
ENHANCING 21ST CENTURY SKILLS THROUGH LITERATURE CIRCLES IN THE HOME READING PROGRAM (HRP) TO DEVELOP READING DESIRE AMONG THE STUDENTS IN THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract

The English Home Reading Program (HRP) of the High School Department is designed to help the students enjoy books, recognize, and appreciate good literature, and understand their experiences. The program reinforces and enriches reading skills thereby inspiring students to become independent and proficient readers. The desire and motivation of Junior High School students to read the assigned novel in the HRP has been a growing concern for English teachers most especially during online learning. Students rely on reading summaries of the novel or on the discussions in class without really taking ownership of the task which is to read and to appreciate the text. With these observations, Literature Circles were implemented as a strategy to increase their desire in reading the assigned novel; and in taking interest in reading different text types. The data gathered through survey and observation logs showed that students participated actively in their assigned circles and demonstrated interest in understanding the main idea, identifying keywords, and vocabulary words; and in relating the theme in real-life situations. Moreover, the students pointed out that the implementation the strategy increased their confidence, interest and desire for communication, cooperative learning, critical thinking, reading objectively without bias, and independent reading skills.

Keywords: literature circles, cooperative learning, reading desire, reading motivation

Introduction

Employing new methods, offering diverse and engaging activities, enhancing teaching strategies, and improving and varying learning tools is inevitable to adapt to the changing times in the educational landscape. With the presence of digital technology appealing more to the 21st century learners, teachers are in constant search of appropriate and creative strategies in delivering instruction that will further improve the desired skills and enhance the learning of students.

Based on observations, students in high school typically lose interest in reading. English teachers are challenged to look for instructional methods that will engage students to read, discuss and complete a novel assigned in the Home Reading Program (HRP). Adolescent learners are social creatures by nature. They like to get together to talk about their interests and what they find enjoyable. Given these circumstances, the subject area chose to utilize the strategy, Literature Circles to promote the students' reading desire in a collaborative learning atmosphere.

Literature circles have been identified as an approach to developing this collaborative process in the classroom. Daniels (1994) described literature circles as small, temporary discussion groups consisting of students who elect to read the same text. Literature circle groups meet together on a regular basis, with or without the teacher, to discuss previously read text. Each member assumes a specific responsibility in preparation for the discussion. Students come to the discussion with supporting notes related to his or her role (Day, 2003). The use of literature circles is a strategy that uses collaborative group interaction in reading text and this interaction leads to discussion. Daniels (2002) stated that literature circles can vary in many ways and be adapted to a variety of implementations, but should have a foundation in the original intent of the strategy. The approach itself is constructivist in its roots and represents a best practice approach in reading and English language arts in the education community (O'Brien, 2007). Literature circles encourage cooperation, responsibility, student reflection and insight into the text. This strategy can promote the development of more thoughtful, competent, and critical thinking readers.

Casey (2008) believed “students are engaged because they have the opportunity to make choices about their reading and their participation while sharing responsibility for learning with peers and their teachers” (p. 286). Brabham and Villaume (2000) stated that numerous articles confirm the contributions that literature circles make to the development of thoughtful and probing readers at all grade levels. Literature circles are temporary discussion groups and students are assigned or have chosen to read the same text (Daniels, 2002). Literature circles give students the opportunity to create connections between texts and personal experiences, monitor and take ownership of their own learning, as well as have the opportunity to listen to other group members’ interpretations of the same text. It provides students with an avenue to discuss and share thoughts and opinions. All of this adds to their enjoyment of the text (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1993).

In utilizing Literature Circle as a strategy, students are engaged and are responsible for their learning through the collaborative tasks and opportunities to work and interact with one another to read, analyze and interpret a given text; contribute to the discussion and to listen to the interpretation, opinion, and ideas of the other members of the group. This brings forth meaning and relevance to what they read, and why they need to read. In this way, they are emotionally and psychologically invested in the novel that they are reading, thereby promoting their desire to read. Intrinsic motivation to read becomes evident in terms of their active participation in the group and plenary sessions. Furthermore, the 21st Century Learning Skills are also being developed as students use critical thinking, develop collaboration, and enhance their communication skills and creativity in understanding and interpreting assigned texts.

