schools were going to face state sanctions if they did not improve reading and language proficiency scores in fourth and sixth grades. Therefore, all intermediate teachers of both schools had to participate in the Transactional Literature Circles (TLC) program. The teachers had to attend the coaching session through one year. They had also to meet weekly with the researcher to “plan TLC instruction, and share feedback regarding demonstration lessons” (p. 12). Students read the following books: *Henry and Mudge*, *Ramona Quimby*, *Tales of a Fourth Grade Noshine*, *Tuck Everlasting*, and *The Circuit*. The data were collected through pre and post-tests, observations, field notes, interviews, and surveys. The results showed that LC improved reading comprehension, vocabulary, writing, and students learned to appreciate their culture and different ones. Besides, the participants arouse their self-esteem, confidence, responsibility, and motivation.

A study carried out by Kim (2011) showed how LC worked with adult ESL learners. This qualitative study was conducted with 9 students (3 female and 6 male) from different countries who were studying at a mid-western university. The participants’ average age was 18-30. This research lasted seven weeks. The participants read fictional and non-fictional books. In each group, the roles good cop and bad cop were assigned. The good cop defended the novel while the bad cop criticized it. . Data were collected through recordings, observation of lessons, field notes, and interviews. Consequently, the researcher showed that LC helped students improve reading comprehension and communicative skills. Besides, LC arouse students’ motivation and their desire to read. Finally, as they developed their critical thinking, they learned to value their own culture and to respect cultural differences.



Bernadowski (2013) carried out a study to improve the reading attitudes of college students. This was a case study. Data were collected through pre and post surveys, observations, and journals. The participants were 22 preservice teachers (20 females and 2 males) who were studying at a private university in Pennsylvania. Participants ages ranged from 20 to 35. They chose the book of their preference and started working in groups. They were responsible for assigning roles among groups. The roles used were discussion starter, illustrator, word wizard, passage picker, summarizer, and connector. This study lasted 15 weeks and the results showed that LC promoted a positive attitude towards reading and critical thinking. In addition, this method improved writing skills and taught students to be more tolerant and responsible.

Young and Mohr (2018) analyzed the influence of personality traits, reading ability, and gender in LC. In this quantitative study, 17 students (fourth grade) participated. They were studying at a school in the U.S. southwest. They were arranged in groups of three and five students. The researchers did not assign roles to students, but they implemented open discussion after they read the books. The researcher emphasized that the influence of the purpose, roles, reading abilities, structure, gender, personality traits, and group size may complicate our understanding of the effectiveness of LC. The whole process lasted seven months, and the analysis presented that students became more extroverted, confident, responsible, and they presented a higher reading ability.

Venegas (2018) analyzed the attitude towards reading while applying LC. The participants were four and six grade students (17 students) who were studying in a public school in Texas. This research was a case study, and a mixed method design was used. Researchers used observation, focus groups, interviews, and pre and post-tests to collect data. At the beginning of this study, the researcher had to identify struggling and reluctant readers, so he applied the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) which “is an



instrument created specifically to measure the reader self-efficacies” (p. 6). After that, the students chose a novel called *Rules* by Cynthia Lord. The assigned roles were artful artist, connector, discussion director, literary luminary, summarizer, and word wizard. This study lasted eight weeks and indicated that students improved their reading skills, and they acquired a positive attitude towards reading.

Thomas and Kim (2019) examined the effects of LC on college students. This study had a mixed method design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and post-tests. The participants were 38 students who were studying at Central State University. They were divided into two groups. The first group, formed by 20 students, participated in LC. The second group, formed by 18 students had to read a book independently. Both groups participated in the post-test. The researchers proposed two books, and the students had to choose one of them. After that, the researchers formed two groups of five students, one group of four and two groups of three students. The roles assigned were discussion director, reporter, word wizard, connector, and questioner. This study lasted 5 weeks, emphasizing that LC had a good impact on students’ comprehension, and motivation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, 15 relevant articles were reviewed to accomplish the objective of this research synthesis. Although this study focuses on the analysis of the benefits of using Literature Circles in EFL classrooms, most of the studies were carried out in English Second Language (ESL) classrooms or English Language Learners (ELL). However, it is essential to preserve these articles to compare the roles and the literary works that are applied in Literature Circles.



