

## Reading Circles: Combining Collaborative Learning and Extensive Reading

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### Abstract

Small-group work and other forms of interactive, discussion-based education have come to play a more prominent role in the new higher education environment. As Light, Cox, and Calkins (2009) state in their popular text on pedagogy *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*, “the opportunity to come together in small groups to change conceptions and explore theories and insights provides students with one of the most important learning experiences higher education has to offer.” This article looks at one such form of small-group, discussion-based learning - reading circles - and provides some evidence, both theoretical and practical, supporting further utilization of reading circles in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes and non-EFL classes.

After the abstract, the paper is divided into seven sections: 1) the historical and theoretical background to reading circles, 2) practical considerations, 3) reading circles in the EFL classroom, 4) personal experiences in conducting reading circles, 5) introduction of the survey participants and procedure, 6) results and discussion of the survey, and 7) conclusions.

**Key words** : Collaborative Learning, Extensive Reading, English Education

### I Historical and Theoretical Background to Reading Circles

Reading circles, in various forms, have been in existence probably since the beginning of the printed word. At their most basic, they are simply groups of interested people meeting to discuss some written material, with the aim of gaining a better understand of the material. Reading circles have also been known by other names, such as reading groups, book clubs, or literature circles. However, the preferred term nowadays seems to be reading circles, perhaps due to this being the term most commonly employed in the EFL sector,

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which has recently shown increased interest in this learning method.

A survey of the modern history of reading circles, from about the year 1900 to present, shows that this method has been used in almost all levels of the education world, from primary to secondary to tertiary and finally to adult social education. It also has been used in non-formal settings by groups of like-minded adults who want to share their understanding of various texts. However, it has been most often found, at least in Western countries, at the primary and secondary levels of formal education.

Despite this long history and widespread use, reading circles have been surprisingly under-examined in the research literature. Duncan, in *Reading Circles, Novels and Adult Reading Development* (2012) states that most of the limited available data into reading circles “is either historical/ethnographic research into the circles formed autonomously by groups of adults in the past or present, or educational research on the reading circles formed by teachers within compulsory schooling or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) provision.” Perhaps this scarcity of research reflects the fact that reading circles are relatively uncommon at the tertiary level, or perhaps it is due to the fact that many of the supposed benefits of reading circles—greater learner autonomy, improved critical thinking skills, better student engagement, to name a few—are so difficult to measure.

Nonetheless, Duncan (2012) does state that, of the available data, “research in primary and secondary schools in Australia and the United States has overwhelmingly found reading circles to be an effective method of developing comprehension strategies, confidence and of encouraging both the enjoyment of reading and greater learner autonomy.”

Furthermore, Duncan (2012) declares that research from the EFL community has found that “reading circles are an effective way of developing speaking and listening skills, active and passive vocabulary and greater proficiency and confidence in reading and writing.”

Various approaches to educational psychology also support the utilization of reading circles as a learning method. Perhaps the most applicable is the sociocultural approach commonly associated with Vygotsky. This famed Russian psychologist postulated that learning evolves from social (i.e., communicative) interaction, which is of course the main component in reading circles. He also developed the concept of “zone of proximal development,” which is defined as “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978). This applies to most reading circles, with the teacher operating more as a facilitator guiding the students, and with students also able to help their peers’ development. Most modern examples of reading circles in formal learner settings also take advantage of scaffolding techniques, which are closely related to Vygotskyian concepts.

Furthermore, in the Japanese higher education environment, it can be said that there are particularly good reasons for introducing reading circles into the curriculum, primarily as

an antidote to exams, teacher-centered didactic learning, rote memorization, and limited chances for discussion.

## II Practical Considerations

As previously mentioned, reading circles are found at all levels of education, from primary school up to adult education. Likewise, they are found in both formal and informal educational settings, and with native and non-native speakers of the language. Thus, it should come as no surprise that in practice a variety of reading circles exist.

In the lower levels of primary school, for example, the actual text might be chosen by the teacher and read aloud in class together, with a rather short discussion to follow. In the EFL setting, particular attention might be drawn towards scaffolding of the necessary language. In less formal book clubs, negotiations by members over curriculum, roles, and rules might more likely be collaboratively decided.