Materials and Methods

The purpose of the study was to promote the reading desire of the Junior High School students by using Literature Circles in the subject area’s Home Reading Program (HRP). This strategy served primarily as an intervention to improve the participation and engagement of students in reading, analyzing, and interpreting the assigned novel per year level. This strategy using the collaborative learning experience was implemented in all year levels in taking up of the novel while veering away from the traditional lecture and discussion method.

All English teachers from the Junior High School provided the directions and guidelines in the execution of the Literature Circles during the Second Quarter. It was conducted for two weeks for a one-hour class. After two weeks of its implementation, the teachers gathered data through survey and open-ended questionnaire.

The research design of this study was to implement and evaluate the effectiveness of Literature Circles in promoting the reading desire of students in the Home Reading Program (HRP). The study utilized the mixed method of quantitative and qualitative using survey as the primary tool in the data collection and the questionnaire as secondary sources to further validate and substantiate the results in the survey form.

The Survey Form was the tool used to obtain data. It was a survey used by Karatay, H. (2017), The effect of literature circles on text analysis and reading desire, *International Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 6, No. 5. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v6n5p65>, that he himself developed for the aforementioned study. It included statements regarding the use of literature circles and its effectiveness in promoting the reading desire of students, in consonance with the action research and purpose of the study. This form was uploaded in Schoology for the students to answer and accomplish. The questionnaire containing open-ended questions was a supplementary material to further validate and complement the survey form results.

Students from Grades 7-10 of the Junior High School participated in the study particularly in the English subject where the Home Reading program (HRP) was conducted. The researchers used convenient sampling as there were some students who are not able to complete the survey and questionnaire due to some tasks and school activities. The implementation of Literature Circle as a strategy was carried out during the Second and Fourth Quarter of Academic Year 2021- 2022. All other English related subjects like Technical Writing, Creative Writing, Reading and Writing were not included in the study.

The survey form together with the questionnaire were uploaded in the Learning Management System, namely Schoology. Students from the Junior High School answered the survey and questionnaire in google form from April 12-18, 2022. Their honesty in answering the forms and completing them on the deadline were reiterated and emphasized. After the deadline, the area then checked the total number of respondents which was 197. Responses and

email addresses were verified and validated. All year levels were represented as the responses came from the different grade levels of the Junior High School Department.

SCALE	VERBAL INTERPRETATION
3.26 – 4.00	Very Good
2.51 – 3.25	Good
1.76 – 2.50	Fair
1.00 – 1.75	Not at All

Results and Discussions

During April 12-18, 2022, Students from the Grade 7-10 of the Junior High School Department answered a survey and an open-response questionnaire that was made in Google Forms and uploaded in the Schoology learning management system.

The initial part of the instrument which is a survey focused on students' assessment on the effectiveness of implementing Literature Circles in improving their reading motivation, comprehension, and vocabulary development. On the other hand, the latter part of the instrument which is an open-response questionnaire aimed to get elicit their feedback regarding the implementation of Literature Circles in detail. Nonetheless, this part of the instrument will be used only as a supplementary material to the results of the survey.

The total number of respondents from the survey is composed of 197 students from each of the four sections in Grades 7-10 level. The following data shows the result of the survey and is represented in tabular form to illustrate the frequencies and percent distribution of respondents; and the weighted mean from each survey question; and lastly, the grand mean:

Table 1.
Frequency and Percent Distribution of Respondents According to Grade Level.

Grade Level	Frequency	Percentage
Grade 7	5	2.54
Grade 8	58	29.44
Grade 9	65	32.99
Grade 10	69	35.03
Total	197	100

Table 2.

The Assessment of the Respondents on the Effectiveness of Implementing Literature Circles in the Home Reading Program (HRP) in Terms of Providing a Social Learning Atmosphere (Collaboration)

INDICATOR	WEIGHTED MEAN	VERBAL INTERPRETATION
Literature Circles provided a hands-on atmosphere for learning book reviews and book discussions.	3.44	Very Good
Literature Circles made it possible for all students to participate in the discussion because of the different roles assigned to each member.	3.35	Very Good
GRAND MEAN	3.39	Very Good

Table 3.

The Assessment of the Respondents on the Effectiveness of Implementing Literature Circles in the Home Reading Program (HRP) in Terms of Improving Critical Reading (Critical Thinking).