Chapter IV

Methodology

In order to analyze the benefits of using Literature Circles (LC) in EFL Classrooms, the methodology will be exploratory bibliographic research. Search engines such as ERIC, Taylor & Francis Online, and Academic Google were used to review articles about the use of Literature Circles since 2003. Search terms included combinations of the following: (a) Literature Circles (b) children (c) adolescents (d) adults (e) benefits (f) reading methods (g) emerging literacy (h) reading improvement (i) and (j) results. Additionally, for this research synthesis, four journals were reviewed: *International Journal of Educational Methodology*, *International Journal of Higher Education*, *Journal on English Language Teaching*, and *European Journal of Language and Literature*.

The development of this research synthesis will draw upon the findings discussed in 15 primary source studies, however; considering the aim of this study and the research questions stated before, the number of studies may be reduced. The inclusion criteria for this review were: 1) studies that show benefits of using LC in EFL classrooms; 2) the roles used in this method; and 3) the types of literary works chosen for LC. On the contrary, some papers were excluded from the analysis due to the lack of relation to the categories established beforehand.



Chapter V

Analysis

In this section, the analysis of each category mentioned before is developed. The percentages of the analysis of the categories are presented in tables. Table 1 shows the benefits of using LC in EFL classrooms, table 2 explains the roles applied in EFL and other classrooms while using LC, and table 3 demonstrates the literary works used in Literature Circles. The analysis of these tables shows the connection between the findings with the reviewed studies and the results of this research synthesis.

Table 1. *Benefits of using LC in EFL classrooms.*

Benefits	No. of studies	(%)
Reading ^a	6	(18)
Confidence ^a	5	(14)
Speaking ^a ,	4	(11)
Social interaction ^{a,b}	4	(11)
Respect other points of view ^a	3	(8)
Cooperation ^a	3	(8)
Improve vocabulary ^a	2	(5)
Solidarity ^a	2	(5)
Critical thinking ^a	2	(5)
Writing ^c	1	(3)
Listening ^c	1	(3)
Self-efficacy ^c	1	(3)
Transferring LC to professional lives in a future ^d	1	(3)
Reveal student's hidden talents ^d	1	(3)

Note. N=7.

^aStudies may be counted in more than one category if applicable.

^b This benefit appears only in young learners.

^c These benefits belong to young learners.

^d These benefits belong to adult learners.

Source: Pérez



For this table, seven articles from the 15 were chosen since those studies were focused on the benefits that LC provide to EFL students. The analysis shows that the most important advantage of this method is enhancing reading comprehension (18%). This skill was found in six articles. These articles show that LC boost the ability to find the main theme, the main idea, and the keywords in the text. Besides, this method enhances students' reading habits and catches their interest in reading. On the other hand, one article does not show any benefit regarding reading because the researcher gave students the book they had to read. Ripp (2013) argues that if teachers interfere in book choices, they may end up turning students away from reading. Therefore, educators have to allow students to choose the book of their preference.

Another benefit of LC is confidence (14 %). Students feel more confident when they work in groups and discuss a topic of their interest. According to Wahyuningsih (2018), the implementation of group work improves classroom interaction and the feeling of confidence. Consequently, the LC method is appropriate to develop social skills in shy students. Besides, Clark (2016) argues that teachers have to propose conversations where learners can describe and explain their interests. So, discussing the same book selected in LC, offers students the opportunity to feel confident while expressing their thoughts.

The third common benefit of Literature Circles between young and adult learners is speaking (11%). While applying LC in EFL classrooms, students have to express their ideas and share information about the book they have been reading (Bunga, 2018). Hence, this method pushes students to practice speaking. It is important to emphasize that speaking and confidence work together because students who built confidence develop effective communication skills (Sar, Avcu, & Isiklar, 2010).



