UTILIZING LITERATURE CIRCLES STRATEGY TO DEVELOP EFL CRITICAL READING COMPREHENSION LEVEL OF THE SECONDARY STAGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The present study developed EFL critical reading comprehension level of sixty students of Al-Azhar first-year secondary institute students. A critical reading comprehension questionnaire was designed and juried. The EFL critical reading skills test was juried and administered. Participants were divided into two groups; a quasi-experimental group and a control group (thirty participants of each one) was chosen. The material based on literature circles to develop the critical reading level of the experimental group was designed and administered in the first term of the academic year (2020/2021) and lasted for ten weeks with one session per week. On the other hand, participants of the control group received the regular instruction. Results of the study revealed that the experimental group exceeded the control group in the post-administration of the instruments.

Keywords: Literature Circles Strategy, the EFL critical reading comprehension levels, Egypt.

I. INTRODUCTION

Critical reading (CR) as a pointer of critical thinking has become an effective skill in EFL learning. In an academic setting, many school students are not yet educated to read critically. Contextually, CR can affect the Readers complete academic progress (Wilson, 2016).

CR comprises learners’ energetic practices to think profoundly by situating various skills. Mainly, CR activities are practiced to determine main ideas of a selection, propose a conclusion, attach the information, conjecture its purpose, scrutinize arguments, find different points of view and evaluate ideas (Flemming, 2012).

Subsequently, a critical reader needs the ability to outline arguments accurately of the text, categorizes claims, determines specified or indirect assumptions, analyzes and gauges accurateness of reasoning. Also, he/she explains, analyzes and evaluates the aim or consequences of exploiting a certain fact or a source of information. Equally important, a critical reader gathers evidences and uses them in testing mistaken assumptions and evaluates them through criteria to state their quality (Barnet & Bedau, 2011).

CR makes readers more dynamic in grasping meanings of the writer’s aim via evaluating his assumptions and viewpoints. A critical reader can judge whether to track, reject, believe or trust views or ideas inserted by the writers (Hujiie, 2010, p. 53).

For teaching CR skills, teachers must have information in text selections and utilize appropriate strategies and preparations of functional teaching and learning process. Contextually, they should identify CR skills themselves and hold abilities to detect the writer’s purpose precisely (Greiff, Niepel&Wustenberg, 2015).

Findings of previous studies have detected that CR skills need much practice to be enhanced. Puteh, Zin& Ismail (2016) yielded that readers’ capacity to reflect and evaluate a script was lower than their capacity to access, retrieve, integrate and understand it. This weakness in CR skills designates that the readers struggled to grasp the
texts at higher levels. In the same point, findings by Karadag (2014) revealed that pre-service secondary school instructors believed that they were not critical readers with little confidence to practice CR skills.

The literature circles strategy (LCs) is consistent with sociocultural theory that based on the idea of involving students in the community and the world around them. To this theory, participants constantly interact with the people and the culture around them. LCs are substantial for them to learn new things from plenty of resources (Pei, 2018).

One way is that students demand to learn from real-life settings that happen around them. They also learn from their every day communications and comprehend their peers within their classroom. This theory introduces a culturally concentrated analysis of participation in daily life, in both formal/informal situations (Larson & Marsh, 2005). LCs can facilitate developing a successful group. They are used inside classrooms among small groups based on participants’ interest in literature and use them at home by exploiting learned strategies at the school settings (Greef, 2002).

Harvey Daniels, the inventor of the LCs, discussed the importance of their roles and how to use them with sessions. When the participants begin to use LCs, it is significant to use the roles stated to them with the organization. After a period of using them, the participants will be capable of interacting and exploiting them to their advantage, so can utilize them promote reading comprehension (Casey, 2008).

Bales (2021) capitalized that exploiting a chart to map out Readers LCs is a proper structure used in meeting times. For benefits, participants can work together and this asserts how they can work in groups. The study of Berne & Clark (2008) showed the reading comprehension strategies can be, by participants, gained while participating in LCs.

