

Improving the Reading Comprehension of the 9th Grade Students of SMPN 14 Surabaya Using Literature Circles Technique

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to improve the students' reading comprehension of the 9th grade at SMPN 14 Surabaya by using literature circles technique. Each cycle of classroom action research consisted of three meetings and included four steps: planning, action, observation, and reflection. The data were gathered through the use of two instruments: observation and test. The results indicated only 5 students were present among those who passed the test (12.50%). The number of students that completed the test increased from 5 to 18 which one may argue that the number of students increased by 13 students, or 32.50%. In light of the results of cycle 1. Then, in the cycle 2, the total number of 35 students (87.50%) passed the KKM and there were only 5 students (12.50%) who did not pass the test. The Literature Circle technique was successfully implemented with the students of SMPN 14 Surabaya in the 9th grade. A considerable improvement in the implementation of the Literature Circle was seen among the students. Students' narrative reading comprehension achievement in class 9-A was greatly enhanced as a result of the Literature Circles technique, according to the results of the pre- and post-tests.

Keywords: *reading, reading comprehension, Literature Circle*

INTRODUCTION

The process of reading is about gaining knowledge and new information by understanding what is contained in a text. Reading for information, such as books, magazines, newspapers, letters, posters, advertisements, comics, the internet, and so on, aims to help a reader to gain a better understanding of the concepts and issues they come across. Reading is the ability to derive meaning from the printed form and interpret the information accurately (as stated by Anne, 2003, p.8). While reading can best be described as the ability of the reader to paraphrase information provided in the reading text, reading is not limited to this ability. Other possible causes of difficulties with understanding syntax, grammar, vocabulary, and reading strategies could be a problem understanding syntactic structures, sentence structure, vocabulary, and reading strategies. While the reading process is relatively short, a reader can arrive at an understanding of the language symbols and decipher the content of the text by reading.

To better understand the information from the text, one should first identify what background knowledge each reader has and what information is provided within the text. It is

also called reading comprehension. Reading proficiency aims to provide comprehension. Thus, the two tasks must be done simultaneously in order to fully comprehend the text's meaning. Reading comprehension is the ability to use text to perform tasks such as taking information from written text and showing understanding of that information (Brassel & Rasinski, 2009, p. 18). It is an understanding of how to attain the content of the passage text.

Comprehension is an active process that you must work on. Readers, like students, must critically analyze the text in order to come to a realistic assessment of the information. It is absolutely necessary for senior high school students to improve their ability in identifying the author's ideas in order to advance in their academic studies. In order for students to succeed in the English language, they must understand what they read, so reading comprehension is a critical skill for learners (Varita, 2017, p. 234). Reading is more than understanding the main idea, inferences, and details; it is also about developing students' ability to read quickly and accurately.

When reading instruction is focused on teaching the cognitive act of interpreting and constructing meaning, it has a transformative effect on students because it influences students' personality, their reading selection, and their personal and academic goals (Walpole & McKenna, 2007, p. 7). Good comprehension of what has been read requires knowledge of vocabulary expansion and vocabulary instruction. In order to be able to understand the material, one must take the time to think about it and interact with it, while simultaneously demonstrating an intent and being considerate. Teachers who are better prepared to help students with reading comprehension strategies can help students improve their comprehension abilities (Bedee, 2010, p. 17).

Different methods to explore reading comprehension are possible, such as using relevant teaching resources, such as literature. Reading literature can inspire people. Reading and interpreting English literature offers an interesting contrast to reading literature in one's own language. Students can gain access to values of the people whose language they study when studying literature. It's possible that the students could easily come to comprehending reading ability in the learning process.

Reading competence of the English text is one of the skills that should be mastered by the students in the school. Referring to the Standard English Competency requirements for senior high schools, the students are expected to develop their ability to comprehend written functional text and simple short texts of essay at the 9th grade. Furthermore, they are expected to be able to comprehend the meaning of written functional text and simple short texts of essay related to the environs. While, the basic competence expects the students to be able to the

respond the meaning of the written functional text and short essay with utterance, stress and intonation that is acceptable related to the environs.