It is therefore difficult to claim any one particular method for conducting reading circles. However, King and Briggs (2005) state that, in general, “the text itself is read mainly independently and most of the circle time is spent discussing the group members’ responses to the text.” They further state that, in order to achieve the maximum benefit, the texts used for the circles must 1) be interesting, 2) utilize a broad range of genres and/or authors, 3) be relatively complex and multi-layered, and 4) provide a variety of themes (King & Briggs, 2005).

Buchelew and Fishman (2011) claim that typical characteristics present in reading circles include the following: 1) students sit together in small groups, 2) they talk without teacher participation, 3) they share their understanding with each other, 4) they decide the meaning in a text, and 5) they share their group’s thinking with the other groups.

Many, if not most, teachers utilizing reading circles also attempt to scaffold the learning experience by guiding or training their students in analytic techniques. For example, Kelly and Clausen-Grace (2007) teach their students to use the following six analytic strategies: connecting, predicting, questioning, visualizing, clarifying, and writer’s craft. As teachers, they provide students with a worksheet list of these six strategies to be completed at home after reading and before the actual circle.

Another common technique is assigning students beforehand with a clear and specific role in the group. This technique, mentioned later, also allows the teacher to provide proper scaffolding.

## III Reading Circles in the EFL Classroom

### 1. Benefits

A strong case can be made for using reading circles in the EFL classroom. Firstly, reading

circles attempt to use material that is understandable and thought-provoking at the same time as providing a structure that enables learners to have engaging and student-led discussions (Furr, 2007). The reading and preparation for the discussion activity is made more achievable, and the group discussion that comes later becomes more insightful through the assignment of roles and role sheets that enable the students to approach the reading material from different perspectives and focus on one particular feature (Furr, 2007). Clear instructions explaining what is expected of each role together with an example of a completed role sheet can also be provided. This kind of support, or ‘scaffolding’, can be especially helpful in the EFL classroom as students may have little experience of taking part in group discussions in English. It should be noted that it would be difficult to achieve positive results with reading circles in the EFL setting without this scaffolding, except perhaps in the case of extremely motivated students with advanced English-language ability.

A reading circles specialist, Daniels (2002), points out that reading circles (which he refers to as literature circles) “are a part – a quite sophisticated and highly evolved part – of the wider collaborative learning movement” and display the “characteristic features of true collaboration: student initiated inquiry, choice, self direction, mutual interdependence, face-to-face interaction, and self and group assessment.” Educational research by Johnson (cited in Laal and Ghodsi, 2011) has revealed that collaborative learning as opposed to individualistic efforts “results in higher achievement and greater productivity; more caring, supportive, and committed relationships; and greater psychological health, social competence and self-esteem.” Thus, working and collaborating in groups makes the class more enjoyable and enables the individual learner to make better progress. Daniels (2002) also claims that the collaborative nature of reading circles serves to make “heterogeneous classrooms work.” He says that even in a class with students of mixed ability you “can still have an exciting, challenging, orderly and caring atmosphere for everyone.” This is particularly important in the EFL environment as it is often the case that the teacher has to work in a class with a wide range of levels.

Another convincing argument in support of using reading circles in the EFL classroom is that they involve a combination of activities that together include input, output and interaction. Abundant and wide ranging input is provided through reading, and opportunities for output (both written and spoken), and meaningful interaction are provided during the feedback and discussion stage. Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research now shows that input, output and interaction are all crucial to successful instructed language learning (Renandya, 2013; Lessard-Clouston, 2007; Ellis, 2005).

Reading circles also serve to motivate students to develop the habits of extensive reading (Furr, 2007). Reading is one of the most accessible forms of comprehensive input, especially in countries where there is little opportunity for interaction with speakers of the target language (Maley, 2009). If learners are encouraged to read extensively outside the

classroom, they will be exposed to far more input than would be possible during the limited period of time they spend in lessons (Maley, 2009). Day (n.d.) points to other positive effects of extensive reading that have been revealed through research: students become better readers, develop a more positive attitude towards books and an increased motivation to read, and make impressive gains in overall language proficiency and vocabulary knowledge. Maley (2009) also states that extensive reading serves to develop learner autonomy as reading is an independent activity and readers make their own decisions regarding level and reading speed and can also decide when and where and for how long they read.

Finally, reading circles practices all four of the language skills, and, as is the case in real life, these skills are linked and focus on the same content area. This allows the language used to be recycled and provides increased opportunities for reinforcement, a greater understanding of the meaning of the language, and an increased awareness of how the language is used in communication.

