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透過線上文學討論提昇閱讀興趣

中文摘要

　　青少年與孩童閱讀能力的退步是全球教育人士皆憂心的議題。台灣教育長期追蹤資料庫(TEPS, 2004)研究數據指出百分之 44 的台灣中學生鮮少從事課外閱讀。教導學生閱讀、寫作、以及批判性思考顯然成為 21 世紀最重要的挑戰之一。像是在 1999 年由愛沙尼亞及芬蘭的老師們所聯合舉辦的會議中，"克服學生閱讀困難"成為探討焦點。另外在美國 2001 年"沒有落後的孩子法案"中"閱讀優先法案"成為核心議題。近來，以文學做為語言教學的媒介有復甦的景象。雖然學界對於如何在語言教室中使用文學看法不一，但文學小圈圈 (literature circles，以下簡稱 LC) 的模式逐漸地被認定為最有效的教學方法之一。LC 這項教學法首重"同儕間的合作討論" (Egbert & Simich-Duggeon, 2001, p. 23)，這不僅是 LC 的精髓，它還有促進提昇 ESL/EFL 學生口語溝通能力的好處。

　　有鑑於 LC 在 ESL 學生身上展現的語言學習成效(Buttaro, 2002; Heton, 2003)，本研究將首度結合 LC 與線上討論(on-line Discussion Board)，讓學英語為外國語(EFL)的本國大學生藉由扮演不同的角色，進入並暢遊這個網際網路的"虛擬的文學小圈圈"(Virtual literature circles，以下簡稱 VLC)。在這個虛擬的網路空間裡，學生將扮演由 Daniels(1994)研究中所發展出的下列各種角色：主持人、延伸者、字彙專家、內容闡述者、以及圖示者。這麼一來，比起 LC，VLC 更能提昇學生的閱讀動機與興趣，因為此學習環境迎合了時下 E 世代青少年的資訊吸收習慣。

　　因此，根據研究目的，本研究待答的問題如下：

1. VLC 在增進學生的閱讀興趣方面效果為何？
2. VLC 在改善學生閱讀能力方面的效果為何？VLC 在提昇學生的整體英文能力效果為何？
3. 學生對於虛擬文學小圈圈的觀感為何？
4. VLC 在哪些方面可支援學生於文學討論中做研討及互動？

　　為評估 VLC 的成效以及瞭解，研究者將同時採用質性與量化的方法蒐集資料。對於學生的閱讀興趣、整體英語能力、以及閱讀理解力將施予前測與後側，然後分析測驗結果。

關鍵詞: 英語教學，文學小圈圈，文學討論，線上討論，閱讀教學

A Novel Idea: Cultivating Reading Interest through Virtual Literature Circles

Abstracts

Declining in reading abilities among youngsters concerns educators worldwide. The statistics published by the Taiwan Education Panel Survey (TEPS. 2004) revealed that 44 percents of Taiwanese high school students hardly spend any of their leisure time reading.   Teaching students to read, write, and think critically absolutely becomes one of the 2000's challenges. For instance, the theme of the 1999 joint conference by Estonian and Finn teachers featured 'Overcoming Students' Reading Difficulties'. In America, 'Reading First Legislation' constituted major part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in utilizing literature for language teaching. While debates are still going on about how to use literature in language classes, literature circles (LC) have increasingly been recognized as one of the most effective tools. The merits of LC in second language learning operate from the premise that "collaborative discussions with peers" (Egbert & Simich-Duggeon, 2001, p. 23), which are the essence of LC, could facilitate ESL/EFL students' use of English in a variety of real-life communications.

In lights of the positive results of using LC with ESL students (Buttaro, 2002; Heton, 2003), this project integrates LC with an on-line Discussion Board where EFL college students will meet and gain entrée to the virtual literature circles (VLC) through their roles. Students will adopt the role sheet developed by Daniels (1994), and which consists of discussion director, summarizer, vocabulary enricher, connector, and illustrator. In this way, VLC could promote reading motivation and interests through a learning medium which is more compatible with intended learners' information-acquiring mode.

The current study aims to answer the following research questions:

1.   Are there any changes in students' reading attitudes after taking part in Virtual Literature Circles for a year?

2.   Are there any changes in students' English reading comprehension after taking part in Virtual Literature Circles for a year?   Are there any changes in students' general English proficiency after taking part in Virtual Literature Circles for a year?

3.   What are the students' perceptions of incorporating Virtual Literature Circles into their English learning?

4.   In what ways, participation in Virtual Literature Circle affects students' discussion and interaction with one another in the literary discussion?

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to evaluate the effectiveness of VLC and to gain insights into participants' perceptions of reading, VLCs, and themselves as readers. Pre- and post-testing results on reading interests, overall

English proficiency, and English reading comprehension were reanalyzed for statistical significance.