Social interaction (11%) is another benefit of LC. This advantage appears only in articles applied to young learners. A study carried out by Zhaoyang, Sliwinski, Marire, and Smyth, (2018) states that age is not a factor that influences social interaction. However, these researchers indicate that adults interact better because as people grow up, they have the opportunity to be part of different groups in a society. Consequently, it can be said that LC enhance social interaction skills in young learners.

Besides, the benefits respect other points of view and cooperation have the same percentage (8%). Pollack, McLellan, Lee, and Brown (2002) recommend that teachers change membership, so students have the chance to build new relationships and learn to value different opinions. In Literature Circles, the teacher assigns different roles to students. Once learners are in their groups, they have to work as a team and perform their roles with responsibility. Hence, this method allows students to cooperate in their groups and attain a cooperative learning (Daniels, 2002).

Additionally, table 1 shows that LC improve vocabulary, solidarity, and critical thinking. All these benefits have the same percentage (5%). This method helps students learn unknown words as they read different books. Moreover, students learn solidarity since they have to work in groups. Likewise, learners develop their critical thinking when they give their opinions and analyze books thoughtfully. This information is complemented by Cottrell (2017). This author found that people who read books learned to interpret arguments at a deeper rather than a superficial level, thus developing their critical thinking.

It is also important to explain the benefits that appeared once (3%) in some EFL studies. These were: writing, listening, self-efficacy, transferring LC to professional lives in the future, and reveal student's hidden talents. The reason for these results is



because the articles had different objectives, and researchers applied different methodologies to achieve their purposes; however, these studies had something in common that was the use of Literature Circles.

Table 2. Roles applied in EFL and other classrooms while using LC.

Roles	No of studies	(%)
Discussion director ^a	11	(15)
Connector ^a	11	(15)
Vocabulary enricher ^a	11	(15)
Summarizer ^a	9	(12)
Literary luminary ^a	8	(11)
Illustrator ^a	8	(11)
Travel tracer ^a	3	(4)
Investigator ^a	3	(4)
Interrogator ^a	3	(4)
Character analyzer ^a	2	(3)
Note Maker and Reporter ^a	2	(3)
Information Seeker	1	(1)
Text picker	1	(1)
Text Assessor	1	(1)

Note. N=14

^aStudies may be counted in more than one category if applicable.

Source: Pérez

Most of the studies of this research applied Daniels’ roles; however, some researchers changed those roles names or created new ones according to their necessities. Consequently, this table shows that the most applied roles were *discussion director* (15%), *connector* (15 %), and *vocabulary enricher* (15 %). The *discussion director* can also be found as a discussion facilitator/starter, questioner, or question asker. This role helps students to improve their critical thinking since learners have to ask good questions to push the discussion in the group. This information aligns to findings presented by Sanavi and Tarighat (2014). These researchers found that critical thinking has a significant impact on the speaking proficiency of EFL learners. The role *connector* is the same in 10 articles; nonetheless, it can be found as a relation builder, too. This role aids students to respect other points of view since students have to compare what they read to



their lives. Additionally, when discussing the books, students give their ideas. So, when you listen to them, you are learning to respect a different point of view, and respect is a value that should be present in learners (Jackson, 2014). The role *vocabulary enricher* is also called word-hunter, language enricher, word wizard, or word genius. According to Glen (2017), writers use sophisticated words in their books and it forces us to look at new words while reading. Therefore, this method helps you enrich one's vocabulary. Despite most of the studies applied for this role in LC, only three studies mentioned that this role improved vocabulary in students.