## **2. Planning and Implementation**

The research on reading circles strongly suggests positive effects on student motivation and skills. A review of the literature also indicates that there are no studies that refute the benefits of reading circles, although there are several caveats that must be considered, especially at the stages of planning and implementation.

### **2.1. Selecting the text**

It is important that the texts selected for use with reading circle activities are appropriate for the students. Poorly selected texts might have a negative effect on student motivation, with reading becoming a chore rather than a pleasure. One of the ten principles presented by Day and Bamford (2002) for teaching extensive reading is that students should be able to select the text so that they can choose material that they expect to enjoy and understand. Furr (2007), however, recommends having groups read the same text as it is easier to monitor progress and assign extension activities. In order to take both of these views into account, the teacher could show the students a number of appropriate reading passages by different authors and covering a wide range of genres at the beginning of the course and ask students to indicate the material they would like to read. The teacher could then make up a list of the most popular texts and use a different one in each reading circle class during the course. Such an approach would involve the students in the selection of the reading material but also enable the teacher to ask all the groups to read and discuss the same stories.

### **2.2. Level of text**

Similarly, the reading material should not be difficult for students to understand. As was mentioned earlier, the students should have meaningful discussions about the content of the reading passages, so it is important that they can read the text without difficulty and

without having to rely on a dictionary. Furr (2007) recommends that there should be no more than two or three unknown words per page.

### **2.3. Student preparation**

The teacher should try to ensure that the students come to class prepared. Another potential problem with reading circles is that students come to class without having read the material beforehand and without having completed their role sheets. They are therefore unable to contribute sufficiently to the discussion and the other group members are deprived of the input that would be provided by the person in their particular role. To help avoid this situation occurring, the teacher might ask to see the role sheets at the end of each class to check whether or not they have been completed.

### **2.4. Student participation**

The discussion leader should encourage everyone in the group to make an equal contribution to the discussion. Experience has shown that certain group members sometimes dominate the discussions, making it difficult for less confident students to present their information and opinions. The teacher might therefore stipulate that the discussion leader has to ensure that each group member is allowed to speak for a specified period of time.

### **2.5. Providing support for the students**

Sufficient support should be provided by the teacher to enable the students to prepare for and contribute to the group discussion. This is especially important with less confident students. Ways in which the teacher can give assistance might include providing background information about the text before the students start reading, explaining any difficult vocabulary contained in the reading passage, providing examples of completed role sheets, and making a list of useful expressions that can be used in the discussion. Without this scaffolding initiated by the teacher, the success of reading circles, especially in the EFL setting, becomes much more doubtful.

### **2.6. Use of role sheets**

Students should be encouraged to discuss the reading material without constantly looking at their role sheets. This will make the students think more about what they are going to say and the discussions will become more natural and the contributions more spontaneous. With more advanced and experienced groups the teacher might consider the possibility of removing the support provided by the use of role sheets. Daniels (2002) states that although the use of role sheets provides useful support when students first take part in peer-led discussion groups by setting “a cognitive purpose for the reading and an interactive one for the group discussion,” the role sheets can become an actual hindrance to real discussion as

the students “just go around the circle, reading their role sheets one after the other, and never get into a real conversation.” It should be pointed out that Daniels was working with native speakers of English and the argument for the use of role sheets is much stronger in the EFL context. However, it is likely that higher level EFL students would benefit from less structured discussions.

#### **IV Personal Experiences in Conducting Reading Circles**

At this point in the paper, before proceeding to the survey results from the most recent experiment with reading circles, it should prove beneficial to supply short descriptions of three previous classroom attempts to utilize reading circles at the tertiary level. On a personal basis, these experiences have provided the teacher with a greater understanding of the role of reading circles.

The first experience with reading circles began as the EFL secondary and tertiary sectors in Japan started to show increasing interest in this technique. Thus, a small pilot project was introduced, adding reading circles to a freshman-level English-language class of 12 students discussing the topic of multiculturalism. Without knowing how the students would respond, it was decided that only two 60-minute class periods, plus one 45-minute period to explain the concept, would be included. The students were provided with minimal scaffolding and only the most basic of rules and roles for the reading assignment.

The results of the first class period were quite surprisingly positive, with all of the students coming to class prepared and with the two groups of six students both discussing the reading for nearly 60 minutes. Despite the students’ relatively low levels of English, everyone seemed enthused and engaged.

