

REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
ÇAĞ UNIVERSITY
THE INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
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**TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INCREASED APPRECIATION AND
UNDERSTANDING OF LITERATURE THROUGH LITERATURE CIRCLES**

THESIS BY

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MASTER OF ARTS

MERSİN, APRIL 2013

REPUCLIC OF TURKEY

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study has been possible with the contribution of many people in various ways. First of all, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks and sincere gratitude to my supervisor Assist. Prof. Dr. Kim Raymond HUMISTON for providing me his guidance, understanding, expert comments and being a source of calm support whenever it was needed. His constructive feedbacks have contributed very much to my thesis. I have felt myself privileged to be a student of such an excellent scholar.

Secondly, I wish to express my grateful thanks and deepest respect to my role models Assist. Prof. Dr. Tijen TÜRELİ and Assist. Prof. Dr. Hüseyin İÇEN for their priceless guidance, warm encouragement and timeless faith in me. As Mr. İÇEN advised I have hitched my wagon to a star!

I owe special thanks to Assist. Prof. Dr. Hülya YUMRU for her kindness and encouraging me to study on literature circles. I am also grateful to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Şehnaz ŞAHİNKARAKAŞ and Assist. Prof. Dr. Erol KAHRAMAN for their support and motivation.

I am also deeply indebted to my colleagues Carole Elizabeth NICKLE, Serpil ARPACIOĞLU and Alper Yasin EROL for contributing my study with irreplaceable suggestions and sharing their personal experiences.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my mom and dad, Nevin AVCI and Timur AVCI for their unconditional love, tender encouragement, patience and trust through the years of my education. Their invaluable support through this overwhelming process kept me sane on the hardest days.

I also thank to my muses and coffee for giving me the blessing and strength. Without inspiration, I would not be able to write this thesis.

Finally I express my appreciation to everybody without whose support this study would have been incomplete.

12 April 2013

Nilay AVCI

ÖZET

OKUMA ÇEMBERLERİ ARACILIĞIYLA EDEBİYATIN DEĞER KAZANIMI VE ANLAŞILMA YETİSİNİ ARTTIRMAYA YÖNELİK ÖĞRETMEN GÖRÜŞLERİ

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Nisan 2013, 92 Sayfa

Bu çalışma, öğretmenlerin okuma çemberi uygulamalarını tercih etme nedenlerini belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bunun yanı sıra çalışma, okuma çemberlerinin öğrencilere edebiyat ve dili kavramada yardımcı olup olmadığını ve okumaya olan tutumlarını nasıl etkilediğini öğretmen görüşleri aracılığıyla keşfetmeyi amaçlar. Okuma çemberlerinin dil eğitimindeki varlığı, uygulamaları ve etkisiyle beraber; öğrencilerin seçili edebi eserlere dayalı topluluklarda rol alırken geçtikleri süreç ve değişimler, araştırmada tespit edilmiştir. Okuma çemberi öğretmenleri ile yapılan röportajlardan elde edilen veriler incelendiğinde, okuma çemberi kullanımının, öğrencilerin okuma arzularını yükselterek, edebiyatı daha iyi anlamalarına yardımcı olduğu açıkça saptanmıştır. Buna ek olarak, öğrencilerin okumaya karşı genel tutumlarının, topluluklarda yer aldıktan sonra olumlu yönde değiştiği görüşü sonuçlarla desteklenmiştir. Ayrıca öğrencilerin okuma çemberlerinde, edebiyattan özgün ve anlamlı amaçlar için yararlanabilmelerini sağlayacak kavrayış tekniklerini daha iyi şekilde geliştirebildikleri sonuçlarla vurgulanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Okuma Çemberi, Kitap Kulübü, Öğrenci Merkezli Eğitim, İşbirlikli Öğrenme

ABSTRACT

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INCREASED APPRECIATION AND UNDERSTANDING OF LITERATURE THROUGH LITERATURE CIRCLES

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Thesis of Master of Arts, English Language Teaching Department

Supervisor: Assist. Prof. Dr. Kim Raymond HUMISTON

April 2013, 92 Pages

This study aims to determine why teachers prefer implementing literature circles. The study also aims to discover if the literature circle helps students' comprehension of literature and language and how it affects students' attitudes towards reading through teachers' perceptions. Along with the presence, implementation and effect of literature circles in education, the process and changes that students go through while taking part in the circles based on selected literary works were investigated. When the data gathered through interviews with literature circle teachers were analyzed, it supported the view that the use of literature circles clearly helps students to understand literature better by increasing their desire to read. Additionally, the view that students' general attitudes towards reading change positively after taking part in the circles was supported by the results. The results also emphasized that students can develop better comprehension techniques in the circles which will enable them to use the literature for authentic and meaningful purposes.

Keywords: Literature Circle, Book Club, Student-Centred Education, Cooperative Learning

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EFL	:	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	:	English as a Second Language
L1	:	Mother Tongue
SSR	:	Sustained Silent Reading
YA	:	Young-Adult

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CHAPTER 1

1. INTRODUCTION

One afternoon in 2008, I watched a movie titled *The Jane Austen Book Club* based on the best-selling book of the same name written by American author Karen Joy Fowler. In the movie, six friends create a book club to read and discuss six Jane Austen books. Each member plans to be host the group once a month. Entering into Jane Austen's mind, they begin to discuss their own problematic relationships, life experiences, and try to find solutions for their problems that help them to strengthen their friendship. Thanks to this movie, I began to sympathize with book clubs and literature circles which I later on searched for my study.

This chapter provides brief background information to the study and presents information about problem statement, aim of the study, and research questions along with the operational definitions.

1.1. Background to the Study

Recently, there has been increasing interest in integrating literature into language teaching classes, since it provides authentic materials, encourages interaction, and expands language awareness. There have been many popular ways suggested for the use of literature in language teaching, such the literature circle. In literature circles, small groups of students who have chosen to read the same piece of literature meet and discuss it on a regular schedule.

The history of literature circles in which a group of students gather together to discuss and share ideas about the piece of literature they read, dates back to early 1980s. A number of teachers and students around the country simultaneously and independently invented the idea of literature circles. Pioneers like Becky Abraham Searle in Chicago and Karen Smith in Arizona began organizing their students into small, peer-led book discussion groups (Daniels, 2006). They aimed at importing the idea of adult book clubs into school atmosphere. Building on the model of adult reading groups, they began translating the structure for younger readers in classrooms and it worked. It turned out that students could pick their own books, form into small groups, and meet regularly to share ideas, feelings, questions, connections, and judgments about books they had read (Daniels, 2002). Literature circles held during 30 years have turned

out to be successful most of the time. It is also an effective method for EFL students. Of course the effectiveness of literature circles depend on the students as well in addition to the teacher and the methods or materials s/he is using. For example, the reading material should be interesting enough to catch their attention and chapters should not be too long.

As a response to some implementation problems of the teacher, Daniels (2006) promoted the use of a tool called *role sheets*, which assigned students various duties like Questioner, Connector, Illustrator, Word Wizard, and Literary Luminary. He recommended these sheets as a way of showing students how smart readers connect, visualize, and infer. The role sheets also help students capture their reading responses in writing and supply small-group discussions with plenty of material to discuss. Though he suggested the role sheets as a temporary use, it became predominant in most of the classes which shows that it is really effective. When students are given responsibilities and roles for the circle, it is a motivating factor for them because it is a student-centred activity.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

In my years at university, I took several novel and short story lessons, however I only experienced passive sessions. As a student, I was willing to search and discover creative things, but these passive classes did not meet my expectations. We were supposed to read the assigned chapters or stories to discuss in the class and sometimes we made classical presentations about the readings. Besides, I was aware that most of the friends were reading some summaries and comments on the internet, especially from SparkNotes, before coming to the class, instead of reading the book. They were pretending as if they read the book. As can be guessed, those were unproductive and boring classes. Moreover, these students were treated as equals to us, who were a very small number of students making great efforts to read the book and do the research on the assigned subjects before coming to the class. Can you imagine how demotivating it was for a student?

Similar to my own experience, most English language learners describe reading as a boring or difficult activity. Nevertheless, it is a vital element of language learning. Generally, reading or literature classes are the least favourite, most hated or the most difficult courses for students at any age. Most of the students do not like to read the required assessments for a course. They all hate even the idea of assigned

readings and homework. They do not want to actively engage in reading and discussion activities in the classroom. Most of all, they come to class unprepared. Even if they do all the assessments and try to participate in the discussions, they see it as a requirement for passing the class which they are forced to do. So, unsurprisingly, as they are not doing the assessments for the sake of doing it, it does not effectively work out. The students feel bored and sleepy. They simply try to retell the stories without changing the original sentences. Most of the comments are unrelated. Some of them just listen, but are not willing to participate and avoid direct eye contact with the teacher. The whole-class discussions become torture. As most of them do not have an idea, they feel they have little or nothing to add to the discussion. Some of them do not even follow what is happening during the class. Then there comes an uncomfortable silence in which students are unsure of what to do next. In addition, the lessons are mostly teacher-centred which does not give much chance for students properly to show their creativity. As a result of that the essence of the balance between the emotional and intellectual qualities is lost because learning occurs most efficiently when there is a balance between affective and cognitive which are the emotions and intelligence. This minimizes student involvement and development of necessary literary skills. It also limits their learning and understanding of the texts. The results of the situation are challenging for both students and the teachers. When reading is difficult, it is not pleasurable for the students. If the fact that even native English speaking students do not like reading courses is taken into consideration, how can we, as educators, enhance the appreciation and understanding of literature in our EFL classes? All of these problems might be the result of not practicing EFL reading in the right way. This triggers the need to try a new method. This study intends to investigate whether literature circles help students' comprehension of literature and language or not. The learning circle is a significant pedagogical method because it involves multiple intelligences learning, specifically emotional intelligence related to interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences that increase the acquisition and retention of knowledge. It is a student-centred method in which the students are actively interacting with each other because they all have their roles like the actors in a play.

The main reasons for this study are students' negative attitudes towards reading; their unwillingness to participate in the classroom discussions; and the teacher-

centred education which does not give much chance to the students to show their creativity.

1.3. The Aim of the Study

I wanted to conduct a study related to both literature and education because I graduated from the department of English Language and Literature and because of my personal interests in literature.

This study aims to determine why instructors prefer implementing literature circles. The study also aims to discover if the literature circle helps students' comprehension of literature and language and how it affects students' attitudes towards reading. Results and findings can provide teachers with strategies that can be used in small group literature circles to assist students in appreciation and understanding of literature. It is assumed that, if found useful and effective, the methods and ideas studied could be adapted by many teachers to organize more literature circle groups in university and college settings in Turkey.

I believe that literature circles will make reading more pleasurable and increase the students' desire to read. The fact that every student will have a role in the circle is believed to motivate the students as they all have given different responsibilities in the circle. As a result, their reading and speaking activities will be improved, and their ability to participate in discussion will be broadened. Specifically, the main aims this study intends to investigate are:

1. To discover why teachers choose literature circles as a medium of instruction
2. To determine how the experience of learning in literature circles affects student attitudes toward reading
3. To discover whether literature circles help students understand literature.

1.4. Research Questions

This study is designed to investigate how literature circles can benefit the reading attitudes of EFL students. This study intends to investigate and argue about the issues on the responses and findings of the following major research questions:

1. Why do teachers choose to use literature circles?
2. How do teachers' view changes in student attitudes toward reading?

3. How do teachers perceive the role of literature circles in the ability of students to understand literature?

1.5. Operational Definitions

The terms used in this research are defined as follows:

Book Club: A group of people who meet regularly to discuss a particular book they have all read (Book Club, n.d.).

Choiceboard: An organizer that contain a variety of activities for students (Choiceboard, n.d.).

Content Analysis: A method of studying human behaviour indirectly by analyzing communications (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

Fishbowl Approach: A method of class discussion in which a small group of students debate or discuss a topic while the rest of the class observes them from a distance. This method encourages active participation and persuasive reasoning among the debaters, while allowing the observers to see how certain strategies succeed or fail (Fishbowl Approach, n.d.).

Intelligence: The capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural settings (Gardner & Hatch, 1989).

Interpersonal Intelligence: One's sensitivity to other individuals as individuals, one's capacity to form a close tie to a single mentor, one's ability to get along with others, to read their signals and respond appropriately (Gardner, 1993:352).

Intrapersonal Intelligence: The capacity to understand oneself, to have an effective working model of oneself, including one's own desires, fears, and capacities, and to use such information effectively in regulating one's own life (Gardner, 1999:43).

Literature Circle: In literature circles, small groups of students gather together to discuss a piece of literature in depth (Hill, 2007).

Role Sheet: A tool that assigned students various jobs for the literature circles (Daniels, 2006).

Scaffolding: The teaching technique that involves providing students with the supports needed to complete a task or facilitate their learning of new concepts (Scaffolding, n.d.).

Scholastic Book Wizard: A free children's book search engine where you can find and level books, get booktalks, lesson plans, author studies, videos, and discussion guides (<http://www.scholastic.com/bookwizard/>).

SparkNotes: An online source of literary summaries, study notes and guides, and discussion forums offered on various academic subjects that adopted the motto "When your books and teacher don't make sense, we do" (<http://www.sparknotes.com/>).

Student-Centred Teaching: A style of instruction that is responsive, collaborative, problem-centred, and democratic in which both student and instructor decide how, what, and when learning occurs (Dupin, 2004).

Task-Based Learning: Any structured language learning endeavour which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure, and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task (eg. a role-play task) (Richards & Rodgers, 2001:83).

