

# Narrowing the Gender Gap in Literature Circle to Promote EFL Senior High School Students' Reading Engagement

Lifang Liu, Malini Ganapathy

School of Languages, Literacies and Translation Universiti Sains Malaysia Penang, Malaysia

liulifang@student.usm.my

Corresponding Author Email: malinik@usm.my

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v12-i4/18901> DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v12-i4/18901

---

Published Online: 18 December 2023

## Abstract

One of the major issues in peer-led discussion or in the literature circles has been the investigation of gender inequality in academic accomplishment. An action study was conducted in Fuchuan County, Hezhou, China, to determine whether narrowing the gender gap in literature circles might increase English as a Foreign Language (EFL) senior high school students' reading engagement in the classroom. In order to achieve this goal, the author made use of the literature circle in the process of studying with 43 EFL students in small classes for nearly one semester. Data was collected through surveys and interviews. The evidence leads researchers to conclude that changing the grouping structure, gender roles and reading choices can successfully narrow the gender gap in the literature circle and improve students' reading interest. Therefore, this paper enhances the practical understanding of literature circles in addressing the reading challenge of the gender gap in students' reading participation. As a suggestion for future research, it would be beneficial to carry out comparable investigations with students in other classes or in various schools.

**Keywords:** Gender Gap, Equal Opportunities Peer-Led Discussion, Literature Circle, Reading Engagement

## Introduction

At present, one of the most concerns in educational systems around the world is equity in education (According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2019). A significant and long-term objective of the nations in the world is to guarantee an inclusive and equitable education that facilitates equal learning opportunities for all (Roemer & Trannoy, 2016). One of the sustainable development goals proposed by the United Nations is to ensure that everyone, regardless of their personal characteristics and environment, can get the best educational opportunities and help all students realize their potential. From a rights perspective, equity means ensuring that every student learns the skills needed to participate fully in society.

Male students have historically outperformed female students in mathematics and science, while female students have outperformed male students in reading (OECD, 2016). As far as gender differences in learning are concerned, it is noteworthy that the gap in mathematics has been narrowing in recent years, both in China and in many other countries around the world. Nevertheless, the gender gap in reading still exists and can be seen in all countries using standardized performance assessments.

With regard to gender differences in reading and academic performance, previous studies have attempted to explain why girls often score higher in reading than boys, which emphasize the importance of values and beliefs (Reilly, D., Neumann, D. L., & Andrews, G. 2019, Nalipay, M. J. N., Cai, Y., & King, R. B. 2020). As a result, one of the top priorities for educational systems around the globe is to guarantee that all students obtain a high level of literacy, so that they, as citizens, have the knowledge and ability to realize their full potential (OECD, 2019).

While the New Curriculum Standard for Compulsory Education in China encourages students' cooperation, participation, and communication in English learning (2020). The establishment of the literature circle is a response to the needs of curriculum standards. The application of literature circles in reading is perfectly in accordance with the objectives of core English literacy instruction, including enhancing students' subjectivity and emphasizing their language ability and thinking ability. Consequently, it is necessary to distinguish between boys' and girls' participation in reading, so as to maximize the influence of literature circles and achieve the goal of encouraging more children to participate in reading activities.

In the past decades, a large number of international studies have been carried out on this subject, and personal and environmental factor that may lead to such differences have been found. These factors include knowledge, critical thinking and attitudes toward various fields of study, identity, and talents (Young & Mohr, 2018). Despite the importance of this issue, little research has looked at how to use a literature circle technique to narrow the gender gap in reading and increase reading engagement. Nevertheless, not as much attention has been paid to how well literature circles work in a foreign language class at the county high school, where all conversations and activities are done in the target language and English is not the main language of instruction. Additionally, there is a paucity of research on the role of students in reducing gender disparities and on the selection of reading materials to boost literary community engagement.

A student who feels it is difficult to engage in serious reading is unlikely to succeed in his or her studies (Labo-Popoola, 2018). In reading class, the teacher-researcher frequently observed learners who were disinterested and unwilling to attempt reading aloud or do independent reading. Many students failed to read the reading materials they were given, especially for boys and those who often struggled to understand what they had read. When asked why they didn't finish their reading independently, the majority of these students responded that it was time-consuming and difficult. Teenagers like reading in groups or pairs, and some even enjoy reading together in groups.

Luckily, literature circles provide students a chance to discuss their works and give reluctant speakers an opportunity to participate, based on the teacher-researcher. The students took charge of their reading activities when they are directed the literature circles. When students work together, they become enthusiastic about reading and expand their academic vocabulary simply by participating in literature circles (Barone, D., & Barone, R., 2016).

Therefore, it is of great significance to apply the reading strategy of literature circle to the reading lessons of county high school. Furthermore, it is necessary to clarify the factors that affect the participation of the literature circle in reading, so as to encourage students to

participate in reading by achieving a balance between male and female students' reading abilities.

### **Research Questions**

The primary goals of this research are listed below, which are based on the problem description previously discussed. This study was guided by two research questions:

RQ1: What factors contribute to the gender differences in literature circle activities?

RQ2: Whether narrowing the gender difference can effectively improve students' reading participation through literature circles?