Key words: EFL, literature circles, on-line discussion, literary discussion, reading instruction

A Novel Idea: Cultivating Reading Interest through Virtual Literature Circles

Introduction

Declines in reading interest and abilities among young adults concerned educators worldwide. Major concerns about declined reading abilities range from the inability to think critically, lack of insights, and struggle with abstract reasoning, exhibited by many young adults brought up in a digital era. Teaching students to read, to write, and to think critically absolutely becomes one of the 2000's challenges. Around the world, a number of initiates have been devoted into revitalizing this very fundamental ability. For instance, the theme of the 1999 joint conference by Estonian and Finn teachers featured 'Overcoming Students' Reading Difficulties'. In America, 'Reading First Legislation' constituted the major part of *No Child Left behind Act* of 2001. In Taiwan, from 2005, *Focus 300* – a plan to promote children's reading habit was introduced to 300 elementary schools lacking educational resources.

Why has the subject of revitalizing reading ability suddenly swelled in the circle of education worldwide? I believe the primary answer has to do with the spread of information technology. The impacts of information technology upon youngster's reading abilities are soaring as computers and other digital technologies have been gradually pervading our schools and classrooms. According to the recent statistics published by Taiwan Education Panel Survey (TEPS, 2004), forty-four percents of Taiwanese high school students hardly spent any of their leisure time reading. Twenty-five percents of them spent less than an hour per week reading; nineteen percents spend one to two hours in reading activities; only two percents of the population read for 4 to 6 hours per week. Despite the fact that Taiwan Minister of Education has endeavored earnestly to promote reading, the decline in reading interests still prevails among Taiwanese youngsters. If reading wasn't the adolescents' pastime of choice any more, then what takes up the most of their leisure time? The 2004 survey (TEPS) investigating secondary students' uses of computers reveals that 20.90% of the high school population seldom or did not use computer daily while 53.3% of them spend at least one hour each day using computer.

Not surprisingly, the Taiwanese youth's declined reading interest also affect their English reading proficiency, as reflected in their downswing reading comprehension test scores. For instance, from 1998-2003, Sims (2004) examined the English language proficiency of 3000 incoming freshmen to Tunghai University by comparing the mean scores of the Tunghai English Placement Exam. A consistent tendency was found that the freshmen's reading comprehension has dropped whereas their listening comprehension and grammatical awareness has improved over years. In addition,

Lin (2001) analyzed English proficiency of students at the Mei Ho Institute of Technology and found that the students in both two-year junior college and five-year college programs all performed better in oral and written English, but less satisfactory in reading comprehension.   Therefore, how to prevent the already decreased reading ability from slopping downwards becomes apparent.

In light of the drastic decline in reading engagement compounded with the substantial decrease in reading abilities among Taiwanese adolescents, the researcher decided to use the very technological means that dominated the youngsters' leisure time to rejuvenate their reading interest and enhance their English reading proficiency. It is also hoped that the enhanced reading interest in English will be transferred to reading in Chinese.

For the purpose of motivating students' reading interest and facilitating students' development of English reading proficiency, English reading researchers have been seeking various strategies, tools and techniques.   In quest of useful educational tools, the values of incorporating literature in English as foreign language classroom have been recognized and the idea of literature circles initially introduced by Harvey Daniel (1994) has been widely adopted and administered.   For example, both researchers in the language arts classroom (Hu, 2003; Lin, 2002; King, 2001; Gilbert, 2000; Alwood 2000; Pitman, 1997; Noll, 1994) and in English as a second language classroom (Kim, 2004; Lin, 2002; Martine-Roldan & Lopez-Robertson, 2000; Peralta-Nash & Dutch, 2000) have systematically implemented the literature circles and investigated their potential effects.   Besides, with the increased utilization of communication technology, virtual literature circles in which students read and discuss the books via e-mails, MOOs, and online discussion board have been proven to enrich student literacy and critical thinking (Hay & Hanson, 1999 ; Thomas & Hofmeister, 2002; Pate-Moulton, Klages, Erickson, & Conforti, 2004, Wolesy, 2004). From the above studies, literature circles or virtual literature circles have proved to be one of powerful means to foster student reading interest and reading proficiency.

Recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in utilizing literature for language teaching.   While debates are still going on about how to use literature in language classes, literature circles (LC) have increasingly been recognized as one of the most effective tools.   In view of the positive results of using LC with ESL students (Buttaro, 2002; Heton, 2003), as a study of this project, the researcher piloted integrated LCs into a regular Freshman English class where 31 EFL students met on a regular basis and they gained entrée to the LC through their roles.   Students adopted the various roles developed by Harvey Daniels (1994), such as discussion leader, summarizer, vocabulary enricher, connector, and illustrator.   The results form this preliminary inquiry demonstrate encouraging remarks from the participants as well as

some halting plateau for further implementation of LCs with current EFL students. The interview data revealed that these students generally developed more positive attitudes toward reading English after participating in literature circles for three months.   Nevertheless, both the participants and the researcher sense the needs for adjustment and modification in order to rejuvenate participation interests and continue to cultivate reading interest.   Some of the dissatisfaction voiced by the participants include: used up too much of class time, interaction and exchanges of opinions are confined within the circle, retrospective thoughts can't be communicated, and some of the circle roles are inhibiting rather than facilitating.   On the basis of student feedback and the instructor (researcher)'s professional judgment, the researcher turns to the alternative form of LC, Virtual Literature Circles for further LC implementation and research.   It is believed that VLC could promote reading motivation and interests through a learning medium which is more compatible with intended learners' information-acquiring mode.

