



LITERATURE CIRCLES IN READING CLASS: STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION AND PERCEPTION

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ABSTRACT

Literature circles are methods to teach reading that aim to bring an enjoyable atmosphere to the class. It refers to a group of students who read the same book and discuss what they have read, with different roles being assigned to each member. It is believed that literature circles can promote the students' interest and help them get better reading comprehension. Therefore, literature circles are suitable to be implemented in reading classes in higher education. This study aims to investigate the students' participation and perception towards literature circles in reading class. The research was conducted in reading classes of D3 and D4 English Study Programs of Business Administration Department, State Polytechnic of Malang. The research participants were two classes consisting of 50 students. Questionnaires were used to collect data from the respondents. The data was then analysed using the descriptive quantitative method. The finding shows that the students actively participated in the literature circles and positively perceived it.

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ABSTRAK

Literature circle merupakan salah satu metode pengajaran Reading yang bertujuan menciptakan suasana membaca yang menyenangkan di kelas. *Literature circle* merupakan sebuah aktivitas di mana mahasiswa membentuk grup untuk membaca buku yang sama dan mendiskusikan buku tersebut sesuai dengan peran yang telah ditugaskan ke setiap anggota grup. Dalam beberapa penelitian, aktivitas *literature circle* menunjukkan hasil yang positif dalam meningkatkan minat baca dan pemahaman mahasiswa terhadap teks bacaan. Dengan demikian, *literature circle* dianggap sesuai untuk diterapkan di kelas Reading, terutama di level pendidikan tinggi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menginvestigasi partisipasi dan persepsi mahasiswa terhadap *literature circle* di kelas Reading. Penelitian ini dilaksanakan di kelas Reading D3 dan D4 Prodi Bahasa Inggris Jurusan Administrasi Niaga, Politeknik Negeri Malang. Partisipasi dalam penelitian ini terdiri dari 50 mahasiswa dari 2 kelas Reading. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui kuesioner dan dianalisis menggunakan metode deskriptif kuantitatif. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian, mahasiswa menunjukkan partisipasi aktif dalam *literature circle* serta persepsi positif terhadap aktivitas tersebut.

Kata Kunci: *Literature circle; Partisipasi; Persepsi; Reading*

INTRODUCTION

Reading is an essential skill that non-native speaking (NNS) learners or EFL students need to master, especially at the higher education level. Reading in the EFL class is one of the most important academic skills that enable students to learn new information about the subject and make interpretations with different perceptions. Reading is the means that allows them to synthesize and evaluate the information and also practice the higher-order thinking skills (HOTS). Reading facilitates the students to improve language proficiency or learn more about the subject matter.

However, despite the importance of reading, throughout the country, many English teachers are wrestling with the issue of why students lack the skills necessary to comprehend English texts. Many teachers struggle to have their students actually read the text. On the other side, most English language learners

describe reading as a tedious or demanding activity. The class's reading activity is mainly held by repeatedly reading long and dry academic texts without adapting them years after years. It requires students to finish the task assigned by the teacher and discuss it together. Since many students find reading a tedious activity, it will make them unmotivated to read. It may be the biggest reason why students are no longer reading the texts teachers assign. It is no wonder if the reading score will not be as good as teachers have previously expected and targeted at the end of the semester.

To make reading more exciting and practical, the first thing a reader must do is to read what they love. Literature works such as a novel, or short story will be exciting texts to read. They will give the best experience with enjoyment to gain a general understanding of what the readers read and offer authentic text that enables them to master the target language. Moreover, reading and analyzing literature is widely used to improve the students' level of English proficiency because it provides them with knowledge of the language itself and the culture of the English-speaking world.

Literature circles are learner-centered teaching methods that incorporate collaborative learning and independent reading, which must be included in current teaching concepts. It refers to a discussion group who read the same book, share their understanding, and discuss the text according to their roles. Every student has a role in the discussion, such as a leader, a summarizer, a connector, etc. This method is believed to develop reading skills in understanding the text and fostering students' interest in reading. Above all, teachers have too much power in reading class: choose the text, design the course, and give test or exam. By implementing literature circles, teachers may bring the power back to students to independently choose, organize, and assess their progress.