However, the second class period was much less effective. Many problems were evident to the teacher, most importantly that the students were ill-prepared. Kelly and Clausen-Grace (2007) state seven potential problems that teachers encounter in typical reading circles, including 1) students come to class unprepared and do not know how to prepare for the discussion, 2) students do not know how to participate in peer-led, small-group discussions, 3) students’ conversations are superficial, 4) students do not enjoy the reading material, 5) students do not participate actively, 6) students digress off topic, and 7) students are off task. To some extent, all of these problems were present in the second class period. However, students themselves claimed that the reasons for their lack of second-day effort were 1) the difficulty of using English, and 2) the time required to prepare for the class.

This first experience with reading circles led to mixed results, but did suggest at least the possibility that reading circles could, with more careful planning, be a powerful classroom tool. The decision was made to implement reading circles with EFL students only at or above intermediate levels of English ability (perhaps students with TOEIC scores of 500 or higher), and to provide more and better scaffolding.

Thus, the second chance to implement reading circles was with 16 intermediate-level EFL learners (with TOEIC scores from around 500 up to 800) over a year-long English-language course. This time, fifteen of the thirty scheduled 90-minute class periods were slotted for reading circles. More and better scaffolding was added. In general, the week before the circle, the teacher introduced the reading, describing any difficult vocabulary, creating interest in the story, and assigning the students in each group one of six possible roles: discussion leader, summarizer, connector, word master, passage person, or culture collector. These roles were originally developed by Daniels (1994), one of the leading experts on reading circles, and were further developed by Furr (2009) for the EFL classroom. Furr (2009) provides detailed instructions on reading circles, along with photocopiable student role sheets that encourage scaffolding.

The schedule for the teacher's role as facilitator on a typical 90-minute reading circle day was as follows: Begin the day, remind the students of their task, and confirm understanding (10-15 minutes), listen to the students talk in their groups (45-60 minutes), coalesce and condense the groups' discussions in a wrap-up session (10-15 minutes), and move on to preparing for the next week's circles (10-15 minutes).

This year-long experience with reading circles was extremely positive. The teacher found the students, especially on reading circle days, to be enthused and engaged. Perhaps due to the proper scaffolding of the task, all students throughout the year came to class prepared and communicated extensively. The atmosphere was congenial, and from the teacher's perspective learning was evident.

Student evaluations of the course, likewise, were more positive than usual, making it among the top-rated classes for the year and scoring significantly higher on the evaluations than would be likely if the circles had not been available. Individual student comments on the evaluations were also extremely positive, including the statement by one person that they talked more in this class than in any class previously.

This positive second experiment with reading circles led to a further attempt the next year to add reading circles in the native Japanese language to a Freshman Seminar class of 20 students in an Economics department. Five 90-minute class periods, plus half a class period for introduction to the concept, were scheduled, with readings selected by the teacher based on their interest and their relation to economic perspectives. Each group—there were four groups in total—selected a different reading, and to a certain degree could choose a reading that most appealed to the group members. The role sheets provided by Furr (2009) were translated into Japanese, since their utility was so evident in the previous year-long English-language class.

This class also proved very successful, and students once again were seen as enthused and engaged. They appeared to make more and deeper friendships, one of the goals of the Freshman Seminar, and their attendance was better than in previous years without the reading circles. Student evaluations, likewise, were better than in any of the previous four

years of teaching the class. This suggests that reading circles are transferable to a non-EFL setting with discipline-specific content (in this case, economics). However, it should be noted that the use of reading circles in these non-EFL settings also likely depends on successful planning and implementation by the teacher, as discussed in previous sections of this paper.

## V Survey: Participants and Procedure

The relative success of the three aforementioned encounters with reading circles suggests that this method is valuable to students, and can be utilized across a wide range of classes in the tertiary sector. However, the paucity of more objective empirical data has led to the structuring of a fourth experiment with reading circles, whereby in the final analysis student evaluations are focused more on the issue of reading circles, with at least some numerical values to be assigned.

The learners involved in this study were third-year, intermediate-level English majors (perhaps ranging in English ability from TOEIC 500 to TOEIC 800) attending evening classes at a university specializing in foreign studies in Japan. As well as studying English language, they were also taking classes in English literature, linguistics, and a second language (usually Spanish, Chinese, or Russian). During the day, the students either had full-time or part-time jobs. All of them had experience of travelling abroad, and over half the class had studied in English speaking countries at some stage.

