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STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON READING CIRCLE METHOD IN ACADEMIC TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

Reading is a compulsory activity for students in the university. Nevertheless, many students perceive that reading is boring, especially in class. Therefore, teachers need to implement an innovative method to keep the students curious and motivated in reading. Reading Circle is a reading method recommended to help students understand better in a more varied and interactive way. Thus, this research aims to explore this method by asking students' perceptions about the Reading Circle method that is conducted as a reading activity in their class. This research employed a qualitative method. It invited 45 students who studied at the Guidance and Counselling study program. Data were taken using open and closed questionnaires. The data were analysed using a Likert scale and coding analysis. The results showed that the method had a positive belief on students' understanding of academic reading. This method also contributed to increasing student self-confidence, creating a more dynamic class atmosphere through active discussions, stimulating students to think critically, training communication skills between group members, increasing teamwork, and encouraging students to have big reading. For these reasons, this result can be a potential source of teaching methods in the classroom.

Keywords: Reading circle; academic texts

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is a central academic activity in higher education, where students are expected to build knowledge, broaden perspectives, and develop critical thinking skills through consistent engagement with written materials. Although independent reading is intended to prepare students for classroom learning, improve comprehension, and strengthen academic readiness, numerous studies and classroom experiences indicate that many university students struggle with this task. Long, dense academic readings often create anxiety rather than motivation, especially for students who lack confidence in their reading abilities. Consequently, insufficient comprehension and low reading motivation frequently contribute to students' poor academic performance, forming a domino effect that impacts their overall learning outcomes. This reality highlights a significant gap between the pedagogical expectations placed upon university students and their actual readiness to engage meaningfully with academic texts.

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A persistent challenge is that reading is commonly perceived as a monotonous and unengaging activity. Many students express that reading long, complex academic materials—especially those assigned without consideration of personal interest—reduces their enthusiasm and motivation to learn. Recent findings by Novitasari et. al (2021) indicate that readers are more motivated when they have the freedom to select texts aligned with their personal interests. In contrast, classroom texts are typically predetermined to fit the curriculum, causing a mismatch between students' reading preferences and the required academic content. This disconnect raises an important pedagogical question: how can educators promote active, meaningful reading engagement among students who lack intrinsic motivation for academic texts?

One instructional approach that has gained attention for its potential to address this issue is the Reading Circle, also known as the Literature Circle. Literature circles consist of small groups of students who engage in reading and discussing a book or other material. They allow students to share their thoughts, ask questions, and explore different perspectives led by a peer. Each group member within a group takes on a specific role, guiding the discussion (Cox, 2024). This method integrates collaborative learning with individual accountability, allowing students to interact with a shared reading while assuming specific roles within a small group. Originally adapted from language classrooms in the United States (Daniels, 2002; LeBlanc, 2015) The Reading Circle provides a structured yet flexible framework in which each group member contributes to a collective understanding of the text. Roles such as discussion leader, summarizer, connector, word master, and passage person enable students to engage with the reading from different angles, thereby facilitating deeper comprehension and active participation.

The role-based structure of the Reading Circle aims to enhance students' responsibility and engagement. According to Furr (2007), assigning roles encourages students to explore readings more thoroughly and collaboratively, as each member's contribution supports the group's overall comprehension. This design not only stimulates active discussion but also fosters shared ownership of the learning process. Moreover, the rotation of roles allows students to develop multiple reading-related skills, from summarizing information to analysing vocabulary and constructing meaningful questions.

Empirical studies demonstrate numerous benefits of the Reading Circle method. Shelton-Strong (2018) found that Reading Circles enhance reading fluency, vocabulary knowledge, and speaking confidence, as students participate actively and consistently in group discussions. Wilfong (2009) also notes that student-chosen readings can significantly improve reading motivation, though even predetermined academic texts become more approachable when discussed collaboratively. Additional research by Dijay (2025), Ma (2023), and Kucuk (2025) highlights improvements in critical thinking, self-confidence, communication skills, and comprehension when Reading Circles are implemented effectively. In addition, Ma(2025) highlights the significance of reading circles as an effective method for enhancing L2 English learning outcomes and provides valuable insights for educators and researchers in this domain.