Teacher-Centred Teaching: A style of instruction that is formal, controlled, and autocratic in which the instructor directs how, what, and when students learn (Dupin, 2004).

Theory of Multiple Intelligences: A theory consisting of seven intelligences more accurately accounts for the diversity of ways in which people acquire and utilize knowledge rather than two dominant intelligences, mathematical and linguistic (Mirzazadeh, 2012).

CHAPTER 2

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review provides the necessary background information and summarizes, many scholarly articles, prior researches and books discussing the origin, characteristics, usage, benefits and possible problems of literature circles. It also considers why we, as educators, prefer integrating literature into language teaching classes and how literature circles can help students to understand literature.

2.1. Introduction: Why Literature?

“Literature and butterflies are two sweetest passions known to a man.”

Vladimir Nabakov

Throughout the history of education there have been a number of techniques developed for a cooperative and interactive spirit of language learning. All the educators have agreed on the need for encouraging the students to use their knowledge and skills in real life no matter which technique they developed. Especially positive effects of using literature integrating into language teaching classes have been realized in more recent years and became popular because literature widens students’ horizons by providing knowledge.

First of all we should question what literature is before discussing the importance of it. The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary gives the following definition:

literature / noun

1. pieces of writing that are valued as works of art, especially novels, plays, and poems (in contrast to technical books and newspapers, magazines, etc.)
(Oxford University Press, 2000:783)

Naturally, there are various definitions and views on what literature is. Basnet and Mounfold (1993) claim that literary texts are cultural documents which offer deeper understanding of a country or countries. On the contrary, Eagleton (1983) claims that there is no inherent quality to a literary text that makes a literary text, rather it is the interpretation that the reader gives to the text (as cited in Clandfield, 2011). Related to Eagleton’s view, Probst (1992) notes that understanding of literature depends on the individual reader’s memories, associations, thoughts, and questions; the author

stimulates this within the reader by the words and sentences (as cited in Bedel, 2011). Using literature in language classes stimulates total participation and encourages interaction as it helps students to develop language skills; reading, writing, speaking and listening. Literature is motivating. It provides authentic material for education which leads cultural and language enrichment. Through literature, students can learn about other cultures. Through literature circles, they can better learn similarities and differences among cultures, both current and historical. Using literature can also enhance the quality of learning and help to improve the effectiveness of teaching. As Hill (1977) suggests, it helps students improve general cultural awareness and triggers creativity with literary imagination. Collie and Slater (1987) state that there are four main reasons which lead a language teacher to use literature in the classroom. These main factors requiring the use of literature as a powerful resource in the classroom context are valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement (as cited in Bedel, 2011). Huck (1987) emphasizes that the importance of incorporating literature into teaching is an important teaching method as literature has the power to interpret and translate our experiences by enlarging our thinking. Through the literary texts, we can learn about the societies different from us along with their culture and ways of living. Literature develops our imagination. We gain insight into characters, feeling as if we are experiencing the same thing at that moment. Then, we go back to reality as a changed self. Literature also raises our awareness for understanding the present by showing the past.

Literature functions as a bridge between our imagination and the reality. To release the creative energy in the self, methods used in education and teaching should be carefully chosen. In this sense, organizing a literature circle for language teaching classes has been identified as one of the most effective ways to use literature in language teaching.

2.2. What Is Literature Circle ?

Harvey Daniels (1994) defined literature circles as small, temporary groups with regular meetings to discuss group-determined portion of text. To Hill (2007), in literature circles, small groups of students gather together to discuss a piece of literature in depth. Similarly as DaLie (2001) explains, a literature circle is a students' equivalent of an adult book club in the classroom. The aim is to encourage student choice and a

love of reading in young people. The true intent of literature circles is to allow students to practice and develop the skills and strategies of good readers (as cited in Bedel, 2011). Literature circles, also called reading circles, are defined nearly the same way in every source as it is based on small, organized, teacher accompanied groups of students with varied interests and levels of reading achievement in which the students select and read the same piece of literature and establishing an independent reading and meeting schedule. Then, they get together to discuss, express their opinions, likes or dislikes.

Students use their role sheets and notes from their journals to comment on ideas and interpretations they have made, at the same time they collaborate with each other. They may comment on events and characters in the book, the author's craft, or they may even talk about their own personal experiences related to the story. The literature circle was generally and traditionally popularized in the nickname "book club." An adult book club which is popular in public or a reading group which is effective in school life all look very much the same.

Noe and Johnson (1999) emphasize that there are sharp differences between traditional methods and literature circles. Traditional methods are teacher and text centred based on the entire reading curriculum. Groups are teacher-assigned and formed solely by ability. Discussions are mostly unstructured and guided primarily by the teacher or curriculum-based questions. In brief, those are mechanical and less effective methods. On the other hand, literature circles are student-centred and based on a balanced literary program. Groups are formed by book choice. Discussions are guided primarily by student insights and questions. Moreover, circles are flexible for student independence, responsibility and ownership and each circle is different from the other (as cited in Hill, 2007).

Literature circles are small reading and discussion groups mainly focused on the students and their collaboration with each other. This classroom instructional strategy connects all aspects of literacy for students presenting them the opportunity to listen, reflect and share thoughts about literature. They combine the skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Students' responses and comments on the related material often lead the group discussion. Literature circles provide students with a way to deeper understanding of what they have read through structured discussion and extended written response (Montaya, 2006). Independent reading and cooperative learning are the main focus. In the circles, which are temporary discussion groups, each

member prepares to take specific responsibilities for the upcoming discussion either in or outside the class while reading the selected text. Everyone comes to the meeting with their notes helping them to perform their roles in the circle. The circles consist of regular meetings. Each session is rotated by discussion roles. When they finish a book, the circle members plan a way to share highlights of their reading with the wider community. Then, they trade members with other finishing groups, select more books, and move into a new cycle. Once readers can successfully conduct their own independent and wide-ranging discussions, formal discussion roles may be dropped (Daniels, 1994). Especially in recent years, there has been an increasing interest in literature circles and there are several pioneer studies conducted to enlighten and encourage the educators.

2.3. The Origin and the Educational Development of Literature Circles through History

Table 1: Historical Background of Literature Circles

16 th c.	17 th c.	18 th c.	19 th c.	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	
Adult Book Clubs or Reading Groups				→				→			
X				Literature Circles in L1 English Classes				→			
X				X				Reading Circles in EFL			

Note: From “Literature Circles in EFL” by O.Bedel, 2012

Book clubs have always been popular among literature lovers for many centuries. It is not hard to imagine a group of adult readers gathering together to discuss the book they are reading. However, the history of literature circles derived from book clubs dates back to early 1980s. The idea of literature circles is claimed to be invented simultaneously and independently by a number of teachers and students around America. It all began in 1982 summer, when Karen Smith, fifth grade teacher at Lowell School in Phoenix, Arizona, cheerfully accepted her teaching colleague Claire Staab’s donation which was a box containing some classroom leftovers. Because she was

moving to British Columbia, she thought it might be helpful for Karen's classroom. Karen always needed extra books for independent reading in her class and this full box of assorted paperback novels was just her thing. However, amid the excitement of starting a new year, Karen totally forgot the box in the back of the room when she went back to school. A couple of months later, it was discovered by a group of students. After sifting through the books, the kids excitedly asked Karen's permission to read them. Assuming the kids are simply prowling for more independent reading titles, Karen casually gave her approval. But within a few days, she realized that her students had chosen books, established groups around their choices, assigned themselves pages to read, and were meeting regularly to talk about their books. She joined their group couple of times and was dazzled by the quality, depth, range, and energy of the talk she heard. Karen's ten-year-old students have just invented their own literature circles. As an extraordinary teacher, Karen Smith immediately recognized the significance of the kids' invention. They had accidentally created a structure based upon a powerful, student-initiated, high-order discussion and thinking system around good books. So Karen moved to make these discussion circles official. She just wanted to make sure that all kids in the class got involved without taming their spontaneity. Because Karen was also a graduate student at Arizona State University at that time in 1982, she invited her colleagues and professors into her classroom to observe the kids' groups and help her to puzzle out the next steps. Firstly, Ralph Peterson helped Karen figure out how to join the kids' book talks and discussions without dominating the interaction. Soon Dorothy Watson and Jerome Harste, other leaders of the profession, came to visit Karen's class. They were so impressed by the students that they contributed to the spread of this wonderful structure invented by Karen Smith's fifth graders. She was known to be the first teacher who implemented literature circles in class (Daniels, 1994 :1-2). Soon after this initiation which was described as a promising new practice, a number of teacher-authors and researchers including Kathy Short, Jerome Harste, Carolyn Burke, Ralph Peterson, Maryam Eeds, Bonnie Chambell-Hill, Katerine Schlick-Noe and Nancy Johnson, led by Harley Daniels, gathered together to discuss literature circles. Their main aim was to bring the established adult literacy structure of voluntary reading groups into the public schools (Daniels, 2006), so they began to document their use of literature circles. In this way, the first important steps leading to

literature circles were taken nearly 30 years ago. Though literature circles were applied in L1 English classes in 1980s, it became popular in foreign language teaching in 2000s.

Daniels (1994) states that he spent a lot of time in his colleagues' classrooms to borrow ideas. Thanks to his colleagues, who have lent Daniels their students, their time and their space, he had a chance to try and observe various ideas about literature and learning. Daniels also admits that, this stealing-idea habit has also put him in touch with some wonderful school districts and great school leaders.

While Daniels and his fellow colleagues have decided to experiment bringing the centuries-old adult tradition of informally talking about a piece of literature into public schools, they were consciously aware of the differences between adults and students reading sessions. The truth is for hundreds of years, adults had been enjoying both reading and informally discussing books together. However when students were asked to read or study literature, the traditional school setting and techniques used were visibly destroying the enjoyment, excitement and the passion that could be found in adult reading groups or book clubs (Furr, 2004). Of course, only Daniels and his colleagues' efforts were not enough to reach the large masses. It was fortunate for the Daniels group that American talk-show host Oprah Winfrey, one of the most influential and popular figures in the US, started a book club in 1996, about that time that Daniels and his colleagues were still launching literature circles in their classrooms. It was titled *Oprah's Book Club* which was a book discussion club segment of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, highlighting books chosen by Ms. Winfrey. She selected a new novel for the viewers to read and discuss each month by encouraging them for reading on national television in the US. The club ended in 2011. During its 15 years, the club recommended 70 books (wikipedia.org). Thanks to Oprah and her show, reading and talking about literature with friends became cool again. *Oprah's Book Club* encouraged adult book discussion groups meeting in libraries, coffee shops and in their homes all over the country (Furr, 2004). Undoubtedly, no one could deny her contribution to reading, book clubs, and how it helped encourage literature circles in schools. Harley Daniels has said himself, they all owe great thanks to Oprah for making a lasting contribution to their national literacy (marygroove.edu). Obviously, very similar kinds of reading discussion groups have been around outside of schools for very long time. Everyday, somewhere all around the world, people voluntarily attend book discussion groups. A group of friends reading the same book may gather together unconsciously to

discuss about the book without even knowing about literature circles. They may meet independently and regularly in homes, bookstores or public places. Sometimes these groups may have a single leader among the members or they may be guided by a local community or bookstore. However, no matter how widespread this kind of activity is in the outside world, it inevitably has been rare in schools. Today, thanks to smart and far-sighted educators' efforts and technological developments, reader-run discussions are spreading fast. The powerful structure of literature circles or very similar activities are being experimenting by innovative teachers and mostly they work right way. Daniels (1994) claims that unlike some other student-centred classroom methods, which are very complex and tricky to implement, literature circles usually immediately succeed. It is because of the fact that well-structured literature circles simply cause a natural and comfortable atmosphere for the students to interact around books and ideas.

Daniels (1994) also adds that there are other inspirational ancestors of literature circles whose contributions are perhaps more indirect and yet, just as essential. John Dewey, in his *Democracy and Education* written in 1916 and many other works, he defended learning by doing and creating a real learning-living community. Self-regulating and growth-seeking students take responsibility and make choices, helped by teachers who serve as guides and coaches, as they need to be empowered, not controlled. The father of humanistic education, Carl Rogers, defended facilitation instead of teaching and student ownership, involvement, and choice. One of the most important leaders of literacy education over the past twenty-five years, James Moffett, defended the importance of students' choosing and doing their own reading, writing, speaking, and listening. He stresses playfulness, delight, exploration, and community. He published *Student Centred Language Arts K-12* in 1992 with Wagner. Lastly, Neil Postman challenged hyper-directive schoolteachers in his *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*, written in 1967 with Weingartner (44-46).

2.4. Characteristics of Literature Circles

Daniels (2004) argues that literature circles should have a special structure, otherwise it will not be a successful implementation of the real thing. He draws up a list which consists of twelve key ingredients for literature circles. To him, an authentic literature circle will contain most or all of the following features:

1. Students choose their own reading materials
2. Small temporary groups are formed, based on book choice
3. Different groups read different books
4. Groups meet on a regular, predictable schedule to discuss their reading
5. Kids use written or drawn notes to guide both their reading and discussion
6. Discussion topics come from the students
7. Groups meetings aim to be open, natural conversations about books, so personal connections, digressions, and open-ended questions are welcome
8. In newly forming groups, students play a rotating assortment of task roles
9. The teacher serves as a facilitator, not a group member or instructor
10. Evaluation is by teacher observation and student self-evaluation
11. A spirit of playfulness and fun pervades the room
12. When books are finished, readers share with their classmates, and then new groups form around new reading choices.