1. Are there any changes in students' reading attitudes after taking part in Virtual Literature Circles for a year?

2. Are there any changes in students' English reading comprehension after taking part in Virtual Literature Circles for a year?   Are there any changes in students' general English proficiency after taking part in Virtual Literature Circles for a year?

3. What are the students' perceptions of incorporating Virtual Literature Circles into their English learning?

4. In what ways, participation in Virtual Literature Circle affects students' discussion and interaction with one another in the literary discussion?

Review of Related Studies
In light of the literature circles' plausible effects on rejuvenating reading interest and enhance reading comprehension, the studies investigating the outcomes of incorporating literature, literature circles, and virtual literature circles into language teaching are reviewed to refine and inform the scope of current study.   It is also hoped that the findings of current study would further our understanding of virtual literature circles, particularly its application to foreign/second language teaching.

Literature in foreign/second language teaching
Reading experts have long considered literature as a meaningful tool to promote literacy.   Likewise, in the context of EFL and/or ESL, the merits of integrating literature into language instruction have been documented by different scholars (Collie & Slater, 1987; Hill, 1990; Cater & Long, 1991; Lazar, 1993; Ghosn, 1998).

The findings from prior studies indicated that there are five major reasons underlying the benefits of incorporating literature into English language teaching: 1) literature constitutes valuable authentic material for EFL learners, 2) literary work provides language enrichment, 3) literature offers cultural enrichment, 4) literature encourages interaction and 5) literature educates the whole person. By examining values in literary texts, teachers encourage learners to develop attitudes towards them. These values and attitudes relate to the world outside the classroom (Chan, 2001).

First, literature is an authentic and motivating material for it offers a variety of written materials reflecting human life affiliated with the target language (Collie & Slater, 1987; Lazar, 1993; Ghosn, 1998).　When EFL/ESL learners read literary work, they are exposed to a range of authentic use of the language.　As a result, they are able to grasp the pragmatics and the functional meaning of the target language. In addition, literature holds high status in many cultures and countries.　For this reason, students can feel a real sense of achievement at understanding a piece of highly respected literature.　Also, literature is often more interesting than the texts found in course books.

Secondly, reading and studying literature is instrucmental in developing foreign/second language learners' linguistic competences (Collie & Slater, 1987; Cater & Long, 1991; Lazar, 1993; Hill, 1990; Ghosn, 1998; Hu, 2003).　According to Collie& Slater (1987), literature helps students familiarize with individual lexical and syntactical items.　Similarly, Lazar (1993) also claimed that literature provides memorable contexts for interpreting and acquiring new language.　Of several linguistic competences, Ghosn (1998) maintained that vocabulary enrichment is one of the most beneficial results from a literature-integrated instruction.　The reason lies in the fact that students are more likely to recognize and remember the meanings of words in a contextualized literary texts.

Thirdly, literature opens an avenue to the target culture and leads students to appreciate and recognize diverse cultures (Collie & Slater, 1987; Cater & Long, 1991; Lazar, 1993; Hill, 1990; Ghosn, 1998; Hu, 2003).　Cultural knowledge including social, political, and historical events is often learned and delivered through reading literature.　For example, by reading a piece of literature, particularly, a novel and a play, readers may need to understand the historical background and how the characters are depicted under specific cultural conditions.　In other words, literature guides readers to comprehend and contextualize how members of a particular society would behave or react in a given context. Thus, by reading a piece of literary work, a language learner can readily paint a picture of what a target culture looks like.

Another benefit of incorporating literature is that reading a literary piece entices language learners' emotional awareness and educates the whole person (Collie &

Slater, 1987; Lazar, 1993; Hill, 1990; Ghosn, 1998; Hu, 2003). It is undisputable that literature often conveys multiple aspects of human experiences. By responding to the life issues embedded in the literature, students are provided with opportunities to reflect upon their own life and personal growth (Collie & Slater, 1987), which may in turn infuse them with insights to deal with real life problems.

Last but not the least, literature encourages interaction. Literary texts are often rich is multiple layers of meaning, and can be effectively mined for discussions and sharing feelings or opinions. While literature has the potential to be a tool of great use in L2 classrooms, its potential can be best realized when readers are encouraged to develop personal responses to the reading from multiple aspects and to share them in discussions. Hence, the idea of literature circle was materialized.