By observing the conditions at the 9th grade of SMPN 14 Surabaya as the setting of this study which was done during pre-research during the pandemic Covid-19 era where the proses of learning conducted through online or virtual classroom, it showed most of the students can't comprehend the information from reading texts due to the fact that lack of students' vocabulary, the lack of students' opportunity to express their opinion when in the teaching-learning activity, and the students can't share the main idea from the reading text. The problems above-mentioned make the students unreachable the standard of minimum completeness or *KKM* (*Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal*) which has been decided in education curriculum 2013 ($KKM \geq 80$ for English subject). Most of the students got the lower scores of *KKM*. So, if the problems continuously happen, the goals of education will never be achieved. Therefore, the English teacher is expected to find out the solution of the students' problem in understanding the content of text.

Additionally, the one-year crisis known as the Covid-19 pandemic is being used as a learning opportunity to prepare for the challenges of home-based online learning for the Indonesian government. An additional form of effort, as done by SMPN 14 Surabaya, helps ensure learning objectives are achieved, and the material is shared with students, in order to help avoid a pandemic caused by this corona virus. A wide range of applications such as WhatsApp groups, Google Classroom, Zoom, and so on are utilized in online learning to promote instructional outcomes. What is undoubtedly true is that, in practice, hurdles will be discovered that are specific to online learning, which in the pre-pandemic era, learning took place offline, namely face-to-face in the classroom (Zainuddin, 2020, p. 131). Because of this condition, many students have experimented with an unpredictable system, and online testing has taken the place of in-person testing. The online learning system or virtual learning system integrates an internet connection with the teaching and learning process (Bentley, Selassie, & Shegunshi, 2012; in Hariyati, 2020, p. 2). With online learning, teachers and students do not need to attend the offline classrooms, which is a breakthrough or a new paradigm.

Many teaching and learning approaches are available for teaching and learning processes, especially when online learning is involved. A teacher must first identify the best instructional method and use the most effective teaching strategies or techniques when teaching reading comprehension. Based on the above clarification, the researcher intends to provide a specific strategy to help the students overcome their issues. According to the researcher, one

way to deal with students' issues with understanding narrative text is to implement literature circles approaches.

“Literature circles are small classroom-based student reading and discussion groups. They combine the skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Discussion is often guided by response to what students have read. Often discussions focus on characters, events, the author’s craft, and personal experiences. Literature circles provide students with a way to deeper understand what they have read through structured discussion and extended written response.” (Clower, 2006, p. 22)

The passage above is saying that literature circles provide the students with an opportunity to explore an idea through the text, to give the students new ways to understand the text, and to foster their critical thinking about the text. Another one of the cooperative learning techniques that is often referred to is inclusion. When students are of different abilities, schools use various learning activities to help their understanding of a subject (Kagan, 1994; in Varita, 2017, p. 235).

While it is well-known as a specific type of collaborative learning, known as "co-operative learning," collaborative learning can also take place in a variety of learning processes. By engaging in collaborative efforts, such as creating a project, discussing a topic, analyzing a short story, and so on, students might be encouraged to strengthen their structural abilities (Longo, p. 201). In other words, students are held personally responsible for their projects and their group activity is also scrutinized. Students will learn to apply their weaker and interpersonal skills in a group while also improving their overall development. Additionally, they may have characteristics that can help them overcome their weaknesses.

Relevant explanations describe how the researcher will use an online learning strategy involving reading circles to enhance students' reading comprehension, facilitate communication, and provide students with an active role in the learning process, as it was done during the pandemic Crisis of Covid-19. The researcher will implement literature circles to assess students' reading comprehension by conducting the research via online learning. Therefore, the researcher is going to conduct the research entitled: “*Improving the Reading Comprehension of the 9th Grade Students of SMPN 14 Surabaya Using Literature Circles Technique*”. It was aimed to improve the students’ reading comprehension of the 9th grade at SMPN 14 Surabaya by using literature circles technique.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Literature Circle

Literature circle can be used to help students learn several skills. Literature circles is also known as small classroom-based student reading and discussion groups (Clower, 2006). It combines the skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Response to what students have read is often guided within discussion. The discussions focus on characters, events, the author's craft, and personal experiences. Literature circles provide students with a way to deeper understand what they have read through structured discussion and extended written response (p. 22).