(Daniels, 2004:18)

As analysed objectively, Daniels' key ingredients are perfectly fit for L1 students. However, when EFL students are considered, some of the features may need to be revised for EFL classrooms or some of them may need to be intentionally omitted when students are first learning the activity. Furr (2004) strictly criticises and draws attention to some features, he suggests a revision for the first three and the last one considering, the ability of L1 and EFL classrooms to increase foreign language competence in EFL classes.

2.4.1. Freedom of Choice

Independent reading shaped by student choice is the most important element of literature circles. Petko (2011) claims that allowing students to choose their own text promotes a sense of control over their learning. Clarke and Holwadel (2007) found this aspect to be particularly important when working in an urban setting with students from crime-ridden neighbourhoods. Short class lengths and high absenteeism made it necessary quickly to capture the students' attention. The teacher chose books that related their students' lives to encourage greater personal connections. These book selections were offered to the students who chose which one to read (as cited in Petko, 2011). It has to be voluntary and pleasurable for reading to become a lifelong habit,

develop skills, and create enthusiastic readers. Students feel comfortable choosing a text according to their wish, desire, and interest. They may begin to self-direct and take ownership of their reading. Daniels (2002) claims that teachers may choose to provide students with a list of titles related in theme or specific content from which students are then able to choose. This process encourages students to take responsibility for locating, choosing, and pursuing books rather than waiting for or expecting teachers and adults to make those choices for them (as cited in Smith, 2011). Furthermore, students have an idea of what each book is about before choosing their favourite. On the other hand, Furr (2004) is opposed to Daniels' view as he thinks that giving freedom to students for choosing their own materials is inappropriate for EFL classrooms. Unlike Daniels, who thinks that assignments and choices of texts in the control of the teacher is a shortcoming of school reading programs, Furr suggests that "instructors should select materials appropriate for their student population." To conduct successful literature circles in the EFL classroom, differences in the learning needs and objectives between L1, ESL and EFL students should be carefully considered (Furr, 2004) as some students differing in abilities, interests, and personalities, may need more guidance when selecting texts and materials. Waring and Takahashi (2000) list some good rules for students to find their reading levels; There should be no more than 2-3 unknown words per page, the learner is reading 8-10 lines of text or more per minute and the learner understands almost all of what she is reading with few pauses (as cited in Furr, 2004).

The teacher should select a text at an appropriate level for students by considering reading fluency, as they should be able to read the texts without using a dictionary. Otherwise, it will not be a real-life conversation. In short, the standard model of literature circles should be re-examined carefully, then adapted and modified by the educator according to their own student group.

2.4.2. Small Group Settings

Regardless of reading level, ability, teacher assignment, or curriculum mandate, several people who desire to read the same book or article form the literature circle groups. It is often formed by mix students of different abilities to help each other and learn more. The groups are temporary and task oriented. The students finish the book and discussions based on their readings, they pick their next book and choose a different group. According to the reading material, discussion and the roles, group size can

change from two to six. Students' needs are an important issue in the group choosing process. When they choose their text considering their own needs and interests, groups form automatically around these texts. Katz et al. (1997) reports that 41% of her students admitted choosing their group based on who else had chosen that group, regardless of the text. Additionally, 50% admitted that they picked their group first, then worked together to pick a text. Despite this interesting finding, the results still allow the students to enjoy a level of choice, but limit the chance that they will choose the best text for their interests (as cited in Petko, 2011). Different from Daniels, Furr (2004) advises that "small temporary groups should be formed, based on student choice or the instructor's discretion" as he thinks Daniels' suggestion is more appropriate for L1 students not for EFL students. As a result, Marzano (1989) emphasizes that no matter how the grouping is done, it is important to remember that "to maximize students' experience is probably a good idea to use a variety of criteria" (as cited in Bernier, 2008).

2.4.3. Different Groups, Different Books

Inevitably, when students are given the chance to choose what to read, it is not possible for everyone to pick the same book. Students need a mixture and a balance between teacher-chosen and self selected materials to develop and pursue their own tastes, curiosities, and enthusiasms in the world of books (Daniels, 1994:20). It is a good thing to give them freedom of choice as they need to learn to handle their responsibility on their own. Different groups read different books. As a result, a mixed-ability group is formed. On the other hand, Furr (2004) thinks that "different groups usually read the same text" as EFL students may lack reading skills and need fluency practice.

2.4.4. Group Meetings

Literature circles must be regularly scheduled otherwise it becomes impossible efficiently to work. Group members should create their own schedules, establish the rules, assess their performance, or determine how many pages they should read at a time in the daily and weekly meetings. Students need sufficient time to read, discuss and be prepared which requires proper organization of schedules. It should also be predictable so that students can self-assign parts of book, read with purpose, make notes, and be

prepared fully and actively to participate in the group. Daniels suggests that this pattern also allows the teacher to support students reading, circulating to go over their role sheets. The teacher will also model open-ended questions to reassure kids that their own real responses are truly invited (Daniels, 1994:21-22).

2.4.5. Supplementary Materials

Through writing or drawing, students can express their thinking and responses to the text during the reading process. According to their need, sticky notes, reading response logs, or graphic organizers can be helpful as well. When the group gets together, they can use these materials to start the conversation. Those written or drawn materials are valuable for both their reading and discussion. When the book is finished they can share their project with a wider audience.

2.4.6. Discussion Topics

In traditional classrooms, it is the teacher who provides all discussion topics and decides which can be correct and incorrect. However in literature circles, students find and develop their own discussion topics before the meeting. Every point of view is respected in the circles. The standards of literature circles are much higher than traditional classrooms, as they are able to achieve literary and intellectual independence. Dewey (1916) claims that, as teachers allow students to communicate freely with each other, students may begin to develop strategies to interact successfully with one another. As students do this, they gradually produce systems of behaviour such as patience, turn-taking, questioning, listening, negotiating, resolving conflicts, and respecting different points of view, behaviours which are conducive to democratic participation. As students share similar ideas and meanings and as students' actions and thoughts influence others during literature circles, characteristics of democracy and community will begin to manifest themselves (as cited in Smith, 2008).

2.4.7. Natural Conversations

In traditional classrooms objective questions are preferred. The correct answers are hidden in the text. However in literature circles, interpretive, open-ended questions, and personal responses are important, along with the details of the texts. Conversations are open and natural. Some questions of value:

Does this book seem true to life?
How is this character like me?
Does this family remind me of my own?
If faced with this kind of choice, what would I do?
Could the people in this book have risen above their circumstances?

(Daniels, 1994:23)

2.4.8. Task Roles

The aim of assigning specific, structured roles to group members is to encourage students to cooperate with each other and teach them how to handle individual responsibility. Daniels (1994) believes that old way of assigning texts, “read this by Friday”, sets the stage for poor understanding. However, current reading theory for literature circles stresses the importance of helping students to activate their prior knowledge about a topic or author, to set purposes for reading, to make predictions, and to be constantly “interrogating the text” for clarity and meaning (Daniels, 1994:24). As students are reading different books in cooperative literature circle groups, the teacher uses role sheets to structure responsibilities and guide students’ thinking before and after reading. These role sheets should be adapted to different grade levels, age, or student needs, and they should be modified based on the objectives of the learning assignment and on the text being used. Daniels (1994) designed eight all-purpose, basic roles for fiction including discussion director, literary luminary, illustrator, connector, summarizer, vocabulary enricher, travel tracer, investigator (see Appendix A). He also designed five roles for primary students including discussion director, passage picker, artful artist, word finder, connector (see Appendix B). These basic roles are designed to invite different cognitive perspectives on a text like drawing a response, reading a passage aloud, debating interpretations, connecting to one’s own life, creating a summary, tracking the scene, focusing on words, and tuning in to one character (Daniels, 1994:25). Other roles can be created as needed. Role sheets can be used as a tool to keep each of the students focused on a particular literary element and familiarise them with literature circles. Thanks to the role sheets, it will become easier for them to bring their own unique information to the group and start the group discussion. Furr (2004) claims that role sheets are important tools to guide EFL students too as they are able to discuss issues in English, solve problems in collaboration with their peers that they can

not possibly deal with on their own, and engage in complex textual analysis. The magic of the role sheets lies in the fact that it gives students a clear purpose for reading the story. When they meet in their groups in class, students are confident that they know what they are going to talk about in their group. One of Furr's students claims that "I like literature circles because I feel that I can really discuss these stories in English since I know exactly what I am supposed to talk about (do) when we discuss the stories in my group."

When I was studying at university, in short story classes, I was so eager to find details about the stories that the others could not realize. Like Sherlock Homes, one of my heroes, I was putting all the clues together to guess the upcoming events of the story. Sometimes I was feeling shy to talk in the class, but once I started to share my theories for every story we were reading, the teacher was impressed. After a while, she gave me the name *Master of Foreshadowings*. I was so encouraged that those boring classes became interesting for me as I knew that my opinions were respected. I especially focused on foreshadowing issues in the stories as in every class, the teacher was asking me to share if there were any. It was such a great motivating feeling. I unconsciously experienced how it feels when a student was given a specific role in the class. What if all the students had roles in the class? This is what literature circles address.

According to Daniels (1994), rotating the roles is also important. In this way, everyone gets to look at the story from a different angle each day, gradually internalizing the perspectives of the roles (Daniels, 1994:25). When the students select and play different roles in each circle, they become familiar with all the roles. After a while, if each of the students has had the chance to play every role, they can think in terms of all the roles, not just the role for which they are responsible. Then, there comes natural conversations about books without the role sheets. The students now have an idea about how to engage in literature circles. They become ready to depend on their memories and perspectives while discussing the books. If they stay with a specific role for too long, answers often become short and scripted.

2.4.9. Teacher as Facilitator

In literature circles, the students take over the responsibility for their education from the teacher. The teacher is the facilitator in the circle. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines "facilitator" as "a person who helps somebody do

something more easily by discussing problems and giving advice rather than telling them what to do” (Oxford University Press, 2000:471). So, the role of the teacher does not include lecturing, telling, or advising. In other words, his/her main duty is not to teach in a traditional way. Instead, they can teach mini-lessons to the whole class to show the students what to do in the circles, or they can assist students to activate prior knowledge leading to questions which develop critical thinking. The teacher organizes and supports each group by monitoring and encouraging participation.

According to Daniels (1994), teachers collect sets of good books; help groups to form; visit and observe group meetings; confer with kids or groups who struggle; orchestrate sharing sessions; keep records; make assessment notes; and collect still more books. He also states that in some literature circle classrooms, the teacher also elects to play another key role: fellow reader, only if the circle is running smoothly enough. They join the group not as the teacher, but as an equal person, honestly reading the book right along with students by responding, predicting, and sharing his/her different and powerful ideas (Daniels, 1994:26).

Similar to Daniels, Cavanaugh (2006) sets some duties for the teachers to do during literature circles. To him, teachers should assist students in joining discussion groups, assign roles for the members of each circle, and select circle meeting days which can be daily, weekly, or biweekly. Teacher is also responsible for assigning reading to be completed by the circles inside or outside of the class. S/he meets with each group or mingles among the groups to check on their progress to help keep students on task. In brief, the teacher should act as a facilitator for the circles and help them to prepare for their roles. S/he can also ask students to summarize the reading or discuss aspects of their roles to guide them (as cited in Bernier, 2008).

Of course each classroom situation will be different according to student needs, however in each of them, the teacher will be there to encourage independence, taking a less dominant role than in the past.

2.4.10. Evaluation Process

In literature circles, the aim is to measure the process as a whole, not specific sub-skills. Besides, the centre of attention is the students, not the teacher. Unlike traditional ways, teacher observations and student self-evaluation are main features for the evaluation process in literature circles. Students take part in record-keeping and

evaluation activities. Daniels (1994) claims that as educators, they use the tools of kid-watching, narrative observational logs, performance assessment, checklists, student conferences, group interviews, audio-taping, and the collection in portfolios of the artefacts created by circles to measure the success of the students (Daniels, 1994:27). If the students feel comfortable, video-taping can also be used to show them what their participation looks like by measuring their comprehension and participation. Daniels (1994) also states that, students in literature circles are regularly asked to write and talk evaluatively about their own goals, roles, and their performances in the circle (Daniels, 1994:27).

2.4.11. A Spirit of Playfulness and Fun

In education, psychological aspects of learning should be absolutely taken into consideration by educators. The background of the students inevitably affects their learning. At an early age, children learn everything by playing. “Fun is the key factor that most effectively keeps learners engaged in complex learning tasks and makes it a productive learning” (Daniels, 1994:27). So, when the teachers recreate a close and playful interaction in the literature circle classrooms as in their childhood period, they can enjoy the time together. In the circles, a spirit of playfulness and fun pervades the room. As a result of this, effective and productive learning becomes inevitable.

2.4.12. New Groups, New Reading Choices

When all the groups finish their books, the circles disband and the members form other groups for another project. With each new book choice, a different combination of students comes together. This regular rearrangement of personalities and viewpoints in the circles is enriching, challenging, and encouraging for friendship and communication patterns according to Daniels (1994). He emphasizes the importance of this regular mixing of student groups because he strongly thinks that literature circles offer a model of how heterogeneous classes can work. Students can switch levels, pick harder or easier books, depending on their interests in certain authors, topics, or genres. As a result, literature circles, when done well, show how heterogeneous, diverse student groups can work together effectively (Daniels, 1994:28-29).

On the other hand, Furr (2004) thinks that literature circles are ideal for L1 students. However, it should be modified for EFL and ESL classrooms. Instead of this

feature, he suggests that “When books are finished, readers may prepare a group project and/or the instructor may provide additional information to “fill in some gaps” in student understanding.” The teacher can prepare a mini-lecture about the author and the historical and social issues raised in the story. He calls this step back-loading the instruction. “After the group project or additional instruction, new groups are formed, based on student choice or the instructor’s discretion.”