Literature Circles in teaching second/foreign language

Harvey Daniels (1994, 2000, and 2002) is often credited as the key person who conceptualized and materialized the idea of LC. Literature circles are literary discussion groups where participants make sense and develop understanding of a selected text through social interaction. Daniels (1994) considers the literature circle to be an effective means that foster independent reading and collaborative learning in a stimulating environment. Daniels delineates a range of roles that participants will adopt to support their literary discussions. Daniels (1994) defines his literature circle model incorporating roles as:

> *Literature circles are small, temporary discussion groups who have chosen to read the same story, poem, article, or book. While reading each group-determined portion of the text, each member prepares to take specific responsibilities in the upcoming discussion, and everyone comes to the group with notes needed to help perform that job. The circles have regular meetings, with discussion roles rotating each session. 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 reading, and move into a new cycle. Once readers can successfully conduct their own wide0ranging, self-sustaining discussions, formal discussion roles may be dropped* (p. 13).

When LC was first introduced, its primary application was into the teaching of language art and specifically into teaching reading in the first language. Literature Circles (LC) have been a prevailing pedagogical choice in North American classrooms since early eighties with the recognition that the book club that had captivated adult readers could be utilized with younger readers (Daniel, 2002).

While the growing number of scientific inquiries into the effectiveness of LCs in the language art classrooms are still in infancy, majority of them yielded promising results.   For instance, a number of studies indicated that LCs encouraged responses to literature and resulted in enhanced comprehension and cognitive development (Tierney & Teadence, 2000); increased student motivation for reading (Jewell & Pratt, 1999); and enhanced appreciation of literature (Lehman & Sharer, 1996).   Parker *et al* (1999) evaluated the program which used LC for improving at-risk students' reading comprehension and concluded with enhanced students' attitudes toward reading and increased grade-level reading comprehension.   It is also reported that cooperative learning principles underlining LCs can be used successfully with low-achieving readers and bilingual students at various grade levels (Gunning, 2002; Martinez-Roldan & Lopez-Robertson, 2000).

In recent years, language art teachers began to integrate LCs into multilevel English classes where ESL students could also have successful reading experience via the support from their teacher and peers.   The merits of LC in second language learning operate from the premise that "collaborative discussions with peers" (Egbert & Simich-Duggeon, 2001, p. 23) which are the essence of LC could facilitate ESL/EFL students' use of English in a variety of real-life communications, and most importantly LC could promote and enhance reading comprehension, motivation, and interests (Ali, 1993; Heydon, 2003; Kim, 2004; Boyd & Maloof, 2000).   Ali's (1993) study implemented reader responses with Malaysian college students studying English literature and found that students came to become more active readers and learned to enjoy aesthetic values of the text.   Since 1995, Heyton has used instructional strategies approximating LCs in her English classes to respond to the diverse needs, strengths, and interests of the ESL students.   Successive years of exploring and experiment with LCs in the L2 setting, Heyton concluded that LCs constituted one of the most effective differentiated instruction allowing students with diverse English proficiency to work toward their learning goals.   She also contested that the applications of LCs are in congruency with Flippo's (2001) recommendations on best practices for reading instructions in the following manners: 1. integrating all four skills in complementary ways; 2. maximizing students' engagement in purposeful reading and writing; 3.   encouraging students' talks on a variety of reading; 4. offering ample opportunities to read real books; 4. using silent reading whenever possible; 5. developing students' positive self-perceptions and expectations; and 6. demonstrating repetitively how reading is done (Heyton, 2003).

In addition, Kim's (2004) discourse analysis of ESL students' literature discussions shows that the enjoyable L2 reading experiences and enhanced L2 communicative competency were resulted from participating in LCs.   In her study,

students became more deeply involved in the reading through the process of responding to the text and engaging in the discussions.   The students could comprehend the text better. They experienced the pleasure of reading, which greatly contributed to further motivation. Kim (2004) also pointed out the contribution of LC to the advancement of communicative competency:

"…. in the literature circles, the students had opportunities to practice the target language by way of active social interactions…….This authentic, responsive interaction provided the students with chances to generate extended discourse, which is said to aid in the development of L2 communicative competence" (p. 163).

Review of previous research in LCs indicates that first of all, appropriate class activities and interactive strategies for facilitating LCs should be explored and investigated.   Merely establishing literature circles will not automatically realize the potential that literature discussions offer for L2 learners.   Secondly, there is a need to study the development of reading comprehension of L2 learners in literature circles. Comparing with the studies contextualized in the ESL context, the study conducted in the EFL setting was scarce.   Though the results were encouraging and promising, only one descriptive study of implementing LCs with Japanese EFL students was identified (Furr, 2003).   This indicates greater needs to incorporate LC in the EFL setting and systematically investigate its effectiveness in English learning.