Many studies have shown that literature circles in the classroom gave students a particular benefit. A study conducted by Coccia (2015) shows that literature can improve comprehension of the text through peer discussions to hold students accountable for their learning and understanding of the text at hand. Noah (2018) also states that students had good perceptions of the literature circle as an activity. It helped them gain more understanding of the literature component instead of the usual chalk and talk method. Other than that, literature circles help sharpen the students' four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking and generate confidence in presenting their ideas to a group.

Literature circles were implemented in this study to address the lack of students' interest in reading and improve English proficiency. Therefore, this study investigates the students' participation and perception towards reading as a result of the implementation of literature circles in the class. Personal responses are valuable resources to evaluate the implementation of the literature circles.

A study conducted by Central Connecticut University in 2016 revealed that Indonesia ranked 60th out of 61 countries in reading interest. The study shows that reading has not been a cultural habit among Indonesians despite the available infrastructure and reading access.

Similarly, when asked about how many books they have read or how often they usually read, many students responded that they have read a handful of books and said that reading is not part of their habit. Indeed, reading can be tedious, especially

when students are involved in a repetitive reading activity. With this fact, it is deemed necessary to promote an exciting activity to encourage students to read more, not because it is an order or assignment but because it can be a fun activity.

Stout (2018) attempted to use literature circles to create an enjoyable reading atmosphere, which encourages lifelong reading and develops students' Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). Stout (2018) incorporated literature circles in his English Integrated skills course to teach EFL students in a university in Japan. Using a fiction text, students were assigned different roles, including a Word Tracker, a Profiler, a Fact Finder, and a Chief Detective. The students' English level varied greatly from A2 to B2 level, although the majority was in B2 or intermediate levels. Learners in this level require support to complete the assignment, and therefore collaborative learning using this activity is useful (Graham-Marr & Pellowe, 2016). Indeed, working in groups during a reading task is beneficial for students because they can assist each other in understanding both the task and the assignment. This is in line with finding a recent study on group reading by Hamdani (2020), which revealed that the students comprehend the reading text well when they shared ideas among the group members and helped each other while completing the reading task.

Previously, Subandini (2012) investigated the implementation of Literature Circle in Indonesian language classes. The class used a historical fiction book, and the students worked in groups. Each had different roles, such as a Facilitator, a Summarizer, a Connector, an Illustrator, and a Vocabulary Enricher. Following the discussion during Literature Circle, each student was required to make a speech about a specific event & the characters in the book. Through this activity, students improved their speaking skills through discussion & speech performance. The subsequent research in the following years also shows positive results and suggests that Literature Circle is effective for students' language acquisition (Graham-Marr, 2015; Maher, 2013a; Maher, 2013b).

As a means of group discussion, literature circles adopt both a communicative approach and task-based language teaching in that it allows students to interact with other students in completing the task. In terms of reading, literature circles focus primarily on students' roles rather than the teacher or text. Also, instead of being the center of the activity, the teacher acts as a facilitator to assist the students in the discussion (Stout, 2018). The teacher can also provide feedback for each role after the literature circle so the students know what worked well and what could be improved in their performance, or whether or not they performed the roles based on the role sheet. Aisyah and Wicaksono (2020) argued that teachers' feedback makes the students more active during the learning process.

With different roles assigned to each student, it will give each member of the discussion a clearly laid out reason to read (Shelton-strong, 2012). Interestingly, the roles assigned in literature circles can be modified or adapted based on student needs and context. Other roles can include a Discussion leader, a Summarizer, a Word Master, a Connector, a Culture Collector, and a Passage Person (Daniels, 2002; Furr, 2004; Kevin Maher, 2015; Shelton-strong, 2012), which will be adopted in this current study.

Perception is an essential factor capable of influencing how people respond to a particular condition as it will be a summary assessment of an object of thinking (Bohner & Wänke, 2002). In the learning context, students' perceptions affect

attitudes that can trigger behavioral changes in the classroom (Bohner & Wänke, 2002). More importantly, the way students perceive classroom instruction influences their motivation (Sweet et al., 1996). Indeed, it is paramount that students have positive perceptions toward their own learning as it affects their learning motivation, which likely improves their achievement.

