

Study on the Influence of “Reading Circle” in English Teaching in China and at Abroad

Xu Xinyue, Zhang Wenwen

[**Abstract**] This study focuses on the influence of “reading circle” at home and abroad. This paper introduces the background, concept and implementation elements of “reading circle” in detail. We discover that: firstly, “reading circle” can improve students’ reading and writing abilities and change the classroom atmosphere; secondly, “reading circle” has a certain impact on students’ cultural, social and emotional abilities; thirdly, paying attention to “reading circle” can improve the thinking ability of college English majors and promote the development of their thinking ability and critical thinking. At the same time, the research of “reading circle” teaching in primary and secondary school English teaching is not enough and needs further exploration.

[**Key words**] reading circle; teaching model; application in primary and secondary schools; English teaching

[**About the author**] Xu Xinyue (2003—), female, from Hefei, Anhui, China, affiliated with School of Foreign Languages, Anqing Normal University. Research interests: applied linguistics, English teaching methods. Zhang Wenwen (2001—), female, from Chizhou, Anhui, China, master of education, affiliated with School of Foreign Languages, Anqing Normal University. Research interests: English teaching methods, sociolinguistics.

[**DOI**] <https://doi.org/10.62662/kxwxy0112004>

[**Website**] www.oacj.net

1 Introduction

In China, the research on “reading circle” has a late start compared to international studies, lagging behind in depth and breadth. This paper will discuss the research from the aspects of stage, object, method, content, result and disciplinary distribution.

Research stages: from introduction to practical exploration. Initially, the research focused on introducing and translating the theory and practice of “reading circle” from foreign scholars such as Harvey Daniels. Subsequently, the research shifted towards practical exploration of localized applications and effects in different contexts, educational stages and disciplines.

Research objects: broad coverage with insufficient depth. Research objects include students at different educational stages and under different language teachings. However, in-depth research on specific populations is relatively insufficient, lacking detailed case studies to reveal the influence mechanisms of “reading circle” on different student groups.

Research methods: predominant qualitative research with insufficient quantitative research. Currently, the research on “reading circle” in China predominantly uses qualitative methods such as case analysis, classroom observation, and interviews. Quantitative research is relatively scarce, lacking large-scale experimental studies to validate the effectiveness and influencing factors of “reading circle”. As a result, the general applicability and persuasiveness of research conclusions need to be improved.

Research content: multiple foci with insufficient systematization. Research content covers various aspects such as implementation strategies, student participation, reading ability improvement, cooperative learning ability training, critical thinking development, etc. However, there is a lack of systematic integration of these aspects, and the theoretical framework and system of “reading circle” are not yet complete. Some research stops at simple summaries and generalizations of existing experiences and lacks deep theoretical analysis and innovation.

Research results: rich practical cases with insufficient theoretical summarization. China has accumulated many practical cases of “reading circle”, which are beneficial for the promotion and application of “reading circle” in

China. However, the summarization and extraction of these practical cases are insufficient, and lack systematic analysis of successful experience and lessons, making it difficult to form a guiding theoretical framework.

Disciplinary distributions: predominant English language teaching applications. Compared to Chinese language teaching, the research on the application of “reading circle” in English language teaching in China is relatively more frequent, especially in universities and secondary schools. This is because English language teaching places more emphasis on cultivating students’ self-learning abilities and critical thinking, and the “reading circle” model can squarely meet these needs.

2 Related international research

Since the “reading circle” teaching model was first introduced into the teaching practice in 1982, the international educational circle has carried out a continuous theoretical discussion and practical verification on it. Up to now, many education researchers, academic experts and front-line teachers abroad have carried out extensive research in the field of “reading circle” and achieved remarkable results.

2.1 Theoretical research on “reading circle”

Harvey Daniels’ representative work, *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-centered Classroom*, was published in 1994, which details the background, concept, and implementation elements of “literature circle”. This book has significantly promoted the concept of “literature circle” and contributed to its development. Subsequent research by Daniels, such as *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* (2002) and *Mini-lessons for Literature Circles* (2004), has further enriched the academic resources in this field.