INDICATOR	WEIGHTED MEAN	VERBAL INTERPRETATION
Literature Circles provided us with an opportunity to read and assess the novels from different perspectives.	3.56	Very Good
Literature Circles enabled us to understand and comprehend the text more fully.	3.53	Very Good
GRAND MEAN	3.54	Very Good

Table 4.

The Assessment of the Respondents on the Effectiveness of Implementing Literature Circles in the Home Reading Program (HRP) in Terms of Improving Independent Reading Desire and Making Sense of The Material (Creativity).

INDICATOR	WEIGHTED MEAN	VERBAL INTERPRETATION
Literature Circles were implemented in a conversational atmosphere that provided motivation and enjoyment.	3.45	Very Good
Literature Circles encouraged the desire and interest in reading the novels.	3.40	Very Good
Literature Circles helped us to focus on real life situations related to the text which deepened our understanding.	3.42	Very Good
GRAND MEAN	3.42	Very Good

Table 5.

The Assessment of the Respondents on the Effectiveness of Implementing Literature Circles in the Home Reading Program (HRP) in Terms of Improving Speaking Ability, Vocabulary, and Self-confidence (Communication).

INDICATOR	WEIGHTED MEAN	VERBAL INTERPRETATION
Literature Circles enabled us to express our feelings and thoughts about the literary text more effectively with ease and confidence.	3.53	Very Good
Literature Circles enabled us to learn new words resulting in our vocabulary development.	3.48	Very Good
GRAND MEAN	3.50	Very Good

Table 6.
Literature Circles on Student Motivation.

QUESTION	CODES	CATEGORICAL CODE/S	EXCERPTS
To what extent did Literature Circles increase your motivation in reading the novel?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Group collaboration ▪ Different opinions ▪ Engaging ▪ Sharing insights ▪ Discussion ▪ Analyzing together ▪ Against procrastination 	Active Reading	<p><i>“The Literature Circles made reading stuff I initially couldn't understand more engaging. This is why my reading motivation increased drastically.”</i></p> <p><i>“I saw the different opinions of the different students while reading the novel”</i></p> <p><i>“Literature Circles increased my motivation in reading the novel because it gave me a reason to read and discuss what I have read and understand about the novel.”</i></p> <p><i>“The Literature Circle meets helped me increase my motivation on reading novels since we can talk and analyze these novels freely.”</i></p>

Table 7.
Literature Circles on Comprehension and Understanding.

QUESTION	CODES	CATEGORICAL CODE/S	EXCERPTS
In what ways did Literature Circles help you understand and comprehend the novel more fully?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sharing Thoughts ▪ In-depth ▪ Other's input ▪ Beyond words ▪ Different perceptions ▪ Reflect deeply ▪ Multitudes of ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expanding Perspectives ▪ Self-Reflection 	<p><i>“The Literature Circles help me understand and comprehend the novel more fully because I can see the opinions and answers of my circle which makes me understand the novel more fully.”</i></p> <p><i>“The Literature Circles helped me look what was really hiding underneath the text of the novel. I somehow managed to look at the author's in-depth message because of this.”</i></p> <p><i>“it let me see the many points of view that I never thought about.”</i></p>

Table 8.
Literature Circles on Student Responsibility.

QUESTION	CODES	CATEGORICAL CODE/S	EXCERPTS
In what ways did the role assigned to you made you responsible in doing your task?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proactive ▪ Varied roles ▪ Responsible ▪ Uplifting ▪ Disciplined ▪ Avoid disappointment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Self-Regulated Learning 	<p><i>“I was in-charge of facilitating, presenting and vocabulary, if I didn't do my task, my whole group would collapse and we wouldn't be able to not only explore it properly, but to also share what we've learned.”</i></p> <p><i>“I made sure the role assigned to me was fulfilled in order to keep the activity smooth.”</i></p> <p><i>“The role assigned to me made me responsible because I thought if I didn't do it, I would be disappointing my classmates.”</i></p>

Table 9.
Literature Circles on Collaboration.