Virtual Literature Circles in language teaching

In recent years, two tracks of inquiries have focused on combing LC with on-line tools.   One integrates LC with on-line Discussion Board to strength first language literacy (Thomas & Hofmeister, 2002).   Virtual Literature Circle (VLC) was first coined by Thomas & Hofmeister (2002) to combine two potentially powerful instructional tools: literature circles and on-line discussion boards.   A merge of these two aims to bring up optimal growth in literacy development.   The other track explores the features of educational multi-object-oriented (MOO)s to create a synchronous environment in which the students' on-line discussion are supported and through which the students will become active, intelligent, independent, sensitive, and perceptive 'literary readers' (Hay & Hanson, 1999; Bales, 2001).   This line of research specifically focuses on cultivating 'literary reader' from the Liberians' perspectives.   As a result, its implications are not so directly related to enhancing language skills.   Instead, implanting LC activities within a MOO virtual classroom environment contributes to the empowerment of 'literary readers' that brought about "a more deliberate and focused approach to reading, thinking, and sharing literary experiences in the digital age" (Hay & Hanson, 1999, p. 29).   However, Liou & Yang (2001, 2002) delineated several strategic applications of MOO into general EFL instruction and EFL teacher training though not specifically related to LCs.

Thomas & Hofmeister (2002) consider the virtual learning circles to be carefully designed teaching methods, practices, and strategies that "most effectively combine Learning Circles with inline message boards" (p. 3).   There are several advantages of

on-litate discussion boards to facilitate communication among students.   Its asynchronous nature allows for comments to be posted and read later and has the potential for building extended threads involving multiple interactions.   This feature is consistent with Chen's (2002) intelligent online reading lab and online tools for effective web-based or pc-based EFL learning tools at the college level.   Discussion Boards also entails greater student participation by emphasizing more on student thoughts and reflections rather than on personal performance and classroom social stigma.   At current stage, the studies examining the effectiveness of on-line discussion board interactions in literacy development are still developing. Nevertheless, the researchers are anticipating the logical potentials that the concept of VLC will fulfill in the near future as Tierney & Readence (2000) forcefully put forward following in their new reading strategy book:

> *Literature Circles lend themselves to use with technologies.   Chat rooms and threaded discussions might be adapted or incorporated with elements of Literature Circles in meaningful ways that afford discussions without need for proximity in either time or place.   Chat rooms could invite folks from around the world to discuss a text at the same time; threaded discussion could allow for extended discussions through the use of e-mail.   A powerful characteristic of these discussions might be to have a written records, so that shifts in understanding, perspectives, or contributions can be monitored* (p. 300-301).

For this project, the qualitative analysis of these sorts of written discussions will be conducted to measure the syntactic density of the literary discussions. BlackBoard™ will be able to generate the transcripts of participants' literary discussions, so that the efficacy of VLC can be gauged.

Research Method

Design

A pretest-posttest experiment group design was intended detect any difference in English reading comprehension, overall English proficiency, and reading interests. On top of quantitative methods, qualitative data will be collected to gain insight into participants' perceptions of themselves as readers, VLCs, participating in the VLCs, and various roles in the VLC (e.g. which role is more facilitating, which role is inhibiting, which role is less interesting, etc…) It is hoped that via interviews, the participants' insider view will contribute to the future implementation of VLC in the EFL context.

Research Site and Participants

Two classes of freshman English for non-major (FENM) students at Tunghai University were recruited to take part in this study.   A total of 62 students participated in the study under the guidance of their FENM instructor who is also a

primary investigator of current study. Each student participating in VLC were informed of the general purpose of the research project. After each student agreed to participate, the researcher compiled the student names and added their usernames and passwords into a BlackBoard™ website specifically developed for this research project so that students could access the Discussion Board for the Virtual Literature Circle modules.

Research Procedures

At the outset of this study, the researcher carried out several introductory lessons to help students become familiar with different roles in the literature circle. There are a wide spectrum of literature circle roles proposed by Daniel (1994, 2000, 2002) and others. At the initial stage, this project began with the following five roles which the researcher deemed to be more suitable and familiar with Taiwanese EFL students. The researcher introduced each of the roles and model its responsibility. For instance, the students were taught how to create meaningful discussion questions, how to ask pertinent questions relevant to their lives, how to choose interesting excerpts from the chapters to read-aloud, and how to present the literary text in graphic manners. In addition, a series of tutorial sessions for accessing the BlackBoard ™ were provided to teach participants to make sure they will be able to log on from their school or personal computer. The website didn't permit guest access. Once the students successfully logon, they were directed to the Small Group and Discussion Board sections of the website where the participants accessed the specific Discussion Board threads, read others' responses, and made personal comments under the assigned usernames.