2.5. Types of Literature Circles

There are different types of literature circles that can be implemented in the classroom according to students’ needs. King (2004) has successfully implemented several types of literature circles in the classroom. The types of literature circles include: basic literature circles, modified literature circles, literature circles with roles, nonfiction literature circles, and structured literature circles (as cited in Montoya, 2006).

2.5.1. Basic Literature Circles

Basic literature circles are very flexible which does not require the use of extensive handouts or assignments. The student chooses his or her book based on personal preferences and reading ability. Students can read alone, with a partner, or in small groups, then the group decides on the number of pages to be read. During the reading process, they write questions or discussion topics on sticky notes or in a journal then use their sticky notes to lead a discussion on the day of their group meeting (Montoya, 2006).

2.5.2. Modified Literature Circles

Modified literature circles are used with readers who are not able to handle weekly assignments. As the group meets each day, these readers often have difficulty in adapting themselves to the fast pace of literature circles. The modified literature circles allow them to be more successful. In this format, shorter books are used and students meet everyday with the teacher. Students participate in some reading aloud and independent reading. After reading, the teacher sits in on the meeting to help clarify the main ideas and any vocabulary that may be confusing (Montoya, 2006).

2.5.3. Literature Circles with Roles

Throughout the researches, it has been observed that literature circles become more successful when role sheets are used as a tool to provide students a self-directed discussion. Daniels (1994) designed several roles, some of which are discussion director, who is the facilitator in the group for discussion flow, and passage picker who picks some parts of the story to read aloud. The illustrator draws pictures related to the reading. The connector tries to find connections between the text and the world outside. A summarizer prepares a brief summary, and a word finder looks for special words in the story (See Appendix A and B). These roles should be adapted, modified, or recreated according to students' needs.

2.5.4. Nonfiction Literature Circles

It is the literature circles with nonfiction books. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines "nonfiction" as "texts about real facts, people or events" (Oxford University Press, 2000:898). Montoya (2006) states that nonfiction books have a slightly different structure than fiction books which generally makes them more difficult. The students read together everyday and discuss new vocabulary terms and new facts they have learned. In nonfiction literature circles, there are reading days on which students simply read together and take notes and meeting days on which students write a response in their journal prior to the meeting. Students then read and discuss their responses with the group.

2.5.5. Structured Literature Circles

As understood from its name, these are very structured groups that meet once a week with the teacher. Other students work independently to prepare for their group when they are not meeting with the teacher. On the first week, the teacher introduces the book, then the students generally meet and discuss the book for the following three weeks (Montoya, 2006).

2.6. Why Literature Circles?

Noe and Johnson (1999) point out that literature circles promote a love for literature and positive attitudes towards reading. It is one of the most significant qualities of the circles, since students do not generally like reading and reading courses.

There is a limited number of effective ways to make the students love reading, and circles are one of them. This constructivist and student-centred method also encourages extensive and intensive reading. It also teaches students how to handle their responsibilities through choices. Circles make it possible for the students to have multiple perspectives on literature. As a result, student responses to the text become very different from each other. Circles also foster interaction and collaboration among students which creates a natural discussion atmosphere. Critical thinking skills are developed in the discussions which lead to student inquiry (as cited in Cameron et al., 2012).

Many researchers have seen the importance of social interaction in student development and language education. Specifically, Jean Piaget and Lev Semenovich Vygotsky are the two major influences in psychology and education who emphasize the importance of social interactions in cognitive development. Cognitive development can be defined as the ability to think, reason and understand the world in which we live. Piaget's human cognition is based on the view that "all study of human thought must begin by positing an individual who is attempting to make sense of the world. The individual is continually constructing hypothesis and thereby attempting to generate knowledge" (Gardner, 1993:18). Piaget believed that group work and classroom discussion helps to move from egocentrism. Experiences facilitate logical thinking and language development. To him, the most helpful interactions were those between peers because peers are on an equal basis and can challenge each other's thinking. Vygotsky believed that our specific mental structures and processes can be traced to our interactions with others and these social interactions are more than simple influences of cognitive structures and thinking processes (as cited in Bernier, 2008). At this point, literature circles are helpful tools to promote cognitive development. As learning is a constructive process according to Piaget's view, a student cannot just look at something and make it knowledge. So, it is important to make sure that students are actively engaged in the learning process. A student must modify, question, transform, and understand process and consequences. Then they can turn the data into knowledge. Interacting with both the teacher and their peers make this process possible as they need to test their thinking, to be challenged, to receive feedback, and to watch how others work out problems. In this sense, we can say that organizing literature circles is a perfect opportunity for students as they can act on, observe, discuss or write about what

they have experienced while reading literature. If reading is the basis for knowledge, literature circles can be considered as the tool providing materials for thinking. Piaget claims that students can use, test and sometimes change their thinking abilities while communicating with others which support the process of cognitive development. Of course, in the times when Piaget and Vygotsky were developing their theories, there were no such techniques we call literature circles or book clubs in education. However, as the education system is developing, like many other fields in the world, it becomes clear how their theories are supported by literature circles. In the light of Piaget and Vygotsky, many educators support the idea that social interaction is needed in the classroom to promote learning.

In traditional teacher-centred discussions, the teacher is the one to initiate a topic. Students raise their hands and wait to be called on. Then, the teacher evaluates the responses offered by the students who are mostly silenced and engaged in routines. This method gives students a passive and less responsible role. Under these circumstances, as the teacher is the main target in education, assumptions and prejudices like “if your students test well, you must be teaching well, but if they test poorly, you are not a good teacher” become inevitable. It is very wrong to subject the teacher to such pressure. In modern world, we only need to accept the fact that we, as educators, should be in search of new strategies and techniques in education. Then, we should be open and courageous enough to try them. Literature circles are worth trying, as it removes much of the control from the teacher and hands it over to the students by providing them an environment which is supportive and challenging. Literature circles can be collaboratively integrated into education, then group members can share of authority and responsibility of their actions without creating a teacher-centred atmosphere. As Macaro (1997) defines collaborative learning, learners are encouraged to achieve common learning goals by working together, rather than with the teacher. They demonstrate that they value and respect each other’s language input. The teacher becomes a facilitator for the students to achieve these goals (as cited in Bedel, 2011). Kasten (1995) claims that literature circles promote peer discussions, negotiation of ideas, and the expression of comprehension, which is a feature that is most common in literature circles (as cited in Bedel, 2011).

With the aims of avoiding the disadvantages of teacher-centred education, many teachers have implemented student-centred literature discussions where the

students can express their personal insights and ideas rather than simply receiving from the teacher. Of course there are teachers, in Turkey or around the world, still struggle with giving up their old way of teaching methods instead of trying new techniques even though small group work has been shown to be beneficial.

Most educators today agree on the idea that learning should be student-centred, students should not sit passively around the teacher in the learning process. So, they should be turned into active participants and should be given the opportunity and freedom to talk, challenge, experiment and collaborate. Students should also be motivated so that they can make personal connections with the stories they have read and to think more critically about their reading. These kinds of discussions also encourage equal participation among students. Hill et al. (1995) argue that literature circles have the ability to foster interaction and collaboration in an environment too often obsessed with competition and individualism (as cited in Bernier, 2008). In literature circles, the focus of attention is on the students, their needs and interests. Many teachers believe that small group discussion will be highly beneficial for their students as they have the opportunity to choose literature that is appealing to them. Hudgens and Edelman (1986) suggest that students are more likely to participate at a frequency equal to other students when they are in a small group situation rather than the whole group (as cited in Bedee, 2010). In whole group instruction setting, only a few students can share their reactions because of the limitation of time. However, in smaller groupings of literature circles, more students can take turns during the discussions and have a chance to share their opinions. The quieter students who become shy in front of the whole class, feel more comfortable to speak their minds in the small group atmosphere. Fourth-grade teacher Nierman claims that literature circles allowed her the freedom to turn ownership over the students. Students gained greater insight by sharing literature instead of reading in isolation. Students who never participated before during the whole-class discussion found a voice (Daniels, 1994:1). Literature circles encourage students to read more, think deeply about books, listen carefully to classmates, and share ideas. The psychology of the students is also very important for the continuity of reading. They feel empowered by the freedom to choose a text that interest them and lead group discussion. One of Wadsworth's (2007) students said, "It is so much fun to read when I like what I am reading." This psychology of empowerment keeps their interest and curiosity alive. As students become interested in what they are

doing, the reading process will be much more attractive for them. Literature circles are effective in getting students to adopt reading habits and often, they become lifelong readers when they are interested in what they are doing.

Another important point is, as Dewey (1916) stated, that there is a division between what is taught strictly for school purposes and what is taught for life purposes. Formal instruction in schools is only the subject matter of school assessment and is separate from the subject matter of life. While formal instruction in schools should address the subject matter of school assessment as well as life experiences, it should also provide opportunities for students to engage in democratic participation. Educators do not only have the responsibility to teach knowledge, they also have the responsibility to prepare students for the real world in which they should be considerate, thoughtful, and democratic citizens. In order for the students to receive a quality education and to experience more authentic social interaction, educators should shape their social, language, and literary skills along with their character and knowledge by giving students opportunities by leading them to think, reason, and comprehend. Participating in peer discussions helps students to become more familiar with social, cultural, and political issues guiding them in the development of cultural knowledge. Literature circles can help students make connections to the teaching core and to their own lives, so, it encourages the students to use their knowledge and skill in real life. Mantley-Bromley and Foster (2005) claims that as students engage in these kinds of activities, they learn to trust each other, to listen with care and empathy, to respectfully disagree with each other, and to use feedback to improve their work (as cited in Smith, 2008). Taking parts in literature circles helps students to develop self-confidence and self-control. Students can learn to communicate and cooperate with diverse groups and exercise leadership as they take part in discussions. By this way, they become stronger, passionate, and enthusiastic readers.

Vygotsky suggests that student cultural development appears at two levels. First, it occurs on a social, and later on a psychological level. Language learners should be taught social and cultural skills along with the literacy skills to activate their background knowledge and contribute to their cultural development. Literature circles are perfect for both improving comprehension skills and providing authentic social interactions for the learners. Lloyd (2004) claims that literature circles allow English language learners to become more familiar with strategies that are used to comprehend

text and how they help them to better understand the text. Comprehension is a complex process that requires knowledge, understanding, and active thinking. By self-questioning or hearing other discussions from classmates and focusing on many different roles or strategies in the literature circle, the students are able to familiarize themselves with comprehension strategies that help their understanding of the text. As a result of this natural process, all the strategies experienced in literature circle become a part of students' independent thinking (as cited in Montaya, 2006).

Literature circles provide instruction and learning in basic literacy skills such as questioning, critical thinking, and comprehension. Keene and Zimmermann (1997) note that either as a group, in pairs, or individually, students learn, use, and refine the strategies of proficient readers such as activating prior knowledge, determining the most important information or ideas, creating pictures in their mind, making inferences, asking questions to clarify their understanding, and summarizing what they read (as cited in Prillaman, 2012:14). As the students develop their questioning, critical thinking and comprehension strategies and come up with their own questions, literature discussions also become richer. Students who are responsible for discussions in the circle learn to find meaning in the text, and personal meaning that creates interest. As a result of this, they can expand their own thinking. Discovering their own personal meanings and connection guides them to reference their own opinions within the text. Students learn how to ask sensible and genuine questions and how to interpret newly discovered information about the text. The literature circle becomes an activity in which the reader is actively participating in questioning in addition to their responsibility of finding a meaning to the text. Students also learn to respect and value the options and ideas of others as they are able to see how unique each of them are with the help of literature circles. Wood et al. (2001) state that students could share information, clarify misunderstandings, and raise new perspectives when they collaborated in discussions (as cited in Wadsworth, 2007).

Fountas and Pinnell (1994) suggest that there are three key elements that are brought together in literature circles. The first one is shared experience. Students enjoy a common experience that allows them to learn and construct understanding together. Second, it provides students with rich text. The text provides students with the opportunity to form interpretations across layers of meaning. The third key element is the personal response. Each child's response is important to the discussion. Readers

learn to value their responses to the text, share them with others, and expand their understanding. Fountas and Pinnell (1994) have defined four main paths in which students explore meaning. These paths are talking, writing, reading, and the visual and performing arts. All four paths are important to establish a foundation for literacy analysis. Students usually use more than one mode of expression to explore the meaning of their text. However, talk is the central path that is used in literature circles (as cited in Montaya, 2006).

Encouraging students to share their thoughts and discuss the issues related to the text affects their critical thinking and perspectives in a positive way. Through the discussion method, amount and effect of participation increase as a result of active involvement. Engaging conversation from different points of view helps students form new ideas and think critically about the points they should support or reject in the circle. As Ketch (2005) says, “We learn through discussion, and it moulds our thinking.” Studies done by Long and Gove (2003-2004) have discovered that when students were encouraged to make connections, reflect back on the text, and question the text, they become more critical thinkers. Students involved in discussions were able critically to discuss literary concepts. They were also able to write critically about their topics that were made possible by transfer of skill (as cited in Wadsworth, 2007).