Involving literature circles in learning process, these activities allow students to think and respond more critically, become more reflective, and push students themselves to read, talk, question, feel, and think outside of the box (Long & Gove, 2004; in Bedee, 2010, p. 22). In addition, literature circle approach is highly effective in reading activities that have been proven to be effective as well. Conventionally, the literature circle approach is applied to fiction texts but recently it has been updated and used with a variety of texts including nonfiction (Wilfong, 2009, p. 164).

Based on the experts' opinion above, it can be argued literature circles can be defined as discussion groups where the readers gather for reading discussions not only for the pleasure of reading but to develop critical capacities for thinking and reading. These reading discussions create a co-operative environment that provides the people involved with a huge opportunity to develop and explore their ideas and thoughts and to develop the capacity for critically analyzing and responding to the reading materials that they have been given or have chosen. Literature circles approach is a student's activity to rearrange the story by thinking about what happens in the story to build a comprehension what the story is talking about and trying to retell it by giving a more complete events that occurred.

2. Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is an important way to understand something especially for students in mastering English language. Brassel & Rasinski (2009, p. 18) said reading comprehension is the ability to take information from written text and do something with it in a way that demonstrates knowledge or understanding of that information. This definition underlines that reading comprehension is an interaction process where the students use their prior knowledge and brings it to the text for getting meaning. It is assumed comprehension processes draw on many cognitive and linguistic abilities-most notably,

vocabulary, recalling background knowledge, sentence processing, verbal reasoning, knowledge of print conventions and working memory. So, weakness in any of these abilities can impair reading comprehension and can cause a student to disengage from the task of interpreting text.

According to Blanton in Peter (2008, p. 31), “Reading comprehension is an active thinking process through which a reader intentionally constructs meaning to form a deeper understanding of concepts and information presented in a text”. It is implied that reading comprehension is process of the reader’s thinking to understand the deeper meaning of the reading text. From some definitions mentioned, it is concluded reading comprehension is an understanding activity. Undoubtedly, what the students derive after reading the text and how they connect it with their background knowledge with the text for deriving fit meaning. Thus, the students do not only read the text but they must understand the text correctly. As a result, the students know the content of the text and get message from the author’s text actually.

3. Relationship between Reading Comprehension with Literature Circle

Reading comprehension is a process of getting the information from the text. The comprehension talks not only about being read, but also understanding the meaning of what the written material talks about. In teaching reading the teacher has to use strategy; one of them is literature circles strategy as way to find out a significant effect in comprehending the reading text. In line with Camp (2006, p. 49), “Literature Circles enhancing reading response skills through peer discussions”. Furthermore, Jersey (1998, p. 47) said, “A Literature Circle is a temporary group formed to read and discuss books”. Thus, it is implied the strategy helps the students understand the content of the reading text collaboratively.

Additionally, Daniels (2002, p. 27) argued, “Literature circles are small groups of students interested in reading the same book or story who meet regularly to read and discuss their chosen text”. Procedure of this teaching strategy gives the chance the students to comprehend the reading text collaboratively. Consequently, this teaching strategy has close connection to the reading comprehension.

METHOD

1. Subjects of the Research

The study's subjects were ninth-grade students from class 9-A, 40 of whom participated. This class was assigned because 9A students had issues related to their research backgrounds, as mentioned on the research background of class 9-A. It's the English teacher who serves as the class teacher. As a result, it helped facilitate the implementation of the research.