Subandini (2012) identified students' perception of the literature circle through journal books, in which the students jotted down their feelings and opinions about the literature circle activity. Following the journal entry, the students were interviewed and asked about what they had written. Both the journal entry and interview results showed that the students enjoyed the literature circle since the activity allowed them to express their opinion and at the same time learn from others. Besides, the students mentioned that they could understand the reading materials more easily and became more curious learners. It is supported by Stout (2018), who states that through discussion in literature circles, students see the text from different perspectives and even learn to comprehend a difficult text, even though the text might be above their current levels.

In line with previous findings, a study conducted by Noah (2018) found that students displayed positive reactions to literature circles as they were able to learn in an enjoyable situation and share their ideas and opinions freely. In this study, the students were involved in three literature circles throughout the semester. At the beginning of the activity, it was observed that students only showed lower-order thinking skills (LOTS). However, as they progressed to the following literature circle, they showed significant improvement in their learning and displayed higher-order thinking skills (HOTS).

The previous studies mentioned above revealed that most students positively perceive literature circles in their language classes. Both Subandini (2012) and Noah (2018) used a personal journal to elicit student responses, resulting in positive reactions among students. Stout (2018) also mentioned positive behavior in students who engaged in collaborative learning during the literature circle.

Literature circles have been conducted in various ways, adopting different roles and methods to best suit different needs and settings. Within this present study, the literature circle is conducted by adapting previous studies and best practices. Among others are Daniels (2002), Schoonmaker (2014), and Stout (2018).

The literature circle provides students with freedom and flexibility. For instance, students can make their own groups, decide their own roles, and choose a book they like to read. This way, students will be more motivated to read and discuss it later with their group. In this case, the literature circle combines independent and collaborative tasks (Daniels, 2002; Schoonmaker, 2014). First, they read independently while keeping a record of their reading progress and completing a role sheet. After that, they discuss what they have read and analyzed together with their group. Keeping a record of their reading progress provides them with a guide for their reading and discussion to be more familiar with their roles and more responsible for their reading task (Stout, 2018).

The use of online resources and activities also adds to the benefit of the literature circle. Schoonmaker (2014) used online reading circle activities and interactions and suggest that the use of technology in the literature circle "provides

a boost to learner agency." In this current study, the literature circle is conducted online by adopting both synchronous and asynchronous learning. The former is used by the students to exchange information, monitor their own reading progress, or even ask questions about their book or reading. On the other hand, the latter is where they discuss and "showcase" their analysis based on the assigned role. This way, students have autonomy in their learning and, at the same time, benefit from working collaboratively with their peers, which can increase their motivation for second language reading (Grabe, 2009).

With students becoming agents- the ones with the most active role- teachers mainly act as facilitators during the literature circle. The teacher facilitates the discussion and not teaches specific material or skills (Daniels, 2002). This role "assignment" allows the students to have more autonomy but, at the same time, get scaffolding, which resonates with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development or ZPD (Maher, 2015).

Although this is a more independent activity, the evaluation remains vital. Teachers and students are both responsible for the evaluation. The teacher evaluates through observation during the discussion activity. At the same time, the students carry out a self-evaluation at the end of the activities. Involving the students in the evaluation encourages them to be more responsible for their learning and allows them to think, write, and talk evaluatively about their goals, roles, experiences, and performances in the literature circle (Daniels, 2002).

The graph below highlights the essential facets of this literature circle discussed above.

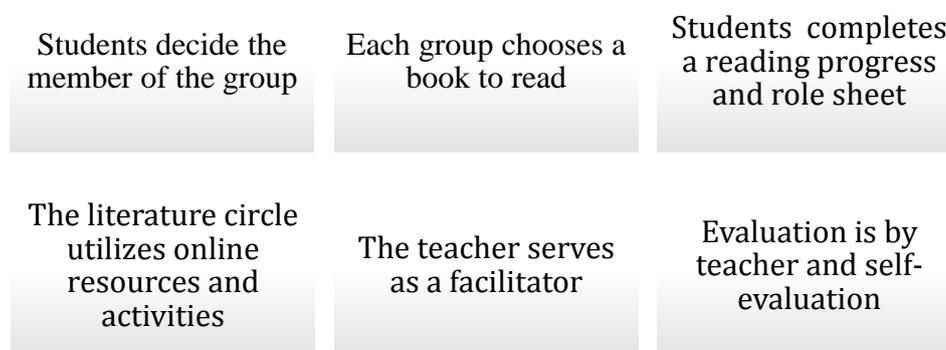


Figure 1. Essential Facets of the Literature Circle

METHOD

This study aims to identify the students' perception towards literature circles in reading class. To achieve this goal, this study used descriptive quantitative research because it tried to describe the students' perception toward the implementation of Literature Circle in Reading class. Below is the research design of this study.