Furthermore, literature circles are proven to be helpful for encouraging male students to read. It is an inevitable fact that boys’ and girls’ learning styles are different and in comparison to girls, boys are less interested in reading. Bede (2010) claims that most girls are quite comfortable sitting quietly and independently working. However, boys prefer to work in groups, have challenges and competitions, use technology, participate in discussions or oral work, and actively learn. Booth (2002) identifies that literature circles have several factors that enhance boys’ literacy development. Boys need to be given a choice in and ownership of their reading. Literature circles provide opportunities to select what they will read. Book selection for boys should reflect their interest, background, and abilities. In literature circles, they can reflect their interests as it includes a variety of genres, both fiction and non-fiction. Boys need occasions for talking to others in meaningful ways about what they have read. The small group discussion atmosphere of literature circles provides a supportive environment for meaningful talk about the text. Boys who are reluctant readers need to have successful reading experiences. Literature circles often involve mixed-ability grouping which

encourages a boy's competitiveness and his social need to be a part of a group (as cited in Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004).

Another reason for the use of literature circles as significant educational and pedagogical method is the relationship with the Theory of Multiple Intelligences. Emotional intelligence and inter/intra personal intelligence increase the acquisition and retention of linguistic and literary knowledge. Howard Gardner, a Harvard psychologist and professor of education, has identified a list of seven distinct intelligences according to his belief that every student possesses a different kind of mind and that each one of them differs in their needs, capacity of learning, and performance. Gardner (1999) emphasizes that multiple intelligence theory is child centred, as it develops children's innate potential, rather than requiring them to master extraneous academic information (as cited in Mirzazadeh, 2012). His theory can be easily adapted into learning and teaching as education should meet student's different needs or interests.

Gardner's theory validates educators' everyday experience: Students think and learn in many different ways. It also provides educators with a conceptual framework for organizing and reflecting on curriculum assessment and pedagogical practices. In turn, this reflection has led many educators to develop new approaches that might better meet the needs of the range of learners in their classrooms. It has helped a significant number of educators to question their work and to encourage them to look beyond the narrow confines of the dominant discourses of skilling, curriculum, and testing (Smith, 2002, 2008). Gardner claims that these differences challenge an educational system assuming that everyone can learn the same materials in the same way and that a uniform, universal measure suffices to test student learning. Indeed, as currently constituted, our educational system is heavily biased toward linguistic modes of instruction and assessment and, to a somewhat lesser degree, toward logical-quantitative modes as well (Lane, n.d.).

Learning occurs most efficiently when there is a balance between affective and cognitive levels which may also be referred to as emotions and intelligence. In the modern world, especially in the 20th century, with the onslaught of mass education, we gravitate towards the style of teaching that involves speaking to large groups of people. The instructor gives them as much information as possible, as fast as possible. Then, the instructor tests the retention of knowledge with a bubble test. Students generally memorize the facts for a test, then forget most of the knowledge once school is over.

That seems to be the most efficient way to do it because you can't individually teach thousands people. The essence of the balance that is a part of educating the whole person is lost. The balance between the emotional and intellectual qualities is sacrificed. The whole framework of thinking is reflected in Gardner's multiple intelligences theory in which he identified the intrapersonal and interpersonal communication. According to Gardner (1989), intelligence is the capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural setting. Intrapersonal intelligence is involved chiefly in an individual's examination and knowledge of his own feelings, while interpersonal intelligence looks outward, toward the behaviour, feelings, and motivation of others (Gardner, 1993: 241). Lazear (1993) adds that intrapersonal intelligence allows us to be self-reflective, that is, to step back from ourselves and watch ourselves, almost like an outside observer (as cited in Mirzazadeh, 2012). In other words, intrapersonal learners tend to shy away from others. They're in tune with their inner feelings. They have wisdom, intuition and motivation, as well as a strong will, confidence and opinions. They can be taught through independent study and introspection. They are the most independent of the learners. On the other hand, interpersonal learners learn through interaction. They have many friends and empathy for others. They can be taught through group activities, dialogues. It allows them to work effectively with others (Lane, n.d.). Mirzazadeh (2012) states that, the interpersonal intelligence is connected to the ability to harmonize with others, to understand their perspectives and opinions, but also to convince others in order to achieve personal objectives. Understanding other people, working cooperatively and communicating effectively, which are parts of the interpersonal intelligence, are strongly connected to learning a second language.

When we consider Gardner's views, we can say that the literature circle creates a balance between intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences as a part of intellectual and emotional intelligence because each student has a role according to their abilities and interests. The students learn from the observation of other students that contributes their ability to work with a team. They cooperate with each other to carry out a complex task. They are interacting with each other and feel motivated to play their roles in the circle because they are with the people they know. Students gain the social experience of working with different personalities in the circles and socializing with them outside of the class when the circle is done. The level of brain stimulation and activation is

higher because they are getting verbal activity, and an emotional investment in the literature. They might also get a chance for working on their own in the circle. As a result, literature circles contribute to students' creativity and receptivity of knowledge.

2.7. Benefits and Possible Problems of Literature Circles

2.7.1. Benefits of Literature Circles

Bernier (2008) states that literature circles create lifelong learners. Circles teach students to learn by doing, foster their responsibility, encourage cooperative learning, and strengthen their critical thinking which leads to collaborative classrooms. Circles increase student engagement by providing students with choice in the classroom. Circles validate student opinions and perspectives, and thus help build student self-esteem. He also emphasizes that circles allow teachers to assess many types of learning and knowledge.

2.7.1.1. Creating Lifelong Learners

It is a known fact that students do not like reading because it is generally boring or difficult for them. Because of this reason, educators know that the reading process should be fun and entertaining for them to develop their reading habits which will create lifelong learners. In literature circles, working in a group has a positive effect on the students. They have the chance freely to discuss their ideas with friends and teachers which makes them more active readers than other students. As DaLie (2001) points out, writing book reports and taking multiple choice tests at the end of a good novel are not a part of an adult's reading experience. If we want our students to continue reading, we can take the adult reading process as a model for them. Literature circles ask students to practice authentic experiences and behaviours to read, think, imagine, question, laugh and talk (as cited in Bernier, 2008). Even reading long novels in the circle can be fun for students. When they have positive experiences thanks to the circles, it will encourage students to read on their own and continue searching for other texts to read. Then, it will hopefully become a habit.

2.7.1.2. Building Self-Esteem

In literature circles, students will feel that their ideas and suggestions are respected and seriously considered, as in the circles every perspective, whether it is

right or wrong, is welcomed. Students are not forced to give the answers that the teacher wants. They can freely express themselves, even disagree with one another. When they receive positive feedback for their contributions in the circle, it boosts their self-esteem and makes them successful readers. Inevitably, reading becomes more pleasurable for them.

2.7.1.3. Learning by Doing

Stringer et al. (2003) declares that many theorists such as Dewey, Rogers, and Piaget suggest that learning takes place best when students are allowed to learn by doing, taking ownership of their studies through opportunities that lead to freedom of choice, and when social interaction abounds in the learning environment (as cited in Bernier, 2008). Many students learn best by using and experiencing their knowledge. The teacher supports their knowledge by visual aids and lecturing, however the average classroom atmosphere does not provide enough chance for the students to learn best by doing. Literature circles give teachers an opportunity to include all types of learners in one effective method. During the reading process, students try and fail as a result find their own insights which help them to develop their thinking and widen their perspectives. Through conversations and interactions, students learn how to generate ideas and develop their own questions and interpretations for the discussions. As they have a chance to practice these skills in the circles, hopefully they can apply them to other fields in their daily lives.

2.7.1.4. Assessing Many Types of Learning

It is known by every educator that there are different learning styles and types of knowledge. It will not be an effective education for the students, if the teacher assesses only one type of each instead of breaking the habit of the typical classroom patterns. Literature circles provide an opportunity for the teacher to implement different types of assessment. As a result, students are given more than one opportunity to show their knowledge. Along with the traditional tests, essays or mini-lessons, students can create their own questions for discussions, explain their favourite scenes, draw pictures, analyze specific characters, create a timeline of events, and even grade themselves according to their level of participation in the circle. Students feel comfortable and learn to trust their knowledge in the class as they can understand the material thanks to

different types of learning. Later, they can use their knowledge and positive experiences in other areas such as writing an essay or journal on the related text. Huntley (2000), an educator who wanted her students to continue to think critically as they turned to doing non-fiction reading implemented a literature circle group to compare the results with her previous teaching experiences. In her first try, she was happy with the results. She observed that all students did better writing on this paper than any other formal paper they wrote during the year.

2.7.1.5. Increasing Student Engagement

The most important factor on student engagement is that literature circles offer smaller group atmospheres. In large class setting, some students might be more prone to dozing off, daydreaming, or doodling. However in literature circles, as Grambell and Almasi (1996) emphasize, students have more opportunities to speak, interact, interpret, clarify, and exchange points of view that are offered in other talk structures (as cited in Bernier, 2008). Students make connections with materials, share their ideas independently by adding their personal inferences independently in the circles which leads them to better learning and to activate their long-term memory. Students feel much more comfortable in the circles than in a whole-class discussion. So, literature circles increase student engagement.

2.7.1.6. Providing Choices

As Bernier (2008) observed, in traditional classroom atmosphere, students generally sit passively, answer teacher questions, read teacher material, learn what the teacher has asked them to learn, and do what the class as a whole is doing. On the other hand, literature circles offer them a wide opportunity for choice. Students can choose the text they will be reading, the specific roles for which they will be responsible, or the materials they will discuss while the teacher recommends different ways of expressing their ideas. As a result, they naturally feel empowered and enjoy the opportunity to have choices in the circles.

2.7.1.7. Fostering Responsibility

Literature circles encourage students to take responsibility for their own education and aim to create individual and responsible students. Stringer et al. (2003)

claims that all literature circles force each student to take responsibility for preparing the discussion by taking notes and organizing information to present to the group. Furthermore in some of them, students decide how many pages to read for each session (as cited in Bernier, 2008). They can also learn to help each other when they have learnt to be responsible for themselves. They figure out how to encourage silent classmates to talk more on their own. They share the responsibility as a whole by socially interacting. This will help them to become more responsible individuals in the real world.

2.7.1.8. Strengthening Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is extremely important for students to realize their own potential and analyze their own responses. Blum et al. (2007) claims that literature circles encourage students to develop their metacognition of how these work to understand what they read. Furthermore, like self-determination curricula, literature circles promote interpersonal relationships through discussion, self-perception, problem solving, and decision making which can all help increase students' critical thinking abilities (as cited in Bernier, 2008). In her study, Almasi (1996) observed the fact that student-led discussions allowed the students a more participatory role in the interpretation of text and the ability to engage in higher level of thinking and problem solving (as cited in Bernier, 2008).

2.7.1.9. Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

All of the positive and supportive effects of literature circles on the students create collaborative classrooms dominated by cooperative learning. Every student in the circle gains unique knowledge. The literature circle atmosphere teaches them empathy and respect for each others' interests and interpretations on the subject. Talking and sharing ideas becomes a motivation for the students as they know that they are respected. It is also an important aspect for EFL students. In their small group, they act more eagerly to share the newly discovered information with each other. Sharing ideas with each other also links them to the real world by providing a more natural context for conversation. They have a chance to learn how to conduct a discussion in a proper way which increases their social skills along with their literacy skills. Literature circles create a better learning and sharing environment for both the teacher and the students.

Students' interpretations and questions are also valuable for the teacher as they differ from teachers'. Teachers can interpret the subject through the students' perspectives.

2.7.2. Possible Problems of Literature Circles

Kiangsu Chekiang Collage educators analyze how literature circles can address problems in four categories including, developmental ability, and lack of prior experience, background knowledge, and models.

2.7.2.1. Developmental Ability

Group discussion is one of the most important parts of literature circles as the students show off their skills and knowledge by sharing ideas. If the discussion is successful enough, the effects and outcomes will be important for the students' development. Critical thinking skills of the students directly affect the quality of discussion. In order to stimulate useful discussions, members should be able to engage in critical thinking. Otherwise conversations can fall flat and the students can not be sure what to do next. They just repeat each others' ideas or they talk one after another which causes the comments to be unrelated. Carrying on meaningful conversations may be difficult for the students and they often need support, especially at the beginning of the circle. There may also be students with learning disabilities, unprepared group members, some students who do not care to be at school, or disagreements among group members. There may also be some students who are so concentrated on their own roles and performances that they do not listen to the others. However, as time passes, they begin to understand the spirit of the circles. They get used to the procedure and gain self-confidence. Teachers guide and encourage the circle members in order to prepare students for literature circles, as they can not fix problems on their own. They can also guide students to deal with different opinions. Clark and Howladel (2007) states that racial, gender, and economic animosities can stand in the way of creating cooperative groupings (as cited in Petko, 2011). Even if there may be some discipline problems, the teacher create harmony for the discussions to be fully successful.

2.7.2.2. Lack of Prior Experience

As the teacher-centred education system is widespread all over the world where schools are designed to accommodate large groups of students. The students and the

teachers are used to a classroom atmosphere in which discussions are directed and evaluated by the teacher. For literature circles, smaller classes with a warm atmosphere will be more effective. For the first few times, students cannot be expected to participate effectively, as they will feel like a complete stranger in such a new atmosphere. Inevitably, getting used to this new technique will take some time before it becomes a normal routine. The most important factor is that the teacher and the students should be open to new techniques.

2.7.2.3. Lack of Background Knowledge

In traditional methods, most of the students come to the class unprepared and sit in silence. Only a few of them have the courage to talk and share ideas. The day will be completed, even if there are unprepared students in the class. However, for literature circles, students should have some background knowledge. They should read the book and be prepared before they come to the group discussion. They bring their materials, so they can share ideas and actively learn from each other. Another rare but annoying problem for Daniels and Steineke (2004) is when the students who have already read one of the books either trash-talk it or give away the ending. If lots of students have read a book choice before, you may need to exclude this book to keep their interest alive (114).