2. Research Procedures

This research was done to examine literature circles, and to reveal the 9th grade students' abilities in reading comprehension. by conducting Classroom Action Research (CAR). Some experts have offered various definitions of action research. According to Kemmis in Hopkins (1993, p. 44), action research has the following definition:

“Action research is a form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participators in a social situation (including education) in order to improve the rationality and justice of (a) their own social or educational practice, (b) their understanding of these practices and (c) the situation in which practices are carried out.”

It can be assumed that any research process that includes teacher researchers, principals, school counselors, or other stakeholders in the teaching/learning environment should be called action research. Moreover, Nunan (1997, p. 18) argues that action research has a feature that distinguishes it from other research endeavors in that those who will be affected by the proposed changes will have a leading role in deciding on courses of action based on critically informed decision making which they believe will lead to progress, and that the methods tried out in practice must be evaluated to verify the results. As many experts claim, action research is any systematic inquiry done by people participating in a social situation (including education) which aims to improve current practices. The model of classroom action research used in this study is based on the model developed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) in Burns (1999, p. 32) as it is stated that action research occurs through a dynamic and complementary process which consists of four fundamental steps in a spiraling process, namely: planning, observing, implementing and reflecting.

3. Data Collection Procedures

Qualitative and quantitative data were obtained through direct observation and testing in the research. Data obtained directly from the research subject as the source of

intended information are known as primary data. The primary data came from the class 9-A SMPN 14 Surabaya students' activities while implementing a literature circle approach for the class. In this study, the researcher used the evaluation sheet as the instrument to gather the data on the students' reading comprehension skills. This was done by implementing the literature circle approach for text retelling, which uses multiple texts to emulate real life situations. In total, there were two different types of tests: the pre-test and the post-test. A test for the normality and homogeneity of data was administered to the students before they received any treatment, and a test on the research hypothesis was administered to the students after they received treatment.

4. Criteria of Success

Classroom Action research (CAR) is able to be called successful if it can exceed the criterion that has been determined. In this research, this research was classified into success when there is 75% numbers of students in achieving some improvement scores from pre-test until the period of post-test in the cycles and they could pass the target score of minimal mastery level of criterion (KKM). The KKM that must fulfill considering of reading subject is 80 which was adapted from the school agreement of SMPN 14 Surabaya. If the criterion of the success achieved, it means the next cycle of the action research would be stopped. Meanwhile, the next action of cycle would be done if the criteria of success have not been achieved yet.

5. Data Analysis

To validate the instrument, the researcher submitted it to validators firstly before conducting try out to the subjects. After the instruments had validated, the researcher conducted tests. The result of tests validated by the researcher herself using the statistics analysis regarding the validity items. The computation of examining the validity of the instruments in the research will be counted through the "Product Moment Correlation." The test is valid if significance level (α) 0.05 is taken from $r_{xy} \geq r$ table. Then, to examine the reliability of the instrument, the researcher will use Alfa Coefficient.

To know the ability of the students after reading the text, the researcher gave the tests to them by using multiple-choice to test the students' ability in reading comprehension. Then, the researcher processed the value of each student by using the formula written by Brown & Cartier (1996, pp. 1-8). Lastly, examining the homogeneity is

used to figure out the homogeneity of the data of the sample and the population. In the research, the researcher uses Harley Test Formula as suggested by Irianto (2007, p. 276).

RESULTS FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

For this research, the researcher used Classroom Action Research (CAR), a well-established approach for establishing whether or not a Literature Circle (LC) will increase students' reading comprehension skills in the 9th grade at SMPN 14 Surabaya in the academic year 2020/2021. Each of the two cycles of this research consisted of three meetings, with three sessions taking place in each cycle. Microsoft Teams was used to conduct the first and second meetings in each cycle, which took a total of 2x40 minutes. While the first and second meetings were devoted to putting the LC into action, the third meeting was devoted to delivering a test to measure the students' ability to comprehend what they had been reading. The research was carried out between March 21st, 2021 and April 11th, 2021.