These findings suggest that Reading Circles may offer an effective alternative to traditional reading instruction, especially for students who struggle with motivation or confidence in reading academic materials.

Previous research has chiefly discussed reading Circles in EFL and ESL contexts in schools and universities. A limited study discussed the use of reading Circles in non-English subjects or courses. Hermarita (2018) researched the use of Literature Circles for appreciating short stories in the Indonesian language subject at school. The Literature Circle was effective in teaching short stories in the class. Given these considerations, this study aims to investigate university students' perceptions of the Reading Circle method in understanding academic texts as a teaching strategy in one Guidance and Counselling study program. Understanding students' experiences and attitudes toward this approach is crucial, as perception also influences participation, learning

engagement, and the overall success of pedagogical innovations in the English language context. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for educators seeking to implement or refine Reading Circle practices, ensuring that the method aligns with students' needs, learning styles, and varying reading abilities in academic texts. Ultimately, this study contributes to ongoing efforts to enhance reading pedagogy in higher education by exploring how collaborative, role-based reading activities can support deeper comprehension and more positive reading experiences among university students.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design with a descriptive approach to explore university students' perceptions of the Reading Circle method as a classroom approach to reading academic texts in the Teaching Strategies course. The mixed-methods design was chosen to allow the integration of quantitative data from closed-ended questionnaires and qualitative data from open-ended responses, providing a more comprehensive understanding of students' experiences.

The quantitative component was used to identify general trends in students' perceptions related to engagement, comprehension, collaboration, and challenges in Reading Circle activities. Meanwhile, the qualitative component enabled the researcher to capture students' subjective experiences, opinions, and suggestions in greater depth. This combination supported a richer interpretation of the benefits, limitations, and potential improvements of the Reading Circle method based on participants' actual classroom experiences.

2.2 Participants and Setting

The research was conducted at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Tanjungpura Pontianak. Participants consisted of 45 undergraduate students from the Guidance and Counselling Study Program. Purposive sampling was applied, as the selected students had completed coursework that incorporated Reading Circle activities. Their direct involvement in the method ensured that they were able to provide informed and relevant perceptions aligned with the research objectives.

Before data collection, students participated in several Reading Circle sessions and assumed rotating roles such as leader, summarizer, connector, word master, and passage person, following established guidelines. These learning experiences formed the basis for students' responses to the research instruments.

2.3 Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected using closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires. The closed-ended questionnaire employed Likert-scale items to obtain quantitative data on students' levels of agreement regarding engagement, role clarity, comprehension improvement, collaboration, and challenges encountered during Reading Circle activities. The open-ended questionnaire generated qualitative data by allowing students to elaborate on their experiences, perceptions, and suggestions that could not be fully captured through scaled responses.

All questionnaire items were validated by experts to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives. Data collection was conducted after students had completed multiple Reading Circle sessions to ensure that responses were based on authentic learning experiences. The implementation of the Reading Circle activities followed these procedures:

1) Students were assigned to stable groups, with rotating roles across sessions.
2) Students received a research article one week before each class meeting.
3) Worksheets were distributed to guide individual and group preparation.
4) During class sessions, students discussed the texts in groups and presented their role-based findings (see Table 1).