2.7.2.4. Lack of Models

It is difficult for students to create an effective discussion atmosphere without knowing what the literature circle is. It is also difficult for the teacher to set up the whole process until students get used to the circle. Firstly, the teacher can prepare a mini-lesson and a role play for the students to show how they should behave in the circles. This process can be videotaped then played back in the class to show students their own performance. It will be easier for the students to learn from their own mistakes with this model. They can reflect and criticize their own performances and learn how to carry out the discussions. They can also improve their public speaking and presentation skills. However, videotaping may be a problem for some students especially for the shy ones. If they do not feel comfortable, the discussion will not be natural. Though it is a time-consuming process for students and teachers, methods and

strategies can be changed according to the needs of the students, as long as they gain experience, confidence and insights.

CHAPTER 3

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents information about the research, procedures, participants, data collection and evaluation plan. It begins with the explanation of content analysis and details of the design. Next, the specific data about the participants of the study is explained. Then, all tools and methods used in the study and the data collection procedure are described in detail to allow more clarity.

3.2. Research Design

The study was organized as a content analysis. Content analysis is a kind of technique that enables researchers to study human behaviour in an indirect way, through an analysis of their communication (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006:483). In the field of educational research, content analysis is widely used to analyze the content of written or verbal communication in an objective manner. After collecting objective information from the literature circle, teachers examine what they have written about their experiences. They discover the outcomes and how they feel about their work. This study is considered a content analysis because it is analysing the responses of literature circle teachers through the interview data. Interview data was used to determine the effects of literature circles on students' comprehension of literature and language.

3.3. Participants

Participants of this study are three literature circle teachers regularly conducting circles for their college and university students. Literature circle methods of three different educational institutions in different cities were investigated and analyzed.

One participant of this study was an English Language educator implementing literature circles for EFL students. As an English teacher, also preparatory school dean, first interviewee is implementing literature circles for collage students in reading classes.

The other participant of this study was an instructor and reading coordinator from a local university. He is implementing reading circles for extensive reading classes in preparatory program.

The last participant was another instructor from another local university. She is also implementing literature circles for reading classes in the preparatory program of the university.

3.4. Procedure

In this study, literature circle teachers working in Turkey from different cities were introduced about the research, aims and procedure via e-mail. They were also informed about the interview questions prepared beforehand (see Appendix C). Interview questions included the information on personal views, experiences, inference about literature circles and suggestions for the colleagues. Interview data were received as written documents from the teachers who volunteered to share their experiences on literature circles. The data gathered from the interviews were transcribed, deeply analysed and compared with other teacher and student opinions around the world for final evaluation.

3.5. Data Sources

Data sources used in this study are the written documents containing interview questions (see Appendix C) and the teacher answers (see Appendix D). Teacher interviews are a significant source for the research to gain first-hand insight about the outcomes of the circles. Through the interviews, teachers were asked about their personal literature circle experiences. They were expected to explain inferences they made on circle setting, materials used, levels, advantages, challenges and special techniques along with their advice.

CHAPTER 4

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter contains detailed data analysis, results and findings of the thesis. It is a constructive and critical analysis of the findings along with interpretations of the outcomes to make the results clear. The data were collected with teacher interviews which provide information for the research questions.

4.2. Findings and Discussion

During the study, as it is stated in the introductory chapter, the aim was to investigate and discover the reason why teachers choose literature circles as a medium of instruction and provide proof for the assertion that “literature circles help students understand literature better” along with the question “how the experience of learning affect student attitudes of learning?” In this sense, the findings of the study based on the interview data play an important role in supporting the validity of the theories presented through the whole study related to literature circles.

Data obtained via teacher interviews were analysed to explore meaningful ideas and insights along with a variety of data sources utilized during this study. Each one of the data I examined gave me a new perspective on the impacts of literature circles. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in integrating literature into language teaching around the world and literature circles are just one of the methods that developed as a result of this interest. For the sake of providing new insights into the way we teach literature, a large number of researchers and educators have been conducting studies consisting of the circle technique.

4.2.1. Positive Effects

The overall findings of this study reveal that the educators using literature circles in their classes agree on the point that circles have a positive effect on teaching. Students generally find reading to be boring and difficult, but the idea of literature circle is observed to be fun, exciting and engaging for them. It is not hard to imagine that how difficult it is to read in English when they do not like reading in their own language.

1st interviewee stated that, thanks to literature circles almost all of the students began reading a whole novel in English for the first time. Giving students a chance to choose the books they will read, makes them much more excited about reading in English. They also become more eager to discuss what they read. There is no use in expecting similar performances from all the students when you make them read the same book regardless of their levels, interests and needs. Circles present educators with a new way to teach all students the same content and skills without regard to their levels, interests, and needs. Freedom of choice helps them acquire ownership, autonomy, and self-confidence. As 2nd interviewee stated, literature circles, the process he called transformation, positively affects students' motivational acquisition, awareness of responsibility, logical and critical reasoning, and productive interactions. Interviewees also implied that in circles, every student equally participates in the interactive activities by doing their reading and their duties instead of just exploiting the successful friends like they do in the traditional methods. They learn the value of listening and reflecting on the thoughts of others thanks to the circles. They also learn to think more deeply as they read.

4.2.2. Short Literary Selections

The analysis revealed that literature circle teachers do not prefer long chapter books and classic literature. This can be considered a good point, as students most probably lose track and get bored in long chapters. Classic literature books may become a torture for most of them. It will be wise to include adventure, fantasy, science-fiction, detective, or modern teenager books for them to choose. These selections will easily attract their attention and arouse the curiosity in them. The more they like what they are reading, the more they willingly adapt to the circle. The system developed by 1st interviewee and her colleagues as a precaution against the possibility of lost or destroyed books can be adapted by many teachers. She claimed that they collect a deposit from the parents at the beginning of the year. If students return books at the end of the year, they can get back the deposit. If not, teachers use the deposit to buy a new one via the internet. Teachers agree that, if the books are chosen carefully and as long as their interests are kept alive, literature circles can be appropriate for all age groups.

4.2.3. Role of the Teacher

Considering the fact that literature circles are a student-centred method unlike traditional teacher-centred methods, interviewees were asked about their roles in the circles. The analysis showed that, teachers are involving in monitoring, assessing, and guiding students whenever they need, help with sample lessons to model the roles and expectations; asking stimulating questions to keep them on track; grouping the students; or preparing a book list for them to choose. As a result, students have more responsibilities to make the class atmosphere more interactive.

4.2.4. Different Learning Styles

Interviewees also emphasized that literature circles present alternative, effective learning for student who have different learning styles, interests, and needs. Most importantly each one of them has different roles and duties in the circle which can be changed in every new circle or every week for equal participation. These roles and duties give them a chance to do different kinds of activities to show their talents. 1st interviewee mentioned that after books are introduced to the students, they write their 1, 2 and 3 choices out of 5 on a ballot, then the top-voted book is chosen. She uses choice boards with many options to demonstrate their learning. Those choices are changed in each unit to give them more opportunities. She also mentioned that they could write and perform a song about a character from the book, or even create a multimedia book trailer on their computer. It all depends on the students. 3rd interviewee added that they watch the movie of the book if there is any and comment on it by comparing the differences. She also mentioned that her students like competitive activities such as comparing their cultures with other cultures based on the book. As understood from the examples, literature circles give many opportunities for students to use their imagination, and to create and present their talents without dampening their creativity, as in traditional methods.

4.2.5. Evaluation

For the evaluation process, 1st interviewee claimed that they are using circles in conjunction with more traditional approaches for students to express what they are learning about theme, characterization, and plot. in open-ended questions. She also emphasized that they collect and assess the role sheets, and give mid-novel and end of

novel quizzes to be sure everyone is involved equally in the process. 3rd interviewee also asks instant questions or she may test their memory by writing phrases or sentences from the chapters on the board. The students identify who said it. This can be a useful activity for the students. Brainstorming will trigger their memories and this will most probably end up in a natural conversational atmosphere. She also added that she gives a plus for each correct answer to be used as their participation grade. Giving a plus for correct answers is another effective method to keep the student focused on the process. The students, even the shy ones, become willing to participate and share their ideas to be rewarded. I know this from my high school preparatory experience. Different from the other interviewees, 2nd interviewee expressed that his students present written documents containing their personal impressions about the books with a vocabulary task. He believes that this reminds the students of their responsibilities and positively affects the learning process and motivation.

4.2.6. Teacher vs. Student-Centred

In the light of the research data it is concluded that, there may be some difficulties while switching from teacher-centred setting to student-centred setting and it may become a time-consuming process until the students get used to the circle atmosphere. Lack of interest in reading based on wrong book of choice, shy students fear of doing something wrong, or the students who try to speak in Turkish can be another challenge, however it is a quite natural situation. There should be a trial and error period.

4.2.7. Advice for Colleagues

Looking at the overall findings, it can be said that creating a student-centred environment and organizing the schedule in a proper way should be the first priority of the teacher. Every detail in the circle should be modelled step by step until students get used to the roles and the rules, even though it can take some time. If possible, they can watch a few circles to observe and comment on it. More specifically 1st interviewee noted that she uses a fishbowl technique at the beginning to model the circles. One group performs their circle, while the other group takes notes and evaluates. Having students to record their circles and uploading to internet is also a good idea for making sure they only speak in English during the process. She also emphasized that it also

gives a chance for teachers to watch the circles online and assess in their own time. Lastly, 3rd interviewee advised the teachers who will use the literature circle technique for the first time that choosing the first book one stage lower than the students' level will work better, as their level may not be exactly at that level in reality.

CHAPTER 5

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, data analysis, findings and the results of this study were presented. This final chapter provides a brief discussion of the topic and a conclusion reached for the entire research. Limitations of this study are also emphasized along with the implications and suggestions for future studies.

5.2. Conclusion

Through research and interview data, it can be concluded that the use of literature circles clearly help students to understand literature better by increasing their desire to read. Research data, parallel to the results of similar studies, provide evidence that students' general attitudes towards reading change positively after taking part in the circles. Enhancing their literacy development by mastering and practicing specific skills, students can also develop better comprehension techniques in the circles that will enable them to use the literature for authentic and meaningful purposes.

Literature circles increase social interaction between the students. They learn from each other. They also teach and help one another through the discussions and tasks. Different from the traditional methods, literature circles promote independent thought. Circles provide students an environment similar to the real life in which they can handle the responsibilities of discussing and understanding the book, inventing activities, finding personal meanings related to the discussion.

One of the main conclusions drawn from this research is that literature circles also provide opportunities for EFL learners to ensure their own understanding by effectively reading, analyzing, and discussing the books. Implementing circles is also an effective way to increase students' social skills that will lead to enriched learning. Students become more interested in reading when they have book options. Circles give students self-confidence and the feeling of empowerment which make them more willing to talk and share their ideas. They really enjoy the literature circles and become excited about books, as they have more control over their learning. Results of Bedel's (2011) research reveal that literature circles can provide an exciting way to promote

student engagement in extensive reading by means of cooperative learning and collaborative work. Literature circles also bring excitement and energy into the language classroom, promoting reading for enjoyment different from ordinary classroom instructions. Another study supporting Bedel's findings was conducted by Avcı et al. (2011). His research shows that the literature circle is an effective method for students to adopt reading comprehension skills. He emphasizes that if such an increase is achieved in just one reading, when the method is constantly used, especially with low-skilled students, they can reach the level of high-skilled students.

The opportunity to choose the books they will read encourages students to show their abilities. The circle atmosphere motivates all students to participate equally in discussions, even the ones who are generally unwilling to talk. The natural, small-group setting of the circles makes them feel more comfortable while speaking. Each student has more time to comment and share ideas. In her analysis, Sanchez (1999) reports that literature circles are one key to successful development of English oral language for second language learners (as cited in Bedel, 2011).

As might be expected, thanks to literature circles, students adapt positive reading habits. They understand the books they read, and they can remember every detail in the books weeks later. As they enjoy themselves throughout the process, they generally continue reading books in their routines. In his study, Baştuğ et al. (2011) reports that the literature circles method improved the reading comprehension skills of students who had low level reading comprehension. He also emphasizes that his students liked reading books by performing different tasks, discussing, and cooperating with their friends over a period of time. They remembered the book they had read with all the details, even two weeks later.

The role of the teacher, which is another aspect in literature circles, is to facilitate and provide guided practice without dominating the students. The success of the circles depends on the country, students, setting, background, and materials. However, the effectiveness of this method depends mostly on the teacher's motivation and organization in creating a collaborative learning environment without using a mechanical structure. Otherwise, students will just do what they have to and nothing more. Most importantly, materials, activities and roles should be suitable and adapted to age group, language levels, and specific skills.

One other consideration that emerged from this research is the importance of modelling the process to show students the components of literature circles. Students can watch an experienced circle group to learn how to engage in their roles; how to think critically; how to develop questions; how to find key events; and relate them to personal experiences, until they are independently able to do it. Research data supports the idea that the teacher needs to model and guide to open the way for an authentic peer discussion atmosphere for the students, even if the process requires time, patience, and consistency.

To conclude, the encouraging results lead us to think that literature circles are a promising method which increases student motivation and enhances understanding and appreciation of literature through choices. Any teacher, at any grade level, with any content, can adapt and modify circles to their teaching. As educators, we need to change our traditional teaching techniques and literature circles are worth trying.

5.3. Limitations of the Study

Although the findings of the present study supported the positive contribution of literature circles to students' comprehension of literature, some limitations should be considered. The most important limitation that needs to be acknowledged and addressed regarding the present study is the time constraints. The study is a content analysis to provide enough evidence on how useful literature circles are for the students, as stated in previous chapters. As a result of this, a larger number of teacher interviewees from a wider range of schools might have created more reliable results. However, limited time and the heavy workload of the teachers, to some extent, affected the research process. Another limitation is the fact that as literature circles are not a widespread method in Turkey, there are limited numbers of educational institutions professionally implementing circles.