Data Collection & Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to evaluate the effectiveness of VLC and to gain insights into participants' perceptions of reading, VLCs, and themselves as readers. Pre- and post-testing results on reading interests, overall English proficiency, and English reading comprehension were reanalyzed for statistical significance. To answer the first research question, the pre-and post-test results of a reading attitude survey were computed via SPSS 10.0 to see if there is any significant differences in students' reading attitude before and after the treatment. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and mean were first counted and then t-test were used to compare the means of pre-test and post-test. The significance level was set at $\alpha < 0.5$. As for the second research question, the pre-and post-test results of Tunghai English Placement Exam were recorded and analyzed by using the SPSS 10.0 for Windows to organize, compute and analyze the data. Similarly, t-test were calculated with the significance level set at $\alpha < 0.5$. Apart from quantitative data, a set of qualitative data gathered from open-ended questionnaire were analyzed to

answer the fourth research question.　The responses from participants were coded and interpreted to understand how students made sense of VLC and what they have gained or benefited form this project.　In sum, the outcomes of the four kinds of data analyzes will be presented and discussed to investigate the effectives of participating virtual literature circles in EFL classrooms as following.

Results

1.　Are there any changes in students' reading attitudes after taking part in Virtual Literature Circles for a year?

There are no significant differences in participants' affective and cognitive domains of reading attitudes, but significant difference was found in behavior domain of reading attitudes.　A reading attitude survey was administered to compare and analyze the difference before and after one year's participation in virtual literature circles.　The results showed that the observed effects were statistically significant in behavioral domain but not statistically significant overall.

With regard to behavioral domain, table 1.0 compared the means and standard deviations of 10 items from behavioral domain.　When comparing the mean of each item included in behavioral domain, the mean scores of post-test were higher than that of pre-test.　As shown in Table 4.4, the result of t-test concluded that the change of behavioral domain items was statistically significant.　As for the third domain, students' cognitive responses toward reading attitude prior to and after this experiment were examined.　Table 4.5 displayed the comparison of items of cognitive domain before and after participation.　As can be revealed, the mean of pretest seemed to have a slightly high degree than that of post-test.　However, according to the results of t-test, the result showed that there was no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test.　It suggested that students' cognitive aspect did not change.

Table 1.0

	Before		After	
II. Behavioral Domain	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1.　I frequently go to library to check out books to read.	2.46	0.77	2.78	0.9
2.　I read only when I am required to do so.	2.59	0.98	2.46	0.84
3.　I spend more time on Internet than reading books.	3.52	0.82	3.39	0.71
4.　I seldom finish reading the entire book just for pleasure.	2.55	0.88	2.83	0.79
5.　When I read, I often keep reading for an extended	3.37	1.08	3.35	0.87

period of time.

6. When I read, I am easily distracted.	2.42	0.94	2.64	0.85
7. I often read books voluntarily.	3.24	0.95	3.3	0.83
8. I seldom read more than two hours per week.	2.14	0.78	2.33	0.93
9. I often spend many hours per week in reading.	3.33	0.99	3.76	0.77
10. I often finish reading the entire book during my leisure time.	3.52	0.86	3.5	0.84

Table 1.1

Paired Differences	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
prebehavior -postbehavior	-1.24074	3.65975	.49803	-2.491	53	.016

The overall effect of virtual literature circles on students' reading attitude was revealed in Table1.2.   The average mean and standard deviations of three domains were calculated.   As previously indicated, the average mean of both affective and cognitive domain in post-test were all lower than that in pretest.   Only the average mean of behavioral domain showed higher degree after treatment.   As for the overall results of t-test, table 4.8 provided the evidence that the effect of partaking in virtual literature circles was not statistically significant overall.   (The lack of statistical significance may be due to long-term)It is very likely that participation in virtual literature circles did not have great influence on students' reading attitude.

Table 1.2

	Before		After	
Categories	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
I. Affective Domain	3.6	0.78	3.56	0.81
II. Behavioral Domain	2.91	0.91	3.03	0.83
III. Cognitive Domain	3.86	0.75	3.73	0.83

2.   *Are there any changes in students' English reading comprehension after taking part in Virtual Literature Circles for a year?   Are there any changes in students' general English proficiency after taking part in Virtual Literature Circles for a year?*

In this study, the pretest and post-test of Tunghai English Placement Exam were conducted and evaluated.   Table 2.0 presents the results of two proficiency tests. The means and standard deviations of the overall performance and reading proficiency were obtained and compared.   As can be seen, in terms of overall language

proficiency, the mean of post-test was higher than that of pretest. Similarly, by only examining students' reading ability, the result demonstrated that there was higher mean in post-test than in pretest.   Moreover, t-test (as shown in table 2.1) was used to compare the pretest and post-test.   As can be seen from the data in table 2.1, there were significant difference in both student's overall language proficiency and specific reading proficiency.   In other words, it is very likely that students' overall language proficiency and specific reading proficiency have improved after one-year's participation in virtual literature circles.