2.2 Practical research on “reading circle”

Over the years, educators and teachers have integrated “literature circle” into various teaching stages, accumulating rich experience. Charlotte Hendrik Keefe’s book *Literature Circles: Reducing Reading Pressure* (1996) explores the advantages and teaching strategies of “literature circle”, emphasizing the importance of making reading a pleasurable activity for children.

In her book *Using Literary Circles to Change the Classroom Climate* (1998), Bonnie Burns discusses the application of “literature circle” in secondary education, highlighting its ability to enhance students’ reading and writing skills and improve classroom atmosphere. Bonnie Burns (1998) pointed out that by allowing students to choose their own reading materials, form mixed reading groups, participate in small interactive groups led by students and have enough reading time, “literature circle” can effectively enhance students’ sense of responsibility in the classroom, cultivate their cooperative spirit and make them feel happy. In the application of this teaching model, students have the opportunity to enjoy literary works and conduct interactive discussions.

Joan E. Dillon’s study “Expanding the Circle: Applying the Literature Circle Model to Developmental Reading Courses in College” (2007) proposes to apply the “literature circle” model to college-level developmental reading courses, emphasizing the importance of students acquiring cross-disciplinary knowledge.

Recent research has also explored the integration of “reading circle” in digital media to maximize its impact on education. Anne Cloonan, Louise Paatsch, and Kirsten Hutchison’s book *Rethinking Literature Circles: Designing Multimodal Response-oriented Instruction* (2019) emphasizes the importance of multimodal responses and student identity recognition. The authors point out that although “literature circle” has long advocated the focus on students’ “voice” and “choice”, it still lacks critical and literary skills, and fails to take full advantage of digital media technology.

With the deepening of the research on “literature circle”, scholars have not only paid attention to its influence on students, but also explored its full effect on students’ cultural, social and emotional abilities. Venegas Elena M.’s paper “We Listened to Each Other: Socioemotional Growth in Literature Circles” (2019) emphasizes that while “literature circle” enhances students’ cultural literacy, their social and emotional abilities are critical and are the cornerstones of successful participation in the model. In a study of fifth-graders who participated in “literature circle”, she reveals that they experienced significant improvements in self-management, social awareness, social meta-cognition, and interpersonal skills.

With many scholars focusing on the application of “literature circle” in L1 (mother tongue) classrooms, Mark Furr, who has many years of teaching experience, innovatively introduced it into EFL (teaching English for non-mother tongue) classrooms. In 2004, he published “Literature Circles for the EFL Classroom”, marking the initial exploration of the concept of “literature circle” in the field of foreign language learning. Mark Furr (2004) pointed out that “literature circle” has a unique charm, and deeply discussed its origin and positive effects in the field of reading teaching. In particular, he pointed out that while “literature circle” is effective in L1 (mother tongue) classrooms, its use in EFL (teaching English for non-mother tongue) classrooms takes into account students’ specific needs and ability levels, adapting itself to the traditional model.

Specifically, Mark Furr modified the first 4 of the 11 core elements of “literature circle” proposed by Harvey Daniels to better fit the characteristics of EFL learners and ensure that this teaching model is equally effective in cross-cultural and cross-language teaching scenarios. In his subsequent research, Mark Furr formally introduced the new concept of “reading circle” in *Bookworms Club: Stories for Reading Circles*.

Subsequently, the research field of “reading circle” has attracted the attention of more related scholars. In 2015, Yuka Kusanagi pioneered the use of the “reading circle” teaching model in English teaching for medical students in her book *Literary Reading Circles and Short Essay Activities for English Learning among Medical Students*. Based on the analysis of students’ essay scores and the results of questionnaire survey, this book evaluates the influence of this teaching model on medical students’ learning results, and extracts its teaching significance, which provides practical reference for ESL (English as a second language) and EFL (teaching English for non-mother tongue) teachers. This research not only enriches the application field of “reading circle”, but also injects new vitality into the transformation of the emerging “literary circle” from theoretical conception to teaching practice.

3 Related domestic research

Although the research on “reading circle” in China started relatively late compared to foreign countries, this teaching model has gradually attracted attention, and researchers from different education stages, including experts, scholars and front-line teachers, are actively carrying out relevant research.