A preliminary investigation was carried out on Tuesday, March 21, 2011, by monitoring participants during an online learning session at SMPN 14 Surabaya. According to the observations, the students' reading comprehension in English was also inadequate, owing to the limited vocabulary of the students in the class, as observed by the researcher. Consequently, they had difficulty comprehending a reading comprehension material. Towards the end of the session, the researcher administered a pre-test to determine the students' ability to comprehend what they were reading. It was decided to include 25 multiple-choice questions in the test's items. 40 students participated in the pre-test, which was given 40 minutes to complete before going on to the main test, which focused on the use of the Literature Circle technique. The following are the results of the pre-cycle test, which are illustrated in figure 1:

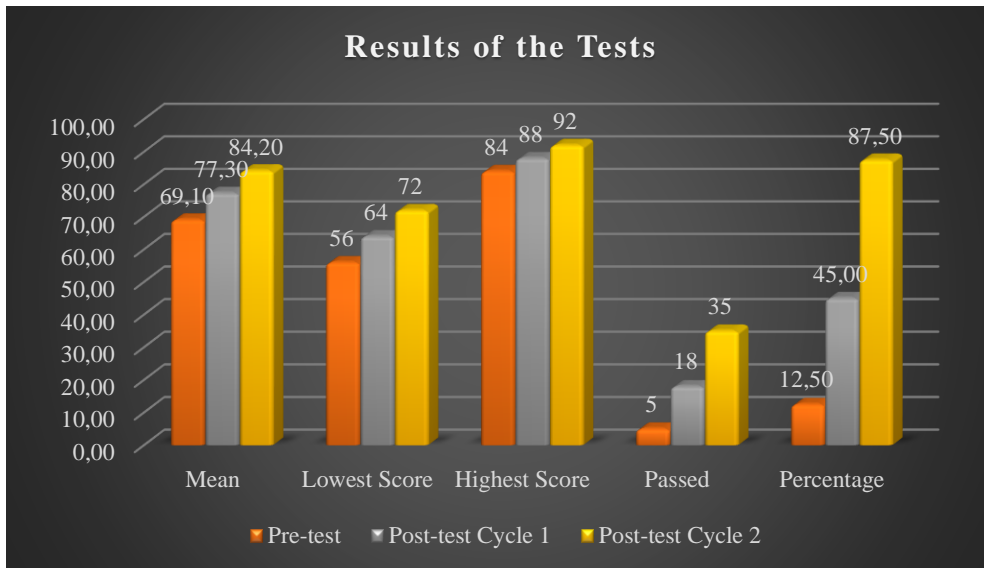


Figure 1. Students' Score Pre-test & Post-tests

As shown in Figure 1, it can be concluded that the actions taken resulted in improvements in the performance of class 9-A students. This conclusion is based on the results of the tests conducted during the pre-test, post-test cycle 1, and post-test cycle 2 that were evaluated. The mean score in the pre-test was 69.10, but improved during the first two cycles from 77.30 to 84.20. The pre-highest test's score was only 84, but improvements in the following cycles resulted in an increase from 88 to 92. The lowest scores on this test improved from the pre-test to the post-test tests, respectively. The lowest score in the pre-test was 56, while the post-test scores ranged from 63 to 72. In the event that students who took the tests were successful, some improvements were discovered. At the beginning of the test, only 5 of the students who had previously passed the test (12.50%). During post-tests, it was a 45% in the number of students who passed and a 90% in the number of students who passed post-tests were noted in the post-test cycle 1 and 2 that had a total of 18 students and 35 students in them, respectively. Related to the *Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM)* standard, if 75% or more of students' scores are 80 or higher, then teaching learning process has been successful. In accordance with the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM) standard, if 75 percent or more of students' scores are 80 or higher, the teaching learning process has been deemed effective by

the teacher. This demonstrates that the application of the Literature Circle technique (which results in better reading comprehension abilities for students) is beginning to be applicable, as indicated by the indication already being met. When comparing post-test results after cycle 1 to those after cycle 2, the researcher was able to interpret the students' learning outcomes using the LC technique, which allowed her to determine the progress. The results of the students' enhanced reading comprehension ability are represented in the following figure.