Table 2.0

	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Overall Language Proficiency	81.2	4.33	85.94	6.09
Reading Ability	28.22	3.22	31.09	4.08

Table 2.1

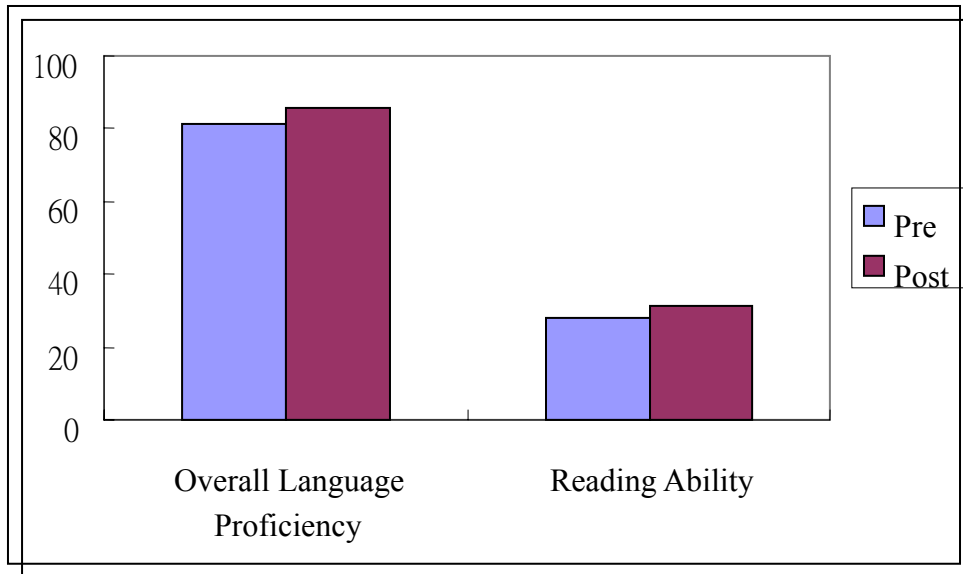|		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	language pretest - language posttest	-4.73585	5.25193	.72141	-6.18346	-3.28824	-6.565	52	.000
Pair 2	reading pretest - reading posttest	-2.86792	4.04797	.55603	-3.98368	-1.75217	-5.158	52	.000

Figure 2.0

3．*What are the students' perceptions of incorporating Virtual Literature Circles into their English learning?*

Majority of the students responded positively and enthusiastically to the implementation of virtual literature circles in their freshman English class. Only a few negative remarks were identified throughout the transcribed interview data and students reflective logs. In light of these positive results, the researchers of this study concluded that by participating in the literature circles, the EFL students benefit from the group discussions in which they actively refined their English proficiency, particularly in reading and speaking. Students enjoyed the atmosphere of discussing various topics with teammates and were provided with ample opportunities to express themselves purposefully, to justify opinions, and to respect different points of view. For instance, one student said, "I think that literature circles can help me to learn English and enhance my reading ability. And through literature circles, I can read and see the book from different ways." In addition, participating students claimed that literature circles stimulated them to become active learners instead of passive crammers because they were assigned certain duties to fulfill. Their responsibility and autonomy were highly valued by the students. Moreover, students were empowered with the greater opportunities to develop their English reading and speaking skills by means of literature circles. A male student remarked, "Literature circle needs skills of fluent reading and active speaking so it forced me to improve those skills without hesitating." Another female participant pointed out, "While we are discussing the book, we try our best to use English to express our thoughts to group members, and we can also teach each other the words we don't know and correct the pronunciation".

As a whole, in terms of different ways of studying English, students preferred literature circles to conventional EFL textbooks because they can purposefully participate in a variety of activities and enhance their English proficiency at the same time.

Some of the disadvantages of literature circles identified by the participants include time-consuming nature of the task, unequally distributed responsibility, and irresponsibility of some teammates. Several students considered literature circles demanded too much time to finish reading and preparing for the role job particularly when they were overloaded with homework assignments from the other subjects. One student wrote, "… sometimes another assignment was due and it took very large amount of time to do, then reading a novel made me tired. When department assignment is due, I sleep only 3 hours every day." In addition, when one or two students didn't prepare for their roles, it causes obstacles to carry on the discussion in literature circles. One student wrote, "I didn't like the feeling when my partner didn't do his job. It really upset me."