Table 1 Reading Circle roles and tasks

Role	Task
Discussion Leader	- Read the text and prepare two general questions and two points for discussion about what you have read. - Ask one or two questions to start the discussion. - Ensure that each group member has a chance to speak during the discussion. - Ask each group member to present the results of their respective tasks/roles. - Lead the discussion while keeping an eye on the time.
The Connector	- Read the text and look for connections/relationships between the claims/arguments/findings in the article and your own experiences. - Note down each connection to your experiences from news or real-life events. - Share the connections and ask for opinions from group members. - Ask them if they have any connections from the article based on their experiences/events they have encountered.
The Definer	- Read the text and find new or difficult words, phrases, and sentences, or those that are considered important. - Select 10 words/phrases/sentences to share with group members. - Write down the meaning of these words/phrases/sentences, indicating the page and paragraph numbers. - Explain why these words/phrases/sentences are important.
The text Summarizer	- Read the text and focus on the main ideas. - Write down the main ideas in your own words. - Summarise the content of the text and read it aloud to the group members.
The text Analyst	- Read the text and find important, interesting, or difficult pages/paragraphs accompanied by the text pages/paragraphs. - Read the paragraphs. - Ask group members about the paragraphs.

2.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using a mixed methods descriptive approach, combining descriptive statistical analysis for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data.

Students completed the questionnaires after participating in multiple Reading Circle sessions to ensure that their responses reflected actual classroom experiences rather than hypothetical expectations.

Quantitative data were obtained from the closed-ended questionnaire, which consisted of ten statements measuring students' perceptions of the Reading Circle method throughout one semester. Responses were rated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, to identify general trends in students' perspectives on engagement, role clarity, comprehension, collaboration, and perceived challenges.

Qualitative data were collected through five open-ended questions designed to elicit more detailed explanations of students' responses and to identify obstacles encountered during the Reading Circle sessions. These open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic coding. The researcher systematically reviewed all responses, identified recurring ideas, and grouped them into thematic categories such as perceived benefits, challenges, difficulties related to specific roles, motivation, and suggestions for improvement. This thematic organization enabled the synthesis of individual responses into broader patterns that complemented the quantitative findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study examined the perceptions of 45 undergraduate students regarding the implementation of the Reading Circle method in a Teaching Strategy course. Data gathered from both closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires were analyzed to determine the impact on reading comprehension, engagement, and affective outcomes. Table 2 summarizes the quantitative findings from the closed-ended questionnaire.

Table 2. Students' Perceptions in Reading Circle

	Statement	Response				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Reading Circle enhanced my reading comprehension, particularly in my role.	1,6%	4,8%	27,4%	27,4%	46,8%
2	I was more motivated to read academic texts	1,6%	4,8%	29%	46,8%	24,2%
3	I was responsible and sincere in my	1,6%	3,2%	16,1%	43,5%	41,9%

	reading, as per my role.					
4	Reading Circle improved my skills in asking questions and giving feedback on the reading.	1,6%	1,6%	24,2%	41,9%	37,1%
5	I was more confident in presenting my reading results to the group	1,6%	1,6%	21%	32,3%	50%
6	Reading Circle improved my reading comprehension through a group perspective.	1,6%	3,2%	14,5%	33,9%	53,2%
7	Reading Circle has engaged me in my reading.	1,6%	3,2%	17,7%	52,6%	35,5%
8	Reading Circle improved my social and collaborative skills.	3,2%	3,2%	12,9%	51,6%	35,5%
9	Reading Circle can improve my vocabulary mastery	1,6%	3,2%	17,7%	30,6%	53,2%
10	Reading Circle can help me think critically in connecting the text and my reading experience.	1,6%	1,6%	22,6%	48,4%	32,3%

The findings are categorized into four key themes: (1) reading comprehension and critical thinking, (2) engagement and accountability, (3) affective development and self-confidence, and (4) implementation challenges.

1. Enhancement of Reading Comprehension and Critical Thinking

The data indicates a strong consensus that the Reading Circle method facilitates a deeper understanding of academic texts. Quantitatively, the majority of participants reported positive outcomes regarding group-based comprehension (Statement 6), with 53.2% strongly agreeing and 33.9% agreeing that group discussions contributed to a better understanding of the material. Similarly, 46.8% strongly agreed that the specific roles they assumed enhanced their individual comprehension (Statement 1).

Qualitative responses provided insight into the mechanisms behind these statistics. Students attributed their improved comprehension to the distinct role assignments—such as summarizer, leader, connector, word master, and passage person. These roles forced students to focus on specific textual elements, facilitating a more in-depth analysis. Furthermore, participants noted that the small group format transformed learning from a "one-way process" into a dynamic interaction, allowing for the clarification of complex concepts.