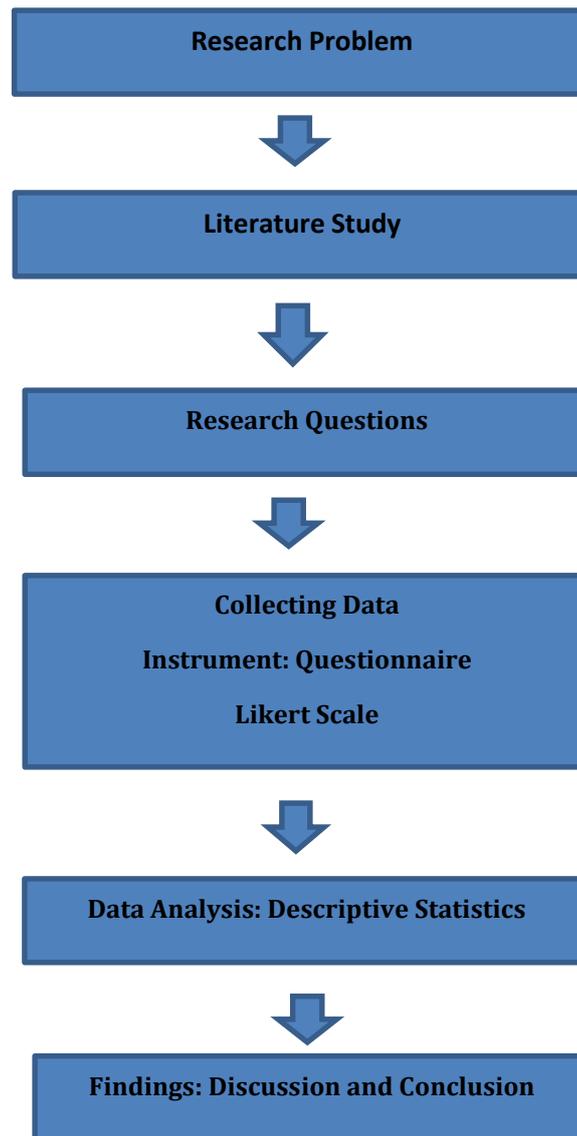


Figure 2. Research Design

The research was conducted at the English Department of State Polytechnic of Malang. The particular class chosen for this research was two classes, one class from D3 of the English department, while another class was from D4 of the English Department. The total number of participants involved in this research was 50 students.

This research had initially had 3 data instruments, an observation checklist, questionnaire, and interview. However, the researchers changed the plan and decided to use one instrument only (questionnaire) due to Covid-19. It was based on some considerations, such as the limitation of time and place to conduct the meeting in the actual class, so the meeting was finally transformed into an online class.

The questionnaire was used to gather a general view from the students regarding some aspects of the literature circle. It is a mixed-type questionnaire that consists of 20 closed questions and four open questions to get in-depth answers from respondents. The closed questionnaire contains some statements about students' perception toward Literature Circle start from the beginning until the meeting. It uses a Likert scale, ranging from 4 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Meanwhile, the closed questionnaire contains some questions asking more detailed information about some statements before. The respondents could answer in short answer or essay.

This research was conducted using mixed methods in two phases. First, quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire survey to explore various students' perceptions of the literature circles' implementation in their language classrooms. To distribute a questionnaire in the main study, *Google Forms* presented multiple ways of sharing the actual form. The simplest way was to provide a link to the participants. The researcher copied the link provided and pasted it where the participants would be able to access it (e.g., email, *LMS*, *WhatsApp*, etc.). The responses were then immediately documented into a spreadsheet.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data by describing data without making a generalization. The data were presented in the form of a table, graphic, and pie chart. Mean and percentages were used to analyze the data of the participants. The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed by Microsoft Office Excel. The responses to the researcher's survey were automatically collected by *Google Forms* with real-time response information and chart and then analyzed using Microsoft Office Excel.