3.1 Application of “reading circle” in Chinese teaching

Xu Zhengyi’s book *Cultivating Lifelong Readers Who Love Books—Literature Little Circles* (2003) elaborates on the theoretical framework, characteristics and practical application of “literature circle”, and deeply analyzes the functions of teachers in this teaching model. Liu Miao and Jin Yanfeng of Beijing Normal University began to pay attention to “reading circle” and published “Literature Circles—Innovation in Reading Teaching Methods” in 2006, affirming the positive influence of “literature circle” in Chinese teaching and holding that “literature circle” is a kind of reading teaching method with infinite generation and can promote students’ all-round development.

In 2009, Yao Jiarui published a paper entitled “A First Exploration of the ‘Literature Circle’ Teaching Method”, putting forward the basic idea of “literature circle” teaching method. In 2016, Xia Jinlan published a paper entitled “An Analysis of the Teaching Practice of Children’s Literature Extracurricular Reading Based on the Literature Circle Model”, which explores the application of “literature circle” in primary schools’ extracurricular reading education.

3.2 Application of “reading circle” in English teaching

Li Xiaoyan (2018) incorporated the “reading circle” model into the teaching of English stories in primary schools to explore its impact on students’ cooperation and thinking ability. The research finds that “reading circle”, as an innovative cooperative inquiry method in story reading teaching, effectively improves students’ reading interest and cooperative inquiry ability through role division, independent reading, sharing and communication, and post-reading display. In this process, students’ language ability, thinking and cultural accomplishment have been improved, and the cultivation of core qualities such as independent reading, independent thinking and cooperative learning has been truly implemented.

Lin Hong (2018) innovatively applied the “reading circle” model in the reading teaching of English picture

books in primary schools. Through three training methods of implicit, semi-implicit and explicit, the research carried out promotion research in 12 primary schools in Changping District, Beijing, and verified the wide applicability and feasibility of this model in primary school English teaching. Subsequently, Li Yuanxiao (2019), Yu Yunfeng (2019), Tang Chenqian (2019) and other scholars further discussed the application of “reading circle” in the reading teaching of English picture books in primary schools by combining specific teaching cases, providing new ideas and methods for the research on the teaching of English picture books.

Lyu Xuhong (2012) and Wu Xiaxia (2016) both pointed out that “literature circle” plays a positive role in improving the thinking ability, especially critical thinking, of college English majors. Wang Hou (2017) took “The Monster”, the practical teaching case, as an example to demonstrate the application of “reading circle” in the reading teaching of English majors. Zhao Dongxia (2017) and Wang Junying (2017) also discussed the implementation of “literature circle” in the reading course of college English majors, and verified its effectiveness and feasibility.

Meanwhile, Dai Yong (2017) and Chen Shuying (2018) explored innovative ways to introduce the “literature circle” teaching method into college literature courses. The latter, taking the teaching of *Border Town* as an example, clearly introduces the implementation of “literature circle” in college literature courses. Liu Hui (2018) explored the effect of the “reading circle” teaching model on the construction of college English culture teaching. In her paper, she systematically elaborated the theoretical basis and construction process of the model, and demonstrated its feasibility in teaching practice. Pu Chunhong (2019) affirmed the model on this basis, and further supplemented the challenges and problems that the teaching model of “reading circle” may face in the implementation of college English culture teaching.

Zhang Yuemei (2015) tried to introduce “literature circle” into junior high school English reading, and elaborated on the application basis of “literature circle”. Zhou Siyu (2019) and Zhang Mengying (2019) explored the application of “reading circle” in high school English fiction reading from the perspective of extra-curricular fiction reading. Although most previous studies focused on the application of “literature circle” in extra-curricular English reading, Chen Xinyan (2018) took a new approach in high school English reading class by adopting “literature circle”, and proposed an innovative text processing strategy combining “literature circle” and “jigsaw puzzle” method.

Qian Jia (2018) took the teaching excerpts of *The Apple Tree* and *The Old Man and the Sea* as examples to introduce the specific implementation steps of “reading circle” activity in senior high school English reading teaching, arguing that the “reading circle” teaching model can reverse students’ negative reading attitude and improve their reading efficiency.

In order to explore the specific effect of “literature circle” on junior high school students’ English reading experience, Yuan Peiyuan (2019) selected 96 students from a junior high school in Guangzhou as samples to conduct an empirical study. The research results show that “literature circle” significantly improves junior middle school students’ English reading experience, the most prominent of which is the positive impact on reading attitude, followed by the improvement of reading interest and self-evaluation ability. This effect is mainly attributed to the increase of students’ reading volume, the effective guidance and encouragement of teachers, the creation of a good reading environment, and the flexibility of “literature circle” activities.