**Context of the problem**

To pinpoint the problem, several studies about reading comprehension level by El-Sayed (1998), Solyman (1999), El-Sherbiny (2007) and concluded that there was weakness among different students and grades in Egypt. Concerning critical reading comprehension level of Al-Azhar secondary institute students, many researchers such as; Abd El Barry (2012) & Hamed (2016) asserted that they faced weakness and needed intervention to tackle this problem.

In the same context, a pilot study was executed to validate the problem of the first-year secondary institute participants. Results revealed that the samples’ scores were below fifty percent. So, Al-Azhar first-year secondary institute students needed a remedy to improve critical reading comprehension level.

**Statement of the Problem**

Based on the results of the previously mentioned literature and studies, Al-Azhar first-year secondary institute students needed more enhancements in their critical reading comprehension level to be able to understand the prescribed texts presented to them. Therefore, the present study enhanced through literature circles strategy.

**Questions of the study**

For tackling this problem, the present study answered the following main questions:

What is the effectiveness of the literature circles strategy to develop critical reading comprehension level of Al-Azhar first-year secondary institute students?

The following sub-questions were derived from the main question:

- What is the critical reading comprehension level necessary for Al-Azhar first-year secondary institute students?

- What is the effect of the literature circle on developing critical reading comprehension level?

**Purpose of the study**

This study aimed at developing critical reading comprehension level of Al-Azhar first-year secondary institute students.

**Significance of the study**

The results of the study would be beneficial for:
-Raising the number of secondary students to understand critical reading texts.
-The study would encourage teachers to allocate class activities to help student’s critical reading.
-To advantage from introducing the strategy in secondary stage EFL courses.
-Paving the way for other studies in the field of teaching reading.

**Delimitations of the study**
The present study was delimited to:

- Some critical reading comprehension skills.
- A sample of Al-Azhar first-year secondary institute students.
- The prescribed book of “Hello English! for First Year Secondary School Students.”

**Results of critical reading studies**
- The experimental group outclassed the control one in the post-test of critical reading comprehension test.
- The post administration surpassed the pre one in the means scores of critical reading comprehension test.
- The literature circles strategy had an effective impact on improving Al-Azhar first-year secondary institute students’ critical reading.

**Interpretation of results**
Results of the current study matched those of the previous studies of García (2008) utilized systemic functional linguistics of a content-based English course. In the same vein, Mosleh (2019) asserted that elicitation techniques vs. creative inquiry had a sizable impact in developing EFL CR comprehension.

II. CONCLUSION
The following items were concluded;

- The current study provided an evidence that critical reading comprehension level can be enhanced among secondary institute participants through the literature circles strategy.

- The participants produced many ideas created for the problem and had the capability to realize the problem and share in the solution.

- The study highlighted key findings to develop instructional materials.

- The electronic aids furnished a context for more ideas to teach EFL participants main skills.

- Electronic devices utilized in the program bridged the gap between the participants and the critical reading.

- LCs presented a unique opportunity to combine a wide range of effective instructional practices in one activity, integrating group discussion, scaffolding, collaborative learning, critical thinking, authentic assessment, and constructivism all in one seem less bundle.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS
Based on the previous results, the recent study recommended the following: --Reading comprehension levels should receive suitable attention to be developed in all stages.

- Electronic devices should be integrated in the curriculum and in classroom practices.

- Engaging participants in designing lessons facilitated learning and administering the lessons.

- Teachers should be qualified to use different devices in teaching and testing.
Suggestions for further research

The present study suggested the following researches:

- Using suggested programs in developing other language skills.
- Administering suggested programs in teaching other areas in primary, preparatory and secondary stages.
- Utilizing online dictionaries to enhance EFL speaking and listening skills.
- Using a program of literature circles to enhance linguistic literacy skills at different levels of education.

REFERENCES