Although there were some unavoidable limitations during this time consuming process, I believe that the study has reached its aims and opened a way for a future study on literature circles. Along with the research data from around the world, teachers who voluntarily shared personal experiences necessary for my data procedure have provided me with a lot of opinions and suggestions before conducting my own literature circle.

5.4. Recommendations for Future Studies

Based upon the information and the results collected during this study, future studies can examine the suitability of literature circles in different class levels, different groups and even different courses in detail. More studies are needed in Turkey to evaluate strengths and weaknesses of the use of literature circles, as this method has begun to be applied in recent years in Turkey. It is not widespread, at this time. More teachers and educators interested in the subject should experiment with similar studies to provide further evidence for the advantages of literature circles. The circle technique is needed to be developed in each time for a better learning environment. Considering the developments of technology, exploration of the benefits of online literature circles by implementing a circle into the digital world, creating a facebook club, a forum, or a blog will also help to demonstrate the advantages of literature circles.

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7. APPENDICES

7.1. APPENDIX A: BASIC ROLES

DISCUSSION DIRECTOR

A1

Name _____

Group _____

Book _____

Assignment p _____-p _____

Discussion Director: Your job is to develop a list of questions that your group might want to discuss about this part of the book. Don't worry about the small details: your task is to help people talk over the big ideas in the reading and share their reactions. Usually the best discussion questions come from your own thoughts, feelings, and concerns as you read, which you can list below, during or after your reading. Or you may use some of the general questions below to develop topics for your group.

Possible discussion questions or topics for today:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Sample questions:

What was going through your mind while you read this?

How did you feel while reading this part of the book?

What was discussed in this section of the book?

Can someone summarize briefly?

Did today's reading remind you of any real-life experiences?

What questions did you have when you finished this section?

Did anything in this section of the book surprise you?

What are the one or two most important ideas?

Predict some things you think will be talked about next.

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow _____

Assignment for tomorrow p _____-p _____

From *Literature Circles: Voice and choice in the student-centered classroom* by Harvey Daniels.
Stenhouse Publishers, York, ME.

Name _____

Group _____

Book _____

Assignment p _____-p _____

Literary Luminary: Your job is to locate a few special sections of the text that your group would like to hear read aloud. The idea is to help people remember some interesting, powerful, funny, puzzling, or important sections of the text. You decide which passages or paragraphs are worth hearing, and then jot plans for how they should be shared. You can read passages aloud yourself, ask someone else to read them, or have people read them silently and then discuss.

Location	Reason for Picking	Plan for Reading
1. Page _____ Paragraph _____	_____	_____
2. Page _____ Paragraph _____	_____	_____
3. Page _____ Paragraph _____	_____	_____
4. Page _____ Paragraph _____	_____	_____

Possible reasons for picking a passage to be shared:

Important	Informative
Surprising	Controversial
Funny	Well written
Confusing	Thought-provoking

Other:

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow _____

Assignment for tomorrow p _____-p _____

From *Literature Circles: Voice and choice in the student-centered classroom* by Harvey Daniels. Stenhouse Publishers, York, ME.

Name _____

Group _____

Book _____

Assignment p _____-p _____

Illustrator: Your job is to draw some kind of picture related to the reading. It can be a sketch, cartoon, diagram, flow chart, or stick-figure scene. You can draw a picture of something that's discussed specifically in your book, or something that the reading reminded you of, or a picture that conveys any idea or feeling you got from the reading. Any kind of drawing or graphic is okay—you can even label things with words if that helps. **Make your drawing on the other side of this sheet or on a separate sheet.**

Presentation plan: When the Discussion Director invites your participation, you may show your picture without comment to the others in the group. One at a time, they get to speculate what your picture means, to connect the drawing to their own ideas about the reading. After everyone has had a say, you get the last word: tell them what your picture means, where it came from, or what it represents to you.

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow _____

Assignment for tomorrow p _____-p _____

From *Literature Circles: Voice and choice in the student-centered classroom* by Harvey Daniels.
Stenhouse Publishers, York, ME.

Name _____

Group _____

Book _____

Assignment p _____-p _____

Connector: Your job is to find connections between the book your group is reading and the world outside. This means connecting the reading to your own life, to happenings at school or in the community, to similar events at other times and places, to other people or problems that you are reminded of. You might also see connections between this book and other writings on the same topic, or by the same author. There are no right answers here—whatever the reading connects you with is worth sharing!

Some connections I found between this reading and other people, places, events, authors . . .

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow _____

Assignment for tomorrow p _____-p _____

From *Literature Circles: Voice and choice in the student-centered classroom* by Harvey Daniels. Stenhouse Publishers, York, ME.

Name _____

Group _____

Book _____

Assignment p _____-p _____

Summarizer: Your job is to prepare a brief summary of today's reading. The other members of your group will be counting on you to give a quick (one- or two-minute) statement that conveys the gist, the key points, the main highlights, the **essence** of today's reading assignment. If there are several main ideas or events to remember, you can use the numbered slots below.

Summary:

Key points:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow _____

Assignment for tomorrow p _____-p _____

From *Literature Circles: Voice and choice in the student-centered classroom* by Harvey Daniels.
Stenhouse Publishers, York, ME.

VOCABULARY ENRICHER

Name _____

Group _____

Book _____

Assignment p _____-p _____

Vocabulary Enricher: Your job is to be on the lookout for a few especially important words in today's reading. If you find words that are puzzling or unfamiliar, mark them while you are reading, and then later jot down their definition, either from a dictionary or some other source. You may also run across familiar words that stand out somehow in the reading—words that are repeated a lot, used in an unusual way, or key to the meaning of the text. Mark these special words too, and be ready to point them out to the group. When your circle meets, help members find and discuss these words.

Page No. &

Paragraph

Word

Definition

Plan

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow _____

Assignment for tomorrow p _____-p _____

From *Literature Circles: Voice and choice in the student-centered classroom* by Harvey Daniels.
Stenhouse Publishers, York, ME.

Name _____

Group _____

Book _____

Assignment p _____-p _____

Travel Tracer: When you are reading a book where characters move around a lot and the scene changes frequently, it is important for everyone in your group to know **where** things are happening and how the setting may have changed. So that's your job: to track carefully where the action takes place during today's reading. Describe each setting in detail, either in words or with an action map or diagram you can show to your group. Be sure to give the page locations where the scene is described.

Describe or sketch the setting (you may also use the back of this sheet or another sheet):

Where today's action **begins**: Page where it is described _____

Where key events happen today: Page where it is described _____

Where today's events **end**: Page where it is described _____

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow _____

Assignment for tomorrow p _____-p _____

From *Literature Circles: Voice and choice in the student-centered classroom* by Harvey Daniels.
 Stenhouse Publishers, York, ME.

Name _____

Group _____

Book _____

Assignment p _____-p _____

Investigator: Your job is to dig up some background information on any topic related to your book. This might include:

- The geography, weather, culture, or history of the book's setting.
- Information about the author, her/his life, and other works.
- Information about the time period portrayed in the book.
- Pictures, objects, or materials that illustrate elements of the book.
- The history and derivation of words or names used in the book.
- Music that reflects the book or the time.

This is not a formal research report. The idea is to find one bit of information or material that helps your group understand the book better. Investigate something that really interests you—something that struck you as puzzling or curious while you were reading.

Ways of gathering information:

- The introduction, preface, or "about the author" section of the book.
- Library books and magazines.
- On-line computer search or encyclopedia.
- Interviews with people who know the topic.
- Other novels, nonfiction, or textbooks you've read.

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow _____

Assignment for tomorrow p _____-p _____

From *Literature Circles: Voice and choice in the student-centered classroom* by Harvey Daniels.
Stenhouse Publishers, York, ME.

7.2. APPENDIX B: PRIMARY ROLES

B 1

DISCUSSION DIRECTOR

Name _____

Group _____

Book _____

Assignment p _____ -p _____

You are the Discussion Director. Your job is to write down some good questions that you think your group would want to talk about.

1. _____

2. _____

3. Why . . .

4. How . . .

5. If . . .

From *Literature Circles: Voice and choice in the student-centered classroom* by Harvey Daniels.
Stenhouse Publishers, York, ME.

PASSAGE PICKER

B 2

Name _____

Group _____

Book _____

Assignment p _____ -P _____

You are the **Passage Picker**. Your job is to pick parts of the story that you want to read aloud to your group. These can be:

- a good part
- a funny part
- a scary part
- an interesting part
- some good writing
- a good description

Be sure to mark the parts you want to share with a Post-it note or book-mark. Or you can write on this sheet the parts you want to share.

Parts to read out loud:

Page	Paragraph	Why I liked it
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

From *Literature Circles: Voice and choice in the student-centered classroom* by Harvey Daniels.
Stenhouse Publishers, York, ME.

Name _____

Group _____

Book _____

Assignment p _____ -p _____

You are the **Artful Artist**. Your job is to draw anything about the story that you liked:

- a character
- the setting
- a problem
- an exciting part
- a surprise
- a prediction of what will happen next
- anything else

Draw on the back of this page or on a bigger piece of paper if you need it. Do any kind of drawing or picture you like.

When your group meets, don't tell what your drawing is. Let them guess and talk about it first. Then you can tell about it.

Name _____

Group _____

Book _____

Assignment p _____ -p _____

You are the **Word Finder**. Your job is to look for special words in the story.
Words that are:

- new
- different
- strange
- funny
- interesting
- important
- hard

When you find a word that you want to talk about, mark it with a Post-it note or write it down here.

Word	Page	Why I picked it
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

When your group meets, help your friends talk about the words you have chosen. Things you can discuss:

- How does this word fit in the story?
- Does anyone know what this word means?
- Shall we look it up in the dictionary?
- What does this word make you feel like?
- Can you draw the word?

From *Literature Circles: Voice and choice in the student-centered classroom* by Harvey Daniels.
Stenhouse Publishers, York, ME.

Name _____

Group _____

Book _____

Assignment p _____-p _____

You are the **Connector**. Your job is to find connections between the book and the world outside. This means connecting the reading to:

- your own life
- happenings at school or in the neighborhood
- similar events at other times and places
- other people or problems
- other books or stories
- other writings on the same topics
- other writings by the same author

Some things today's reading reminded me of were . . .

7.3. APPENDIX C: TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- What caused you to begin the use of literature circles?
- What are the advantages?
- Can you give me an example of a literature circle setting you have used and explain how you used it?
- What kind of literature did you use?
- Do you incorporate a multiple intelligence approach?
- How do the students attitudes toward literature change?
- How do you determine if the students understand the literature in literature circles more than a traditional approach?
- Have you tried traditional approaches to teaching literature? Which ones?
- Do you think literature circles are appropriate for all age groups?
- What challenges, difficulties have you encountered with the use of literature circles?
- Describe how you made the literature selections for the literature circles?
- Do certain kinds of literature choices work better than others?
- Are there any literature selections you would not include in a literature circle?
- Describe your role as a coordinator of literature circle?
- How do you train your students to participate in a literature circle?
- What adjustments do you make in the literature circle training format for language skill level?
- Do you have suggestions for instructors with regard to evaluation of student performance?
- Is there anything you did or would have done differently with this particular group of students?
- What did you learn about this group of students with regard to the literature selection that you did not know before literature circle sessions?
- What advice do you have for instructors who will use the literature circle technique for the first time?

7.4. APPENDIX D: TEACHER INTERVIEWS

7.4.1. INTERVIEW I

INTERVIEW I

19.02.13

What caused you to begin the use of literature circles?

We found that our previous approach to using novels with EFL students was not working. Within the high school preparatory year program, we have a range of students from absolute beginner to advanced English levels, and having all the students read the same book wasn't working. It used to be "The Giver." It was too easy for the highest level students and the lowest level students were having to look up every other word because it was new vocabulary.

What are the advantages?

Literature circles allowed us to teach the same content and skills, while differentiating for student English level and interest. By allowing students to choose which one of the books they wanted to read, students had more ownership and autonomy during the process. Student engagement was greatly increased using reading circles. Also, because we had so many different novels being read, there were more students reading the book instead of the SparkNotes!

Can you give me an example of a literature circle setting you have used and explain how you used it?

In the high school preparatory English program, we have one section of the course specifically teaching reading skills. It is 8 periods a week. We use literature circles in this class. We have about 30 novels in our literature circle list, and 6 copies of each novel which consist 1 teachers copy, 5 student copies. After clearly outlining the purpose of reading circles, the reading teacher introduces each literature circle role one at a time and guides the student through practicing completing that role as a class while reading a short story. After each role has been modelled, the teacher presents the 5 novel options for that unit. Students write their 1, 2, and 3 choices on a ballot and the teacher then places them into groups of no more than 5, trying to give them their top choice while also considering group dynamics. Then students create a reading calendar together, counting out the number of days and pages. Students read mostly at home,

although we also have SSR time of about 15 minutes a day. Students spin for a role each week, complete either at home or in class, and complete the literature circle at the end of the week. Sometimes in the classroom, sometimes outside with one student recording it on their smartphone and uploading the video to Youtube for the teacher to watch later. This continues with one literature circle a week, different roles for different students each week, until the novel is finished.

What kind of literature did you use?

The novels are all at a grade 9 – 12 interest level, but the reading level ranges from lexile 3.4 to 8.4. We use scholastic book wizard to find appropriate titles. We use all sorts of YA novels, all written within the last 10 years, no classic literature.