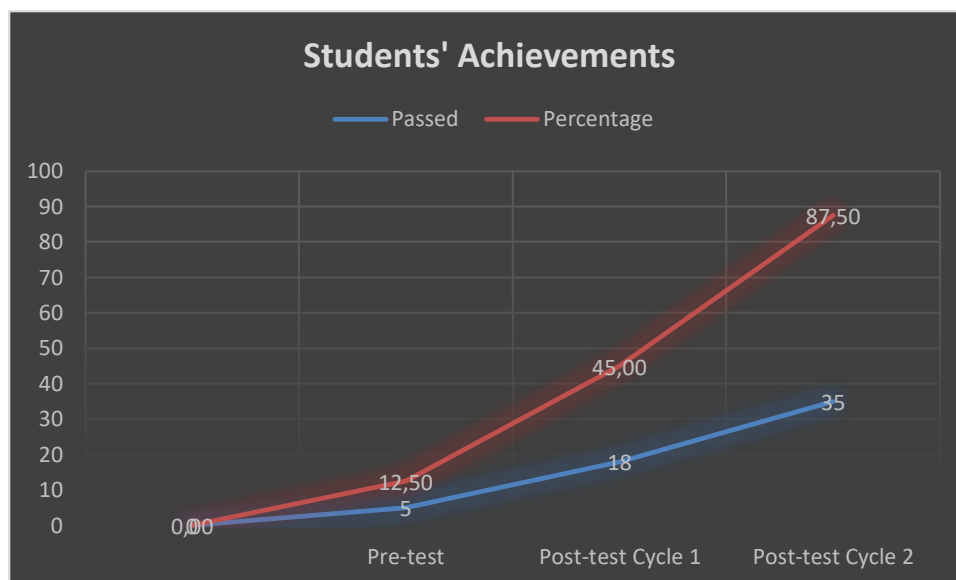


Figure 2. The Students' Achievement in Reading Comprehension

Students' reading comprehension improved as a result of the deployment of the LC technique, as seen in the figure. It was considered that the improvement indicated that the students were able to explore concepts for reading comprehension after receiving treatment with the LC technique, and this was validated by the results. It was determined that this research was ended in cycle 2 because the success requirements had been met in a percentage of 87.50%, according to the information gathered. On the basis of the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM) standard, which is ≥ 80 in the percentage $\geq 75\%$ students who pass the test, the number of students who passed the post-test in cycle 2 was 35 students in total. Following the findings of the research, the researcher concluded that the Literature Circle technique was effective in

improving the students' reading comprehension to students in class 9-A at SMPN 14 Surabaya in the academic year 2020/2021.

In the pre-test results were in the lower range, with an average score of only 69.10. The highest possible score on the pre-test was 84, while the lowest possible score was 56. The results of the test revealed that only 5 pupils were present among those who passed the exam (12.50%). In the end, just five students were able to pass the test if they got more than 80 on the master's requirements, which was the KKM. Consequently, the researcher argues that an appropriate strategy is required to solve the problems in order to achieve the learning objectives, particularly by using reading comprehension of narrative texts by 9-A students as the main topic, which was developed during the pre-research phase of the study, to achieve the learning objectives. According to her findings, the researcher concluded that the employment of a strategy intended to address problems in the classroom should be encouraged in order to improve students' abilities in the future. To achieve success with her study project, she employed the Literature Circle Technique to help students improve their reading comprehension skills. As a result, the Literature Circle Technique was used to help students improve their reading comprehension skills.