The class in which the survey was carried out was an English communication class that met once a week for two 15-week semesters. Each lesson lasted for 90 minutes. The reading circle activities were carried out a total of 12 times: six times in the first semester and a further six weeks in the second semester. The reading materials used were short stories from the Oxford University Press Bookworm Club Series for Reading Circles. The stories were all either stage three or four in the Bookworm series. Stage three has 1000 headwords and stage four has 1400 headwords. The levels were probably a little easy for most of the students in the class, however, as Furr (2007) points out, the students have to have meaningful discussions about the material, so it is important that they can read the texts without difficulty and without having to rely on dictionaries.

Reading circles was a particularly suitable activity for this group as they had experience of attending English literature classes. Although these literature classes were carried out in Japanese and did not involve student participation, the students would probably have obtained knowledge of how to approach a book discussion. This proved to be the case during the various reading circle discussions and in the student presentations held at the end of the first semester: the students were frequently able to point to features in the stories that the casual, 'untrained' reader would probably miss. Again, this indicates the importance of scaffolding in achieving the greatest benefits from reading circles.

The survey was carried out towards the end of the second semester, after the 11th (of 12)

reading circle discussion had been held. Questionnaires were handed out to all students present. Fourteen students were involved in the reading circles in this class. However, one student's responses were unavailable due to their study abroad schedule, so only 13 surveys were tallied. The students took about 20 minutes to complete the questionnaires.

## VI Results and Discussion

The first question on the survey attempts to gauge the novelty of reading circles as a classroom technique. As previously mentioned, reading circles do not have a particularly strong tradition in Japan, but have become increasingly popular in the secondary and tertiary levels of the EFL sector.

Question 1: Have you tried a reading circles type activity in a class before?

For the results, only four of the thirteen students responded in the affirmative, with three having tried it in a previous EFL class and one having used it in their after-school club activities. This suggests that, while EFL teachers have started to embrace reading circles, classes in other disciplines are not using this technique.

The second question in the survey tries to discover how much preparation time is involved in reading the material and preparing for the discussion through the role sheets. As previously mentioned, some students do find the preparation to be time-consuming. On the other hand, it is a well-documented fact that Japanese university students do much less homework than their counterparts in other countries, so any reasonable increase in productively-spent homework time could be considered a benefit.

Question 2: How long do you usually spend reading and preparing your role for class?

Answers ranged from thirty minutes to three hours, with the average at 1.7 hours. Since the class period was 90 minutes, this amount of homework time seems slightly demanding but not excessive.

The third question is actually a series of separate questions based on a typical five-point scale, and is an attempt to understand the students' evaluation of the particular pedagogical usefulness of the reading circle activities through various individual attributes. Each question here attempts to measure a different attribute, and their grouping in the following chart is not an attempt to suggest a correlation between the questions but rather solely for ease of display.

Question 3: How useful were the reading circle activities in promoting  
a. discussion and classroom interaction?

- b. understanding of vocabulary and expressions?
- c. understanding of the story?
- d. collaboration with other students?
- e. an enjoyable class?
- f. a relaxed classroom atmosphere?
- g. improvement of overall English skills?

Table 1. Students' evaluation of usefulness of the reading circle activities

	Very Useful ('5')	Useful ('4')	Rather Useful ('3')	Little Useful ('2')	Not Useful ('1')	Avg. Score
a. interaction	7 (54%)	4 (31%)	2 (15%)	--	--	4.4
b. vocabulary	5 (38%)	5 (38%)	3 (23%)	--	--	4.1
c. understanding	7 (54%)	5 (38%)	1 (8%)	--	--	4.5
d. collaboration	6 (46%)	7 (54%)	--	--	--	4.5
e. enjoyment	10 (77%)	1 (8%)	2 (15%)	--	--	4.6
f. atmosphere	9 (69%)	4 (31%)	--	--	--	4.7
g. skills	7 (54%)	2 (15%)	4 (31%)	--	--	4.2

It is clear from the data that the students in this class were, as observed in other reading circle experiments, both enthused and engaged. All the scores here are highly positive, but particularly the students valued the reading circles for their ability to make the class more relaxed and more enjoyable. This suggests the appropriateness of reading circles in inducing a positive learning environment. Overall, the results for these seven individual attributes suggest high levels of student satisfaction.

The fourth and fifth questions ask about the difficulty of reading circles, to gauge whether the activities are too challenging (or too easy) for the students.

Question 4: How difficult were the reading and preparation activities for reading circles?

Question 5: How difficult were the in-class reading circle activities?