Yang Su (2019) and Zhao Yu (2019) respectively analyzed the practical value of “reading circle” in junior high school English teaching from their respective perspectives, providing new perspectives for related theoretical research and practice. In addition, based on *English Curriculum Standards (2017 edition)*, Chen Dongrong (2020) explored the teaching model of “reading circle” in practice, expounded the application of “CO reading symbiosis” in high school English, and explored the strategy of cultivating high school students’ thinking and innovation abilities.

4 Conclusion

In summary, the “reading circle” teaching model, originating from abroad, has a relatively mature theoretical

system and its effectiveness and practicality have been proven through practice. Related theoretical innovations and practical explorations are also increasing. Looking at the development in China, the initial research focuses on the application of “reading circle” in Chinese teaching. In recent years, with the deepening understanding of “reading circle” by language scholars and English teachers, the model’s influence and importance have been widely recognized, stimulating in-depth research in this field. The application of “reading circle” in university English reading teaching is relatively rich, while research at primary and secondary school stages is still insufficient, leaving significant research gaps to be explored.

This study aims to further explore the impact of “reading circle” on high school students’ interest, attitude, and ability in English reading using textbooks as the research content. The hope is to provide references and insights for the development of “reading circle” in foreign language education in China.

References:

- [1] Daniels, H. Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-centered Classroom[M]. Markham: Pembroke Publishers, 1994.
- [2] Daniels, H. Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups[M]. Portsmouth: Stenhouse, 2002.
- [3] Daniels, H. Mini-lessons for Literature Circles[M]. Oxford: Heinemann, 2004.
- [4] Furr, M. Literature Circles for the EFL Classroom [A]. Proceedings of the 2003 TESOL Arabia Conference[C]. Dubai: TESOL Arabia, 2004.
- [5] Furr, M. Bookworms Club: Stories for Reading Circles [M]. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- [6] Liu Miao, Jin Yanfeng. Literature Circles: The Reform of Reading Teaching Methods[J]. Language Planning, 2006(8): 45-47.
- [7] Lyu Xuhong. The Model of “Literature Circle” and the Development of Critical Thinking Ability of English Majors[J]. Journal of Minjiang University, 2012, 33(6): 68-71.
- [8] Liu Hui. Construction and Exploration of Reading Circle Teaching Model in College English Culture Teaching[J]. Education Modernization, 2018, 5(45): 236-238.
- [9] Pu Chunhong. Construction and Exploration of Reading Circle Teaching Model in College English Culture Teaching[J]. Contemporary Education Research and Teaching Practice, 2019(24): 63-64.
- [10] Qian Jia. The Application of Reading Circle Activities in Senior High School English Reading Teaching—A Case Study of *The Apple Tree* and *The Old Man and the Sea*[J]. English Teachers, 2018, 18(19): 132-136.
- [11] Tang Chenqian. English Picture Book Teaching Practice Based on Reading Circle [J]. Jiangsu Education, 2019(81): 46-48.
- [12] Tang Yi. Action Research on the Influence of Literature Circle Model on High School Students’ English Reading Ability: A Case Study of a Middle School in Hefei City[D]. Chongqing: Southwest University, 2021.
- [13] Wang Qiang. Zhang Hong. Action Research on English Teachers[M]. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2013: 10, 130.
- [14] Wang Qiang. Analysis of New Curriculum Standards and Teaching Guidance (Senior High School English)[M]. Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press, 2019.
- [15] Wang Junying. Application and Effectiveness Analysis of “Literature Circle” Model in English Major Reading Course Teaching[J]. Journal of Hubei Correspondence University, 2017, 30(1): 138-140.
- [16] Wu Xiaxia. A Study on Literature Circle and Critical Thinking Development of Foreign Language Majors [J]. Journal of Yan’an University (Social Sciences Edition), 2016, 38(3): 125-128.
- [17] Yu Yang. Action Research on the Application of Reading Circle Teaching Model in Junior Middle School English Classroom[D]. Changchun: Changchun Normal University, 2020.