QUESTION	CODES	CATEGORICAL CODE/S	EXCERPTS
How did the discussions in the literature circles promote collaboration and social interaction among members of the group?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effective Communication ▪ Work together ▪ Finding neutral ground ▪ Discuss insights ▪ Collective interest ▪ Meaningful discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shared Goal Improved Confidence 	<p><i>“By coming together and discussing insights about a novel to form one output, the members are able to effectively collaborate and communicate between one another.”</i></p> <p><i>“The fact that everyone got a specific role that connects to the other makes the Literature Circles more engaging and because of this, every Literature Circle I've been in has been successful in studying the piece and giving our valuable insights on it.”</i></p>

Table 10.
Literature Circles on Vocabulary Development

QUESTION	CODES	CATEGORICAL CODE/S	EXCERPTS
<p>How much vocabulary development and comprehension skills do you think you have gained from Literature Circles?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learned a lot ▪ Highlighted vague words ▪ Increased Capability to understand ▪ Slightly improved ▪ Not much 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased Understanding 	<p><i>“I honestly think I have learned a lot of new words and I have the capability to understand books better now.”</i></p> <p><i>“I gained quite a bit of vocabulary development, mostly because of the section of the presentations that highlighted some vague words that needed clearing up.”</i></p> <p><i>“I have learned a lot more than I expected.”</i></p>

Table 11.
Literature Circles and Real-life Applications.

QUESTION	CODES	CATEGORICAL CODE/S	EXCERPTS
<p>How did the Literature Circles discussions help you relate the ideas, morals, or events in the novel in real-life situations?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shared thoughts ▪ Different takeaways ▪ Symbols and themes ▪ Self-Reflect ▪ Other perceptions ▪ Open sharing ▪ Solving problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased Social Awareness 	<p><i>“Having a group meant that each one had different takeaways from the novel and different lessons that can be shared with other groupmates.”</i></p> <p><i>“The discussions help me relate the ideas, morals, or events in the novel in real-life situations by using the lessons that we have gained from the discussions in solving current problems in our society.”</i></p> <p><i>“Literature circles helped me reflect on myself, especially my past experiences. I feel more interested in the novels because there are some events which I could relate to and quotes that I needed to hear.”</i></p>

Table 12.
Literature Circle Recommendations

QUESTION	CODES	CATEGORICAL CODE/S	EXCERPTS
<p>To what extent can the Literature Circles as a strategy further improve its implementation in class?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Equality ▪ More interesting books ▪ Distribution of members ▪ Student’s Freedom ▪ Clearer students’ responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Balanced Groups 	<p><i>“The Literature Circles we’ve been given this year have all been equally balanced. It’s a perfect collaboration between classmates, and I have no qualms about it. For this question, I’d have no suggestions since the Literature Circles have already been such a helpful way to make reading things I once didn’t enjoy more fun and interesting.”</i></p> <p><i>“I think it has potential into achieving what it was meant to do but the students are going to have to be more open and social because there will be scenarios that some members will slack off and the ones who are concerned about their grades will most likely do the tasks that some failed to do.”</i></p> <p><i>“The Literature Circles can further</i></p>

Based on the data collected from the survey, the students from Grades 7-10 have responded positively in assessing the utilization of Literature Circles in the Home Reading Program (HRP) in terms of Providing a Social Learning Atmosphere (Collaboration); Improving Critical Reading (Critical Thinking); Improving Independent Reading Desire and Making Sense of The Material (Creativity), and Improving Speaking Ability, Vocabulary, and Self-confidence (Communication), which got a total or grand mean of 3.39, 3.54, 3.42, and 3.50, respectively, and with a verbal interpretation of “Very Good” (Tables 2-5).

The statement, “Literature Circles provided us with an opportunity to read and assess the novels from different perspectives” garnered a mean of 3.56, the highest from the results (Table 3). The data is aligned with a study of Karatay (2017) which showed that students’ critical thinking skills, particularly in reading is improved in a social learning atmosphere where different point of views are exchanged and respected by learners.

Meanwhile, the statement, “Literature Circles made it possible for all students to participate in the discussion because of the different roles assigned to each member” received a mean of 3.35, the lowest from the results (Table 2). Despite this, the data represents that Literature Circles was still effective in fostering collaboration by encouraging students to participate socially in small groups and undertaking different roles in HRP discussions/activities, thus inciting the interest and willingness of everyone to read. Furthermore, collaboration in literature circles manifest in student-initiated inquiry, self-direction, and mutual interdependence due to the rotation of roles (Hsu, 2004).