FINDINGS

The literature circle meeting was held in two classes, namely in class D3 English Program and D4 English for Business Communication and professional in Business Administration Department. Due to Covid 19, all campuses were required to apply long-distance learning, so the learning process was conducted online. Clearly, the pandemic affected the implementation of the research. The literature circle meeting was conducted through a Zoom meeting. Zoom meeting is an online video conference for meetings that has a host and participants. Every student installed a Zoom meeting application and joined the room with a link provided by the lecturer.

Before the meeting, the lecturer explained to the students about literature circles and students' roles and motivated them to participate in that activity. First of all, the students were grouped into 4-5 groups in each class. They were given a chance to choose their own book and consult the lectures. The students had one month to finish reading the book. Every student had a role in the discussion, and they took part in the discussion based on their role. Some groups decided and chose their roles, but there were some groups who made a lottery to choose their role to make it fair. There were 6-7 roles in one group, depending on the number of students. The roles were discussion leader, summarizer, passage person, connector, culture collector, word master, and illustrator. The students were asked to fill the role sheet in their group and submit it after the discussion ended.

At the end of the discussion, the students filled out the questionnaire

distributed through a google form. The questionnaire was distributed and filled out by 49 students consisting of 28 students from D3 and 21 students from D4. The results of the questionnaire are shown below.

Students' Preparation

Before having literature circles, students need to do some preparation. They had to read the novel based on pages assigned by lectures. A role sheet must be accomplished as well while reading the novel. They also kept a note of their reading progress. To find out how much their preparation, the questionnaire was distributed. There are four statements that can be used as an indicator of students' preparedness. The following is the result of students' responses related to their preparation for literature circles.

Table 1. Students' Preparation for Literature Circle

Statement	Response			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I was well prepared for literature circle.		4.1%	46.9%	49%
2. I read the assigned pages thoroughly.		4.1%	49%	46.9%
3. I completed the literature circle role sheets on time	4.1%	4.1%	8.2%	83.7%
4. I kept a note of my reading progress.		8.2%	32.7%	59.2%

The table shows some statements asking about students' preparation in literature circles before having a literature circles discussion. About 47% of students agree, and 49% strongly agree that they are already well prepared for literature circles. Most students stated that they read the novel's pages thoroughly (49% of students agree, and 46.9 % strongly agree).

The student preparation was also shown from how they used the time to complete the role sheet, in which the majority (83.7%) said that they completed it on time before the discussion. While reading, 59.2% of students kept a note for their reading progress. From the four statements in the questioner, it can be concluded that most of all students have a good preparation before having literature circles. They completed reading the novel and the role sheets and always managed their reading progress.

Student's Participation

After having preparation, the students must perform in literature circles discussion. Students' participation is significant in literature circles; students should actively participate in literature circles to make the discussion run well. Every student should perform their role in the discussion and be actively involved in the discussion. The following is the students' response related to their participation in the literature circles.

Table 2. Students' Participation in Literature Circle

Statement	Response			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I shared my ideas and offered my suggestions	4.1%	18.4%	49%	28.6%
2. I answered others' questions confidently.	4.1%	14.3%	46.9%	34.7%
3. I encouraged others to participate and respond to my explanation	4.1%	16.3%	51%	28.6%
4. I remained on topic and helped the group stay focused.	6.1%	26.5%	36.7%	30.6%
5. I listened to others courteously and effectively	2%	6.1%	18.4%	73.5%
6. I summarized or repeated my ideas when necessary.	2%	12.2%	51%	34.7%
7. I performed my role well based on the instructions on the role sheet	2%	8.2%	34.7%	55.1%

From table 4.2, it can be seen that most of the students took part in the literature circle meeting. 49% of students agreed that they shared ideas, and about 46.9% of students answered questions asked by their friends. Students also encourage the other friends to participate (51 %). When the literature circle was running, 73.5% of students listened to others carefully. 51% of students also summarized their ideas when presenting their role, and 55% of students performed the role well based on the instruction and job description. From the findings, it can be concluded that students thought they had good involvement in the meeting.

Students' Perception

Most of the students believed that the literature circle is good for some reasons, especially in reading skills. The following is the result of the questionnaire.