Although students' reading comprehension skills improved as a result of the implementation of the Literature Circle (LC) technique, according to Table 2, it was still necessary to conduct a second cycle due to the fact that the first cycle's implementation of the LC technique did not meet the research's minimum standard of success, as evidenced by the students who passed the test based on the criteria of success. However, the mean score for the students' reading comprehension exam was 77.30, with the lowest score being 64 and the best score being 84.30 percentiles. Although this was the case, when comparing their post-test results to their pre-test results, students' reading comprehension skills demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in terms of mean scores, which increased from 69.10 to

77.30, with the highest scoring 84 and the lowest scoring 64 on the scale. During this time span, the number of pupils who passed the test climbed from 5 to 18 from the previous year. One may claim that the number of students increased by 13 students, or 32.50 percent, since the beginning of the school year. Because 18 students (45.00 percent) met or exceeded the minimum standards (KKM) of ≥ 80 based on the master's criteria, the researcher decided to proceed with the next cycle to ensure the success of this research. The researcher wanted to ensure that this research was a success, so he proceeded with cycle 2 to ensure that it was.

On the basis of the results from cycle 2, it can be concluded that the pupils' reading comprehension in this class was exceptional. A total of 35 students (87.50 percent) passed the KKM, with only 5 students (12.50%) failing the test, according to the information presented above. The average score achieved by the students was 84.20. The lowest possible score was 72, and the best possible score was 92. As a result, it was discovered that the children's reading ability had significantly improved. On the basis of the findings of the research conducted in cycle 2, the researcher and collaborator were pleased with the outcomes, noting that the students' overall performance was great. In addition, the students demonstrated excellent comprehension of a reading book, as well as passion and participation throughout the learning and teaching procedures and activities. In addition, the instructor was successful in implementing the Literature Circle technique in the online classroom for students in class 9-A at SMPN 14 Surabaya, which resulted in increased student engagement. Upon reviewing Cycle 2 data and establishing that at least 75% of those who took the KKM passed, the researcher and collaborator decided to discontinue the Classroom Action Research cycle at that point.

As a result, Literature Circles assisted students in better grasping the reading text they were assigned. To put it another way, Literature Circles had a major impact on students' capacity to comprehend what they were reading and write about it. The students were asked to participate in small-group conversations about the reading material, which was accomplished

through the use of the Literature Circles Strategy. Everyone in each group participated in the following activities: *highlighter, relater, picture builder, word detectives, profilers, and question creators (to name a few)*. The Literature Circle technique has a significant impact on improving the students' capacity to comprehend narrative literature, particularly when used in conjunction with other techniques. According to the testing hypothesis, it can be concluded that the use of the Literature Circles Strategy had a statistically significant impact on the students' ability to comprehend what they were reading. It is possible to conclude that the research hypothesis is ACCEPTED based on the results of the hypothesis computation.

CONCLUSION

The Literature Circle technique was successfully implemented with the students of SMPN 14 Surabaya in the 9th grade. A considerable improvement in the application of the Literature Circle was seen among the students. Students' narrative reading comprehension achievement in class 9-A was greatly enhanced as a result of the Literature Circles technique, according to the results of the pre- and post-tests. As a result, this method would be appropriate for use with students in the 9th grade. Furthermore, by doing the research through the use of Literature Circle, the students were able to participate more actively in the class activities as a result. They participated enthusiastically in all stages of the process and had a genuine interest in learning. It facilitated group collaboration and improved participants' ability to communicate with one another and build a sense of belonging in a group setting. Furthermore, the students' performance improved as a result of their study of literary texts.

Based on the above conclusions, it is recommended Teachers should be prepared to work with kids who learn in a variety of ways at all times. The literature circle approach should be given the opportunity to test and experiment with new learning strategies, notably online learning, in the event of a future pandemic in order to gather experience. When teachers participate in their own literature circle groups, they will gain a better understanding of how to plan for student development. For the students, the outcomes of the study will be used to broaden the scope of the literature circle technique in order to gain a better grasp of reading comprehension in general. As an added bonus, helping them to improve their English language skills will inspire them to improve their reading comprehension skills. For other researchers,

Additional research is needed to corroborate the findings of this study, which suggests that the literature circle technique is a viable educational strategy. Other researchers will benefit from this study because they will gain a better knowledge of the literature circle method and will be able to apply it in the context of either online or traditional learning processes. If students continue to participate in literature circles, they may be able to improve their reading comprehension skills.

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