To support the gathered data in more detail, the students expressed that Literature Circles increased their motivation to read because of the insights of their classmates about the text read, which in turn encouraged them to read and share their opinion afterward. In addition, sharing ideas with one another in an unrestricted or a freer manner through small-group discussions induced reading motivation (Table 6). This result is in line with the study of Casey (2008), which states that when learners' ideas about literature matter to the teacher and their peers, it motivates them to not just become readers, but also writers who are active participants in a literacy process.

According to the respondents, they perceived that their reading comprehension skills were enhanced, as the process of sharing ideas and learning multiple perspectives through their classmates allowed them to understand the text extensively. This finding of the study corroborates the results from a study by Fletcher (2018), which found reading comprehension to be improved by Literature Circles as learning is social in nature. The respondents also expressed that creating group-made plot diagrams, literary text analysis, and opportunities to summarize and create something out of the text as a group allowed them to understand the text on a deeper level (Table 7).

The function of role assignments in developing responsibility among respondents was also explored, and they stated that the roles or tasks given to them by their leaders or assigned by their fellow members made them conscious of accomplishing them in a time-efficient and excellent manner. It also made them realize that if they were to do their task with subpar quality, their group members' grades will also be affected. Furthermore, it made them understand how such roles contribute to the whole, and the inaction of one member to actively do his role brings the group towards a more challenging situation (Table 8).

Literature Circles promoted collaboration and social interaction among students according to the respondents. Through its implementation, it made them understand the value of helping one another to achieve a common goal which is to process a reading event, while also becoming constructive critics of each other for the betterment of not just their members, but the group as well (Table 9). As students undergo shared inquiry through Literature Circles, their individuality shapes conversations and the text being read, while the conversations and text shape their individuality (Claxton, 2002, as cited in Casey, 2008).

There was a significant improvement in terms of vocabulary development and comprehension skills of the respondents. While some have answered that they have learned new and plenty of words while expanding their comprehension skills through their Literature Circle discussions about their HRP, some have mentioned that their vocabulary acquisition and comprehension skills fared moderate or fair, while some stated that it wasn't much (Table 10). The results are in accordance with Fletcher's (2018) findings in her study which stated that vocabulary and comprehension are increased as the members of each circle strengthened their relationships with each other.

Like their responses in Table 2, the respondents mentioned that they were able to relate the text to real-life situations due to small-group discussions that enabled them to listen to their classmates' varying experiences and takeaways or perspectives, thus expanding their ideas about the text rather than hearing or knowing only a single perspective in interpreting the text. Furthermore, aside from relating to the text, the respondents also stated that it allowed them to connect and empathize with their classmates due to realizing that they were also experiencing the same set of experiences that made them feel that they were not alone (Table 11). Literary discussions that incorporate students' experiences bridge the gap between the text and the self more closely and help students manifest values like empathy (Courtney, 2020).

Lastly, the respondents expressed that the implementation of Literature Circles can be improved further by ensuring that each group will be balanced in terms of distribution/assignment, or to at least allow freedom to choose members while also holding accountable those who are assigned roles. The respondents also suggested that a report that serves as an update regarding task progress or has a list of members who are not participating may be assigned to a key person in each Literature Circle to ensure that everyone is working on their task. Also, having the instructor/facilitator identify and focus on those students who have low to no interest in reading can improve its implementation, aside from creating an encouraging environment that fosters different ideas and open communication (Table 12).

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to develop the 21st Century Skills of the Junior High School students by using Literature Circles in the subject area's Home Reading Program (HRP). The quantitative and qualitative analysis of all data collected demonstrates that the program was successful in encouraging the students to participate actively in their respective Literature Groups and exhibited an in-depth understanding of the assigned texts. The students also reported increased interest in understanding the main idea, identifying keywords, and vocabulary words; and relating the theme to real-life situations. Furthermore, the implementation of the strategy increased their confidence, interest and desire for communication, cooperative learning, critical thinking, reading objectively without bias, and independent reading skills.

Acknowledgement

All Glory to God for His unending grace, guidance, and wisdom. With grateful hearts, the English Area would like to thank the students who actively participated in the study and conduct of Literature Circles in their classes. We would also like to thank the High School Administrators and the Research Coordinator for their guidance and support.

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