This depth of understanding also extended to vocabulary and critical thinking. A significant proportion of students (53.2%) strongly agreed that the method contributed to vocabulary mastery (Statement 9). Regarding higher-order thinking, 48.4% agreed and 32.3% strongly agreed that the activities encouraged them to connect textual content with their own experiences (Statement 10). Participants described the method as particularly effective for digesting academic texts that were previously regarded as complex or unfamiliar.

2. Engagement, Responsibility, and Collaboration

The Reading Circle method appears to foster a high degree of accountability and social interdependence. The quantitative results show that 41.9% of students strongly agreed and 43.5% agreed that role assignments encouraged greater accountability (Statement 3). This sense of responsibility was corroborated by qualitative data, where students reported that the specific obligations associated with their roles motivated them to prepare thoroughly to ensure the group's success.

Engagement levels were similarly high, with 52.6% agreeing and 35.5% strongly agreeing that the method increased their engagement with the reading material (Statement 7). Furthermore, 46.8% agreed that they were more motivated to read academic texts (Statement 2). Beyond individual responsibility, the method strengthened collaborative skills; 51.6% agreed and 35.5% strongly agreed that the activities fostered collaboration (Statement 8). Qualitative feedback highlighted that the intensive discussion process increased group cohesiveness and fostered a sense of belonging, shaping a more disciplined and collaborative academic character

3**.** Affective Outcomes: Confidence and Communication

A notable finding of this study is the positive impact of Reading Circles on students' psychological comfort and communication skills. Half of the respondents (50%) strongly agreed that the activities increased their confidence in presenting reading results (Statement 5).

Qualitative insights reveal that this boost in confidence stems from the "safe space" created by small groups. Unlike extensive class discussions which can be intimidating, the Reading Circle environment was described by students as making them feel "more courageous to speak" and "more comfortable presenting arguments." Factors contributing to this included the limited number of group members and equal opportunities for participation. Consequently, 41.9% agreed

and 37.1% strongly agreed that the method improved their interactive reading skills, specifically the ability to ask questions and provide feedback (Statement 4).

4. Implementation Challenges

Despite the predominantly positive perceptions, qualitative data revealed specific logistical and environmental challenges that impacted the efficacy of the method:

- Environmental Distractions: Students noted that the classroom atmosphere was occasionally non-conducive to learning. As multiple groups discussed simultaneously in a single room, noise levels often disrupted concentration, making it difficult for some students to hear peers or maintain focus.
- Temporal Constraints: Several participants reported that the allotted time was insufficient for deep analysis and role fulfillment. This pressure led to rushing through readings, prompting suggestions for extended discussion periods or staged discussions to maximize understanding.

Discussion

This section interprets the research findings within the context of the theoretical framework established in the preceding sections. Fundamentally, this study examines student perceptions, which, as defined by Bohner and Wänke (2002, cited in (Novitasari et al., 2021), are crucial elements influencing individual reactions to specific situations. Ament et al. (2025) further posit that perceptions shape how individuals interpret the external world and are intrinsically present in their internal cognitive processing.

Impact on Reading Comprehension

The most prominent finding of this study was that students perceived the Reading Circle method as highly effective for improving reading comprehension. This improvement was largely attributed to the structured role assignments. Participants indicated that role-sharing facilitated the understanding of academic texts that were previously considered difficult. This aligns with Anderson and Smith (2016) who demonstrated that Reading Circles enhance understanding by guiding students to process information intensively through discussion. Specific roles, such as the summarizer and connector, encourage students to synthesize ideas and link readings to real-life experiences—strategies proven to enhance higher-level text comprehension.

These findings corroborate recent studies by Marbani & Ngilangil (2025) and Novitasari et al., (2021) which concluded that Literature Circles effectively develop reading fluency, vocabulary mastery, and literary comprehension. Furthermore, Elhess and Egbert (2015) emphasize that these methods help learners develop comprehension skills that are critical for academic text analysis.