In sum, participating students recognized the benefits and the strength of literature circles in creating an enjoyable learning environment, cultivating the sense of accountability, and fine-tuning their reading and oral proficiency. Nevertheless, like any other instructional strategy, pragmatic considerations from students' overall academic pursuits, such as time constrains, priority of various subjects, and personal preference, impede the full potential of literature circles to realize in students' language learning.
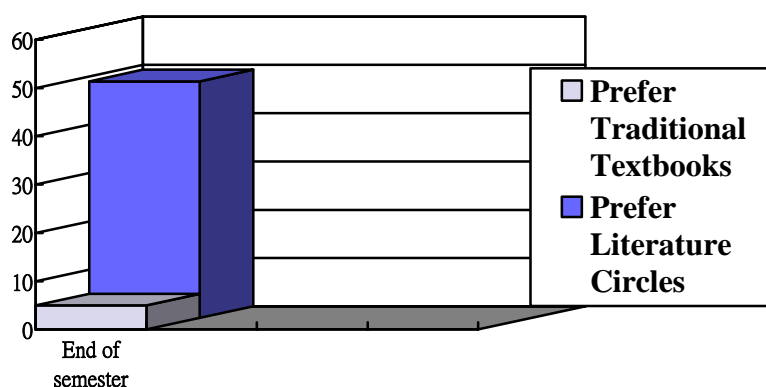

4. *In what ways, participation in Virtual Literature Circles affects students' discussion and interaction with one another in the literary discussion?*
Access to the Virtual Discussion Board did not motivate the participants to voluntarily take part in the literary discussion. Ironically, majority of students prefer face-to-face

discussion with their circle-mates.

Preference over Black Board V.S. In-Class Discussion
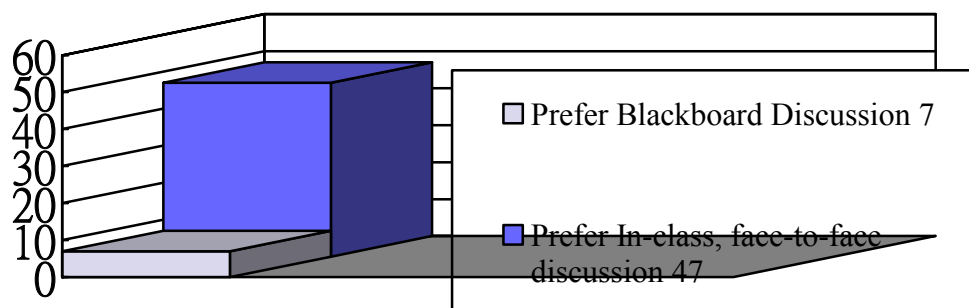
As semester drew to the end, fifty-four students were asked. "Do you prefer doing literature circles on-line (via Blackboard) or in-class (via face-to-face discussion)?" Great majority of students responded in favor of in-class discussion.   Only 7 out of 54 students found discussion via Black Board to be interesting and helpful for language learning.   Frequently attributed reasons against the use of Black Board for literature discussion include: inconvenient access to the Internet, imperfect English typing, halting English expression, and lack of immediate response.

Pedagogical Implication
1.   Several introductory lessons are needed to help students become familiar with different roles in the literature circle.
2.   Introduce each of the roles and model its responsibility.   For instance, the students will be taught how to create meaningful discussion questions, how to ask pertinent questions relevant to their lives, how to choose interesting excerpts from the chapters to read-aloud, and how to present the literary text in graphic manners.
3.   Integrate with other instructional activities.
4.   Constant monitoring of student participation.
5.   Getting feedback from students with regard to their concerns, problems, feelings, and expectation of taking part in the literature circles.
6.   Participating EFL students recognized the benefits and the strength of literature circles in creating an enjoyable learning environment, cultivating the sense of accountability, and fine-tuning their reading and oral proficiency.
7.   Nevertheless, like any other instructional strategy, pragmatic concerns about

students' overall academic pursuits, such as time constrains, priority of various subjects, and personal preference, impede the full potential of literature circles to optimize students' language development.

Conclusions

1.   Literature circles effectively engaged the EFL readers into the literary discussion, which in turn enhanced their L2 communicative competence.

2.   Access to the Blackboard discussion doesn't add much to the benefits of Literature Circles.

3.   By participating in this project, these EFL students became more enthusiastic about reading English novels or other literary works.

4.   Successfully finishing reading one English book on their own has offered the EFL students a greater sense of achievement and enjoyment, which in turn will enhance their further motivation.

5.   The students ought to develop and internalize self-regulatory reading habits and become life-time readers.

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Self-Evaluation

1. The project has completed as it had been proposed.

2. Part of the project has been presented at the international conference:
"*Enhancing Foreign Language Reading via Virtual Literature Circles*"
presented in the International Reading Association 21st World Congress on
Reading, Budapest, Hungary ┬ 7-10 August 2006.
During the presentation, this paper received plenty of attention and discussion.

3. Results of this project have contributed to our understanding of integrating
   technology with academic-oriented task. Merely having the on-line
   platform available for learning purpose can't warrant the optimized
   outcomes of technology for most youngsters use Internet or other
   information technology for non-academic purpose. They are mainly for
   entertaining and socializing.

4. The research is working on fine-tuning this report in order for this paper to
   get published and reach broader audience.