Additionally, the role *summarizer* (12%) keeps the same name in all 9 articles. It can be said that in order to present a good summary, students have to develop writing skills. In Literature Circles, the teachers can assign challenging writing activities, such as changing the end of a story, or writing a critique to improve writing and critical thinking. (Elhess & Egbert, 2015). After that, literary luminary and illustrator show the same percentage (11%). The role *literary luminary* could be named as analyzer, passage master, chapter and paragraph expert, and passage picker. It is worth saying that this role develops the critical thinking because the students with this role have to be ready to clarify specific texts in order to provide a clear explanation (Daniels, 2002). The role *illustrator* is also known as mapper, artist, or artful artist. According to Aytan (2018), this role can create a learning environment with a different learning style. Therefore, this role reveals students with hidden talents especially at drawing.

Then, *travel tracer*, *investigator*, and *interrogator* have the same percentage (4%). The travel tracer role could be found as plotter. The role interrogator is also known as observer, and passage enricher. The interrogator could be named as good and bad cop. Additionally, the *character analyzer*, *note maker*, and *reporter* have the same percentage (3 %). The role *character analyzer* can be known as character captain. The role *note*



maker and reporter can be named as writer. Finally, *text picker*, *text assessor*, and *information seeker* have the same percentage (1 %) because they appeared once in the same article carried out by Thomas and Kim (2019).

Table 3. *Literary Works used in Literature Circles.*

Literary Works	No of studies	%
Novels ^a	10	57
Short stories ^a	4	23
Informative ^a	2	10
Tales ^a	1	5
Poetry ^a	1	5

Note. N=15

^aStudies may be counted in more than one category if applicable.

Source: Pérez

This table shows what kind of literary works are preferred while applying LC in EFL and other classrooms. According to this table, most of the students read novels (57%). Oatley (2014) states that “adults who read novels improved their social skills, including emotional stability, kindness, conscientiousness, and extroversion” (p. 1). On the other hand, Manrique (2019) argues that this literary work allows young learners to know different cultures and learn a new language. So, she recommends that students read novels that gather their attention. Therefore, novels are a good option to catch students’ interest in reading and improve some aspects of a student’s personality (Hammond, 2019).

Besides, learners choose short stories for reading (23%). Bartan (2017) indicates that EFL learners exposed to short story reading achieve a higher level of writing proficiency. This kind of literary work has a positive effect on students' writing skills such as organization, content, language and communicative achievement. Additionally, Ceylan (2016) demonstrates that short stories have many benefits for students such as extending their perspectives and increasing their appreciation for literature. The



researcher says that students learn to contrast their culture and other cultures.

Consequently, short stories help students to appreciate lifestyles as well as literature.

Furthermore, it was found that informative texts (10 %), tales (5%), and poetry (5%) have a huge impact on young learners. Duke and Bennet (2003) suggest informative texts for kids because they can attain the following benefits: success in later schooling, handle real-life reading, understanding social interaction, and boosting vocabulary. Besides, Selvaraj (2017) argues that tales provide the following benefits: foster imagination, develop thinking skills, introduce values, increase vocabulary and enhance problem-solving skills. On the other hand, poetry (5 %) can help students to enhance speaking skills and vocabulary (Baldwin, 2016). Students learn to convey the message by reading aloud and using body language. Equally, poems do not have common words, so kids learn and enhance vocabulary. Even though informative texts, tales, and poetry have not been chosen by young learners in LC, these literary works are very useful for children (Rahma & Tuzlukova, 2010).



Chapter VI

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

To conclude, it was found that Literature Circles (LC) enhance reading skills. When students develop their roles, they boost some techniques that have an impact on students' reading comprehension (Daniels, 2002). This research synthesis shows that changes in reading habits and skills were present in both young and adult learners. It is important to mention that if students develop reading skills at an early age, they will not struggle with reading in the future (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020). It is also possible to create lifelong young adult readers as long as students select the appropriate literary work to make enjoyable the process of reading (Bucher & Hinton, 2004).

Furthermore, this method improves confidence, speaking, and social interaction in young and adult learners. These benefits are connected because LC allow students to build a close friendship. Hence, students feel more comfortable with the group and interact with other people. Although researchers did not mention social interaction as a benefit of adult learners, the analysis showed that social interaction is higher as people grow up.