Do you incorporate a multiple intelligence approach?

Yes, all of our assessments are designed to appeal to multiple intelligences. Students have choiceboards with a number of options on how to demonstrate their learning. They could write and perform a song about a character from the book, or create a multimedia book trailer on their computer. There are many choices and the choices change each unit.

How do the students attitudes toward literature change?

Almost all our students say this is the first time they've actually read a whole novel in English. Especially for our lower-level learners, they don't think they can do it at the beginning, and they amaze themselves about how much they improve over the course of the year. By the end of the year, even absolute beginners are reading 200+ page novels in English. Students also tell us that getting to choose what they read makes them much more excited about reading in English.

How do you determine if the students understand the literature in literature circles more than a traditional approach?

As I mentioned, we use choiceboards for our larger projects so students have a range of ways to express their learning. Teachers also collect and assess all the role sheets to ensure that every student is doing their reading and their roles and not relying on the strong students to tell them what is happening in the book. Teachers also give mid-novel and end of novel quizzes that have short answer and open ended questions that ensure students are accountable for the reading and can express what they are learning about theme, characterization and plot in a more traditional way.

Have you tried traditional approaches to teaching literature? Which ones?

Last year, teachers in the reading course used only the literature circle method. However, we found that there were some gaps because the students were never all reading the same thing, and the teacher couldn't guide the class through the process of interpreting literature and reading. So this year, teachers in the Reading course are using literature circles in conjunction with more traditional approaches. All students have a "Discovering Fiction" short story anthology that is designed for EFL learners, and it includes a short story, vocabulary, comprehension and traditional reading instruction. Teachers use this for whole-class instruction to introduce a concept, say plot development, while all students read the same story. After they learn the concept, they apply it to their individual novels for literature circles.

Do you think literature circles are appropriate for all age groups?

I think literature circles are most appropriate for the grade 6 – 10 range. It requires a level of personal accountability and responsibility to work independently of the teacher. Also, at the higher levels, English courses at our school move towards classic literature and Shakespeare, so the classroom must be more teacher-centric.

What challenges, difficulties have encountered with the use of literature circles?

It took us a little trial and error to find out how best to use them in the curriculum. As I mentioned, we now use them as one component of our reading course, not the entire course. We also had to come up with a system for when students lose or destroy their novels. We now collect a deposit from parents at the beginning of the year, which they get back at the end of the year if their student returns all the novels. If not, we use their deposit to buy a quick replacement novel from Amazon. We had problems with students using Turkish while completing their literature circles. Whenever the teacher was near, they would use English, but then when the teacher walked to another group, the first group would switch back to Turkish. In order to combat that, we use a few techniques, a fish bowl technique at the beginning, where one group performs their literature circle, while the other groups take notes and evaluate. Then we also turned to the idea of recording the literature circles which has been great for making sure students speak only English while completing their circles. It also gives a chance for teachers to watch the circles online and assess in their own time.

Describe how you made the literature selections for the literature circles?

As I mentioned earlier, teacher suggestions and scholastic book wizard.

Do certain kinds of literature choices work better than others?

Yes! We removed a few novels from last year's list that were not popular. Now we have a mix, some fantasy like *The Graveyard Book*, *The Warrior Heir*, *100 Cupboards*; some girly chick-lit like *Confessions of a Teen Nanny*, *Vampire Kisses*, *If I Stay*; some adventure like *War of the Eagles*, *Great Wide Sea*; and some modern coming of age like *Perks of Being a Wallflower*, *It's Kind of a Funny Story*, *Mercy on These Teenage Chimps*.

Are there any literature selections you would not include in a literature circle?

We took out all the Meg Rosoff books as students did not like her! Also, I don't think classic literature would work well for the way that we use literature circles

Describe your role as a coordinator of literature circle?

I'm not teaching Reading this year, but last year my role was to 1. Choose great books. 2. Introduce the concept with energy. 3. Clearly model the roles and the expectations 4. Set clear guidelines and rules for the way that literature circles are done 5. Put students in groups that can work well together. 6. Guide students and keep them on track. 7. Monitor and assess.

How do you train your students to participate in a literature circle?

As I mention, model each role, complete roles as a class using a common short story, eventually model the circle in a fishbowl approach. Lots of scaffolding.

What adjustments do you make in the literature circle training format for language skill level?

We choose novels based on student language level. Our absolute beginners and low-intermediate classes start with only short stories or Black Cat readers. However all levels use the same literature circles approach and have the same roles to complete.

Do you have suggestions for instructors with regard to evaluation of student performance?

I think I covered this above. Lots of choices with choiceboards. Accountability with mid-novel and end-of-novel-quizzes. Having them record their circles on their smartphones and uploading to YouTube.

Is there anything you did or would have done differently with this particular group of students?

Covered this above.

What did you learn about this group of students with regard to the literature selection that you did not know before literature circle session?

Covered this above

What advice do you have for instructors who will use the literature circle technique for the first time?

Leave lots of time for the initial instruction and setup. Students need to be guided very slowly, step by step, through the concepts, the roles, and the rules for circles. Everything should be modelled, even though it can take weeks. Each role should be modelled and they should be guided through completing each role together. The literature circle should be modelled and they should have the chance to watch a few circles and discuss what was good, what was bad, which roles were done correctly, who followed the rules and so on. Do not let the students break off into their own circles until the roles and rules have been hammered into them!

7.4.2. INTERVIEW II

INTERVIEW II

09.03.13

What caused you to begin the use of literature circles?

Sometimes the lessons became so problematic as the student-talk rate has been reducing gradually and it caused unwillingness for students to discuss about the stories. Almost all of them seemed unwilling to talk, inactive, and unaware of the requirements of expansive reading course objectives. There were just a few students who tried to engage the expected objectives for the course. Enhancing the student-talk was our main goal, so the discussion method has to be moved to the forefront. We wanted to make the class atmosphere more communicative and encourage the students actively to engage in the activities.

What are the advantages?

Literature circles are not teacher-centred activities. Students are the centre of attention. It gives the students chances to perform interactive activities that increase their self-confidence. Another positive side of the activity is that, different skills such as speaking, listening, reading and writing are all included in the circle. Conversational atmosphere enhanced the students' participation and critical approach to the story which contributes to the students' comprehension and interpretation skills. This kind of student-centred activity fosters motivational acquisitions. Exchanging ideas helps stimulating the way they think critically, which results in a productive interaction. Students acquire characteristics of leadership and awareness of responsibilities thanks to a shared learning model. Agreements or conflicts tempt the students to more logical and critical reasoning for their implications.

Can you give me an example of a literature circle setting you have used and explain how you used it?

In preparatory English program we use literature circles for expansive reading classes. Task-based reading is considered as the prominent goal. These classes include story books ranging differently in each level. This course requires students to read level books or short stories in advance firstly, then discuss the stories during the lessons. Students are given certain tasks and asked to prepare themselves. The tasks in circle

activity are delivered spontaneously. There are such roles like the group leader, the character captain, the summarizer, the word master, the climax catcher, the theme expert, the cultural connector and the collector of ideas in the circle. If necessary, the third task is shared by two group members. Students have two weeks to prepare themselves for their roles and the teacher directs them during this period so that they can comprehend the task completely. They have a chance to do feasibility studies and check themselves before the discussion circle day, which encouraged them to take responsibilities more seriously. Students can make use of their papers during the discussion. Discussion circle is the evaluation part of the lesson. I form a task-sheet in order to follow the circle activity. I also construct a simple checklist which focuses on students' activeness, willingness, and awareness of responsibility during the lesson.

What kind of literature did you use?

Story books, level books, short stories.

How do the students attitudes toward literature change?

After implementing discussion circle activity, there were clear transformations. The rates of the students who brought the book, read the book, shared his/her ideas, tried to answer my questions, participated actively in the group activities and asked questions were changed in a positive way. Circles decrease the passiveness and unwillingness of the students. Students seem so excited, ready and eager to discuss the story. The class atmosphere becomes very interactive. The impressive thing is that the students begin talking more than that of the teacher. As the teacher, you only direct them to focus on the main or turning points of the story and ask stimulating questions. There is always a sharp difference between the first lesson and the last one. The discussion atmosphere becomes interactive and stimulating.

How do you determine if the students understand the literature in literature circles more than a traditional approach?

Students present a one-paragraphed written document which contains their personal impressions about the book, a vocabulary list containing fifteen unknown words from the story within their own sentences. Students interactively make great efforts to answer the teacher's questions, and start asking their own questions. They become aware of their responsibilities. This task-based activity positively affects the learning process and students' motivation. Although they even seemed unwilling to bring their books in the

previous lessons, they willingly read, write sentences, discuss the story topics, ask questions and gain my appreciation.

Have you tried traditional approaches to teaching literature? Which ones?

Before implementing literature circles we were using eclectic methods. Students were asked to read the selected materials and do the required assessments before coming to the class. Then they were discussing the stories by taking notes during the lesson. The lessons were mostly teacher-centred.

Do you think literature circles are appropriate for all age groups?

My groups consist of adult learners. I have never implemented literature circles for younger students. However, I think literature circles can be appropriate for all age groups as long as it is well-organized.

What challenges, difficulties have you encountered with the use of literature circles?

Sometimes I am having difficulty in checking students' speaking and correcting their errors since two groups are discussing the topic at the same time.

Describe your role as a coordinator of literature circle?

Students' discussions among themselves require group accountability and teacher's feedback. As the teacher, I act like a facilitator. My role is to guide them whenever they need, direct them to focus on the main points of the stories and ask stimulating questions.

How do you train your students to participate in a literature circle?

We are practicing together with the students and doing sample lessons using shorter texts for better understanding for the requirements of the class before we start the real circle activity.

What adjustments do you make in the literature circle training format for language skill level?

Story books and the other materials are chosen according to the level of the students.

Is there anything you did or would have done differently with this particular group of students?

They were asked to prepare their discussion topics through given roles.

What advice do you have for instructors who will use the literature circle technique for the first time?

They can prompt their students to discover and then use their skills in the circles by organizing the schedule in a certain system. Students' engagement should be aimed as the first objective. All in all, teachers should deal with stimulating learning involvement and focus on constructing student-centred learning environment. As a teacher, I've been giving up the motto "I know, I teach."

7.4.3. INTERVIEW III

INTERVIEW III

17.03.13

What caused you to begin the use of literature circles?

It is a subject in our university.

What are the advantages?

Our students can listen to the story in the classroom. They share their ideas with their friends. They do different duties for each book.

Can you give me an example of a literature circle setting you have used and explain how you used it?

Students read some chapters at home or listen to them in the classroom then the teacher asks some words and comprehensive questions to them and gives a plus for each correct answer. These pluses are used for their participation grade.

Or, students are divided into groups. They have different duties for each book. They read some chapters at home and prepare their parts at home, then present their parts in the classroom. For example, if they are the word masters, they choose the most important words of those chapters and tell the class why they chose them. Each group has one word master, one connector, one summarizer, etc.

What kind of literature did you use?

We try to choose different kinds. For example, adventure stories, love stories, detective stories, etc.

Do you incorporate a multiple intelligence approach?

The duties they do each week let them do different kinds of exercises. In the classroom activities, they answer the question they prefer. Sometimes we had the chance to watch the video of the book and to comment on it.

How do the students attitudes toward literature change?

Our students are not interested in reading. If they listen to the chapters in the classroom, they can't say "no." They need to be forced. We have few students interested in reading. As for their homework, unfortunately, they cheat from other classes' students.

How do you determine if the students understand the literature in literature circles more than a traditional approach?

I write phrases or sentences from that day's chapters on the board. They close their books and they tell who said those.

I ask instant questions. Sometimes they do their reading in the classroom, not at home.

Do you think literature circles are appropriate for all age groups?

If your students like reading and the books are chosen properly, yes.

What challenges, difficulties have you encountered with the use of literature circles?

Our main difficulty is lack of interest in reading. If the kind of the book is not interesting for the student, it is also a problem.

Describe how you made the literature selections for the literature circles?

Some teachers read the story books and choose the best among them.

Do certain kinds of literature choices work better than others?

Yes, students love adventure books more than others.

Are there any literature selections you would not include in a literature circle?

I don't prefer books with long chapters.

Describe your role as a coordinator of literature circle?

I make their duties easier for them, I present sample duties.

How do you train your students to participate in a literature circle?

They know their duties beforehand. These duties are explained to them. So each week they know what to do and how to do.

What adjustments do you make in the literature circle training format for language skill level?

We choose the books according to their level. We start with stage 1 for A2 level. For example, in A2 level we ask for five words for word masters, ten words for higher levels. They submit their parts as written homework, but in the classroom they explain orally. We expect their level of speech according to their level.

Do you have suggestions for instructors with regard to evaluation of student performance?

Their level determines our expectation. If they are in A2 level we ignore some of their grammar mistakes in writing and speech. We also ignore cultural differences. When

they give examples, we accept them all if those examples are related to their duties for that book.

Is there anything you did or would have done differently with this particular group of students?

Two years ago, I had reading circle classes and I gave them quizzes for the books selected that year. I found those quizzes from the publishers' internet page.

Also, I wrote words from that day's chapters on different pieces of small papers and they selected the word and make a sentence including information from the story.

What did you learn about this group of students with regard to the literature selection that you did not know before literature circle session?

They like comparing their culture with other cultures. If you do something competitive they enjoy it more.

What advice do you have for instructors who will use the literature circle technique for the first time?

Choose your books one stage lower than your students' level. Your second book may be suitable for their level.

8. CURRICULUM VITAE

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