Results show that the activities were gauged at the proper level. Only one of the thirteen students found the reading and preparation not difficult, whereas ten students described it as a little difficult and only two as quite difficult. Four of the thirteen students felt that the in-class discussion was not difficult, seven of the students described it as a little difficult, and two as quite difficult. Although overall level of difficulty was acceptable, the data here suggests that a small minority of students might have been capable of more challenging, less structured discussions.

The sixth question asks students to rank the six roles—discussion leader, summarizer, connector, word master, passage person, and culture collector—in order of personal preference. Many reading circles employ similar role assignment, but there is little data on

students' preferences for specific roles.

Question 6: Please rank the six different reading circle roles in order of personal preference. (1=like least, 6=like most)

Table 2. Students' ranking of reading circle roles in order of personal preference

	Average Score	Number of Sixes	Number of Ones
Discussion Leader	3.1	2	4
Summarizer	3.8	2	0
Connector	3.3	2	3
Word Master	3.3	4	2
Passage Person	3.3	1	2
Culture Collector	3.3	4	0

Discussion leader was the role least preferred, although not by a wide margin. Discussion leader is also arguably the most important and most involved of the six roles. Summarizer, on the other hand, is likely the least difficult and most straightforward role, and was overall the most preferred, although again not by a terribly wide margin. This data suggests that there is no strongly liked or disliked role, but that students' preferences might be slightly different from that of teachers, who might be more likely to choose the discussion leader, the connector, or the culture collector role for their greater emphasis on higher intellectual skills.

The last section of the survey asks for students' general comments about reading circles. Only eight of the thirteen students responded with comments. Their responses were as follows:

\*I want to continue it.

\*I really enjoy this class.

\*I like reading circles very much. I'm improving my skills by them.

\*Thanks for your class. Gradually I can speak English.

\*When business was busy, I could not read enough, but this class was best.

\*Other members are very kind and have many views of thinking, so I enjoyed it.

\*I want to do this activity with different members sometimes.

\*I find it challenging and enjoyable to talk about literature. I always try to explain something.

The positive comments show that students did enjoy the reading circle activities, and could find purpose in the activities as well.

## VII Conclusions

Small-group work, of which reading circles are just one example, is pedagogically desirable. Light, Cox, and Calkins (2009) list research confirming that “small-group work can help students construct meaning more deeply; enhance critical thinking skills; provide opportunities for feedback and self-reflection; promote social and emotional development; enhance an awareness and acceptance of diversity; and even lessen student attrition.”

However, small-group work has even more benefits. Light, Cox, and Calkins (2009) state further that “small-group work can also develop the interpersonal and collegial interactions among students; promote leadership, teamwork, and collaboration; and enhance problem-solving, decision-making, presenting, and other professional skills.”

Reading circles are just one example of effective small-group work. Their increasing use in the tertiary-level EFL sector has been partially documented, but their use in discipline-specific classes is still quite limited, even though numerous scholars (see Buckelew & Fishman, 2011; Mills & Alexander, 2013) suggest their relevance in content-based classes. Duncan (2012) goes so far as to label reading circles “ideal pedagogy,” for being collaborative, peer-interactive, peer-supported, and accepting of differentiation and diversity among students.

This paper concludes similarly. We the authors have found from our research and experience that, for students in an EFL setting, reading circles can be an extremely productive and enjoyable activity, valued by both teachers and students, but it is also evident that the teachers must facilitate the activities with proper planning and implementation. As has been suggested earlier, it is important for the teacher to provide appropriate guidance and support for the students after carefully considering the students’ level of ability and confidence. It is also clear that student motivation is required as preparation for the reading circle activities can sometimes be quite time consuming. We the authors also suggest that students with TOEIC scores below 500 might not benefit as much from reading circles. However, we also propose that reading circles can play a larger role in the non-EFL setting in Japan.

It is hoped that reading circles, as well as other small-group techniques, receive attention across a wider spectrum of classes within the higher education sector, although certainly there will prove to be some classes in which the benefits of reading circles cannot be realized. Obviously, there also are some skills that cannot be effectively acquired through reading circle activities. Nonetheless, we the authors believe that further research needs to be conducted on the efficacy of reading circles. It is hoped that future studies can especially provide increased quantitative analysis with a greater emphasis on validity, accuracy, and reliability than is possible in a small-scale study, although unfortunately it is extremely difficult to quantitatively measure the effectiveness of reading circles.

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