Students learn to respect other points of view and cooperation, improve vocabulary, solidarity, and critical thinking. As they read different books, they learn to



understand different contexts and lifestyles. Besides, they support their classmates while applying LC because this method requires collaborative work. While students read, they learn new vocabulary and give opinions about the text. This idea is corroborated by Karatay (2017). This researcher states that the development of comprehension and speaking skills are connected to the vocabulary enhancement.

Moreover, writing, listening, and self-efficacy, transferring LC to professional lives in the future, and reveal students' hidden talents showed a low percentage of repetition in the analysis. The benefits of writing, listening, and self-efficacy were proper for young learners (Bunga, 2018). On the other hand, transferring LC to professional lives in the future, and reveal students' hidden talents were proper for adults (Aytan, 2018). These results show that at this age, learners have the criteria to make their own decisions and become aware of the things they can do well.

In addition, the roles applied in Literature Circles contribute to the acquisition of benefits for young and adult learners. According to Daniels (2002) in LC the compulsory tasks are questioner, connector, literary luminary, and illustrator. The selective tasks are summarizer, researcher, vocabulary enricher/word wizard, and travel tracer/ scene setter. However, this research synthesis showed that the roles which are present in LC are discussion director, connector, vocabulary enricher, summarizer, literary luminary, and illustrator. Although vocabulary enricher is one of the most repeated roles in LC, studies did not mention that this role enhanced vocabulary. Even though, literary luminary and illustrator are compulsory tasks, these are not used by researchers as much as the selective tasks vocabulary enricher and summarizer. Moreover, most of the articles applied Daniel's roles, some researchers created new ones. So, the use of these roles depends on the objectives that the researcher wants to achieve.



Furthermore, the literary works used in Literature Circles are novels, short stories, informative texts, tales, and poetry. This research synthesis showed that novels are used in most of the studies because this literary work is useful for both young and adult learners (Hammond, 2019). In addition, the analysis indicated that informative texts, tales, and poetry are better for young learners. On the other hand, short stories work on young and adult learners. However, this kind of literary work enhances writing and critical thinking, and those benefits are not mentioned as others. According to Mudenda (2017), literary works provide good benefits to learners, and these are similar to the ones presented in Literature Circles. Therefore, it can be said that literary works also influence on the benefits of using LC.

Recommendations

This research synthesis focuses on the benefits that EFL learners can get by using Literature Circles in the class. Nevertheless, it was found that most of the articles were developed in ESL and ELL classrooms. Therefore, this method should be applied in EFL classrooms to earn all the benefits LC provide.

In addition, changing reading habits in Ecuador could be a difficult task but not impossible. That is why it is recommended that schools apply LC in English classes. Moreover, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAAYEC) (2020) states that to change negative attitudes toward reading, people need to begin reading books since they are children. Kids learn quickly, and they can develop reading skills at an early age. In addition, most of the articles were not long-term studies. So, this method should be applied in one academic year at least (Calzada, 2013).

Moreover, teachers need to be conscious that some problems may occur in the classroom while applying Literature Circles. In the study carried out by Karatay (2017),



were found the following problems: students did not read the book, did not respect others' opinions, talked too much and others too little, and noise was present in the classroom. So, set rules at the very beginning to avoid undesirable behaviors. Therefore, teachers should have been conscious that these problems could have happened, but it did not mean that these problems minimized all the benefits that students got through LC.

Additionally, Daniels (2002) stated that reading materials have to be chosen by the student because it is a good way to catch students' attention through independent reading. This idea is complemented by Calzada (2013). The researcher forced their students to read a book and the results were not as she expected. Consequently, she emphasizes that teachers should have a wide choice of books, so students can select one of their preferences because the main purpose of LC is to get students' interest in reading. Therefore, teachers do not have to choose the books otherwise, they would be forcing their students to read something they do not want.



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