Affective Benefits: Confidence and Community

Beyond cognitive gains, the study revealed significant affective benefits, particularly regarding self-confidence. As communication skills improved during discussions, students reported increased confidence in speaking. One participant explicitly noted: *"I can work in a team... [and] improve my confidence in speaking in front of friends based on the role I have"* (Student 1).

This result mirrors findings by Kucuk (2025) who confirmed that Reading Circles improve speaking skills, thereby boosting self-confidence. Ma (2025) argues that providing students the freedom to engage in discussion is essential for communication development. Conceptually, the small group format aligns with Wenger's (2015) notion of a "learning community," where social

interaction fosters academic identity and the courage to participate. In the present study, the "safe space" of the small group allowed students to feel better equipped to express their opinions.

Collaborative Learning and Role Accountability

The findings further validate the efficacy of Reading Circles in promoting collaborative learning, a fundamental component of the method (Daniels, 2002; Elhess & Egbert, 2015). Consistent with Kucuk's (2025) research, which found that students enjoyed learning from peers, the participants in this study were actively engaged because each member held a specific role essential to the group's success. This confirms that cooperative learning structures can significantly increase student participation and foster a sense of shared responsibility.

However, the perception of these roles presents an interesting contrast to existing literature. While participants in the current study viewed role assignments positively as a source of engagement, other studies have reported mixed results. Ament et al. (2025) noted that students often find roles such as the "leader" or "contextualizer" difficult, while Dijaya (2025) found that the "facilitator" and "illustrator" were the most disliked roles. This discrepancy suggests that while roles can drive responsibility, they can also intensify pressure; insufficient readiness from certain members has the potential to disrupt the group's overall performance if not managed well.

Implementation Challenges

Despite the evident benefits, the study identified specific logistical challenges. Qualitative data revealed that the classroom atmosphere was occasionally non-conducive to learning; students reported that noise from simultaneous group discussions distracted their concentration. This highlights the importance of the facilitator's role in managing discussion dynamics and creating an orderly learning space, as emphasized by Rogoff (2014).

Furthermore, time constraints emerged as a significant hurdle. Students reported that the 90-minute session was sometimes insufficient for in-depth discussion. This echoes the findings of Chiang and Huang in Calzada (2013) who identified time constraints, uneven distribution of responsibilities, and the occasional irresponsibility of members as persistent challenges in the implementation of cooperative reading strategies.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Reading Circle method is an effective pedagogical strategy for enhancing academic reading comprehension in higher education. By assigning distinct roles within small groups, the method encourages focused engagement with the text, enabling participants to contribute meaningfully to collaborative analysis. Beyond cognitive gains, the structure fosters critical thinking, communication skills, and self-confidence. The increased sense of motivation and responsibility reported by students indicates that the method successfully integrates cognitive development with affective engagement.

Furthermore, this study highlights the broader social utility of Reading Circles. Participants experienced enhanced interaction, stronger teamwork, and greater psychological comfort in academic discussions. These results confirm that the method transforms reading from a solitary, passive task into a shared, interactive process. By creating a dynamic, student-centered environment, the Reading Circle approach bridges the gap between individual reading capability and collaborative knowledge construction.

However, successful implementation is not without challenges. Time constraints were identified as a significant factor, limiting the depth of role fulfillment and discussion. Additionally, logistical issues such as group composition and environmental distractions—specifically noise levels—were perceived as hindrances to concentration. Future implementations necessitate strategic adjustments in instructional design, including extended discussion durations, optimized group sizes, and the selection of appropriate physical environments to mitigate noise.

Ultimately, this research contributes valuable insights to the growing body of knowledge on student-centered pedagogies. It confirms the efficacy of the Reading Circle method while offering practical implications for educators. To maximize the benefits of active engagement and deep comprehension, instructors must balance the method's collaborative strengths with careful logistical planning.

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