From table 3, it was about 46.9% of students agreed and 49% of students Strongly Agreed that they already know about literature circles, and 67.3% of students understood different roles in the literature circle. They were motivated to read the book to perform in literature circles (53% Strongly Agreed). About 53.1% (strongly agree) of students believed that the literature circle improved their reading fluency and vocabulary mastery. It can be summarized that most students give a positive perception toward literature circles.

	Statement	Response			
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	I know what literature circle is		4.1%	46.9%	49%
2.	I understand different roles used in literature circle	2%	6.1%	24.5%	67.3%
3.	I am motivated to read my book to prepare for the literature circle		10.2%	36.7%	53.1%
4.	I like discussing books and characters with my peers through literature		10.2%	49%	40.8%
5.	I learn better when I am engaged in a literature circle.		10.2%	55.1%	34.7%
6.	Literature circle improves my reading comprehension skill (the ability to understand what you are reading)	2%	2%	34.7%	61.2%
7.	Literature circle gives me the opportunity to develop reading fluency (the ability to read a text accurately and quickly)	2%	4.1%	40.8%	53.1%
8.	Literature circle can improve my vocabulary mastery	2%	4.1%	26.5%	67.3%
9.	Literature circle is challenging but fun	4.1%	8.2%	57.1%	30.6%

Table 3. Students' Perception toward Literature Circle

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, it is clear that students showed active participation and positive perceptions towards literature circles. It can be seen from their preparedness before presenting their roles in the literature circle, including the motivation to complete the role sheet on time and preparing a note to record their reading progress. There is no doubt that one perception influences how he carries out the task and completes the assignment (Bohner & Wänke, 2002; Sweet et al., 1996). The same case applies in this literature circle. When students have positive perceptions toward the literature circle, they manage to finish the task well and prepare the subsequent related task enjoyably. Also, and perhaps more importantly, when students perceive the task positively, they feel confident about their ability to complete the task successfully. In the case of this current study, the participants confessed that they managed to learn better, improve their comprehension skills, develop their reading fluency and improve their vocabulary mastery through literature circle. Evidently, learners who are involved in the literature circle often outperform those who read in the traditional method in terms of text comprehension (Thomas & Kim, 2019).

Surprisingly, the students' positive perception and high motivation to complete the reading task and join in the literature circles greatly impact their teamwork. Some of them mentioned that they were held accountable for how the literature circle worked, and therefore actively participated in the discussion and at the same time encouraged others to do the same. This is in line with Graham-Marr and Pellowe (2016) and Stout (2018), who mentioned that collaborative work is useful to optimize student learning and increase motivation. Indeed, the students appreciated the group work during the literature circle. Most students felt motivated to read books because they would discuss them with others. Besides, they enjoyed learning with their peers because they learned better. They believed they improved their reading skill and confidence by discussing what they read with others, which resonates with Shelton-Strong (2012). It is confirmed in a more recent study by Thomas and Kim (2019), which revealed that participation in a literature circle helped the participants comprehend the text better and build a connection with the assigned text as they were involved in group discussion and shared opinion with others.

Assigning roles to students is also a contributing factor that creates a positive atmosphere during the literature circle. The majority of participants mentioned that they were motivated to read because they have a specific role assigned to them. Besides, learners feel empowered and have a clear focus on what they do when they take roles (Widodo, 2015). Different roles assigned to each student also provide an opportunity for the students to be an expert on what they have read, which was evident in how the students prepared for their role and performed it well during the literature circle. It seems to be one of the motivating factors. The students had positive perceptions toward the literature circles because of their responsibility through different roles and the novelty of the activity (Stout, 2018; Subandini, 2012; Widodo, 2015).

CONCLUSION

The results of the study show that most of the students had positive perceptions toward literature circles. The perception was also displayed from their preparedness before performing in the online literature circle with their groups. Most of the participants also felt satisfied with their role & involvement in the literature circle.

The study on the literature circle method in teaching brings positive results. Thus, the English Study Program of Business Administration Department State Polytechnic of Malang can integrate this technique of using literature circles in the RPS (Semester Teaching Plan), especially for intermediate or advanced reading classes. The results bring some insight into English learning in State Polytechnic of Malang, not only for English Study Program but also for other departments because this new method has proven effective in getting students into the reading habit.

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