### **Literature Review**

Common assignments in the literature circles include discussion leader, cultural connector, illustrator, word master, life connector, and passage person (Elhess & Egbert, 2015). One of the leaders of this movement was Harvey Daniels. In *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* (2002), he outlined the benefits of letting students pick the books they want to discuss in small groups, with a teacher acting more as a facilitator than an instructor. The program divides students into interest groups rather than reading ability groups suggested by some researchers. He reasoned that this would make reading more enjoyable and enable the students to connect on a personal level by discussing literature in social groups. He remarked that, as a consequence, learners would be more enthusiastic and more willing to disseminate the engagement to other class members.

According to the research of Herrera and Kidwell (2018), the literature circle enables students to communicate their community's reading practice because they are student-centered. The teachers help the students to strengthen their reading abilities while validating the literacy teaching strategies of community. While using role sheets to respond to various passages of the text, the students develop their ability to discuss texts openly with others. Because they are involved in this type of environment, the readers are successful in the reading material they like (Harits, 2017). According to Herrera and Kidwell (2018), these reading group discussions provide students with the opportunity to talk about their readings when the teacher functions as the facilitator.

Literature circles have an effect on students' social emotion, comprehensive ability, literacy, and rich vocabulary. The finding suggested that literature circles were not a fixed method but rather an adaptable tool that may be used to meet the demands of different students with distinctive reading competence (Conant, 2018). Therefore, through the literature circles, it provides an opportunity for in-depth conversation and connections between topics and peers.

The instructor functions as a facilitator and cycles among the groups; she or he often does not participate (Young & Mohr, 2018). Traditionally, distinct roles are assigned to each student within the group, and these roles are rotated at each meeting (Barone, & Barone, 2016). It is crucial that teachers decide which categorized reading materials that promote reading comfort will be used in literature circles. By doing this, a natural environment will be established for students to actively participate in the discussion (Boulenouar, 2015). Therefore, individual relationships, deviations, and wide-ended questions are necessary as group gatherings aim to be generally open, everyday discussions on literature. In other words, participants are encouraged to participate by openly expressing their opinions on the literary works assigned to them. Young & Mohr (2016) described literature circles as social gatherings that require participants to actively participate in the reading and debate. Education policies

at the national level affect both the reading proficiency of all students as well as the reading proficiency of boys (van Hek, Buchmann, & Kraaykamp, 2019). It has been advocated that literature clubs be utilized to encourage reluctant readers to develop a lifelong love of reading. Brozo and Flynt (2008) emphasized the importance of encouraging young readers to become involved in the material they are reading. They propose six evidence-based guidelines for teachers to follow to effectively motivate readers. Some of these ideas include the use of multimedia teaching methods, not just textbooks; Combining "literature outside school and literature inside school" (p. 173); and giving students access to a variety of engaging texts (p. 174). Two of the principles are directly applicable to the design of literature circles (p. 175): giving students more options and choices and putting them in teams to make them more motivated.

Harvey Daniels (1994) came to numerous findings concerning the positives of literature circles. He identified four primary advantages: choice, obligation, involvement, and research (p.10). He discovered that smaller groups provide pupils with greater freedom to interact positively and cooperatively than groups that are led by teacher (p. 11). Additionally, he discovered that when individuals are free to select their own books, they were more likely to succeed rather than struggle, rather than being asked by teachers to read the text (p. 11). He suggested that teachers of high school students use literature circles by having students respond in written dialogue, using different evaluation methods, and having students read more than just fiction (p. 13).

However, from each of the aforementioned research, so far, there has not been much study on applying literature circles to bridge the gender gap and boost reading engagement.

### **The Gender Differences in Reading**

Over the years, numerous studies have shown that reading skills differ across the sexes. Margaret Ferrara examined the learning styles of different genders in a 2005 study. She explained that "men tend to express themselves through pictorial representations, whereas women tend to express themselves vocally" (p. 2). In her research, she discovered that girls tended to process information more quickly and perform better on exams in groups of single gender. In the poll, women reported feeling more empowered and preferring leaders of their gender group (p. 5). The girls also mentioned that they felt more at ease answering questions in the single-gender classroom, that they were less frightened of making mistakes, and it is easier for them to cooperate with others. They did not have to compete with boys (p. 6). The boys did not experience the same outcomes. Because "the females were brighter and they wouldn't be required to offer as many answers as they knew in the all-boy classroom," the boys in the survey stated that they wanted to return to mixed groups (p. 5).

The research of Lane Clarke (2006) provides the opposite picture of gender categorization from Ferrara's study. She cited an early study by Cherland (1994) which revealed boys speaking for longer turns in mixed-gender literature circles, teasing girls, and usurping the group's authority (p. 58). In Clarke's study, a class of pupils were observed for two years. She observed that when men were younger, they tended to rule the gatherings and be louder. They went backwards as they got older and stopped reading. The girls tended to take control of the groupings at this stage (p. 72). One of her hypotheses for this transformation was that men initially enjoy school, but as they got older, they started to change and spent their time wishing they weren't in school (p.73). This idea was what she called "positioning for power." She concluded that literature circles were essential for book discussions and for teaching students about their own lives and the lives of others (p. 76).

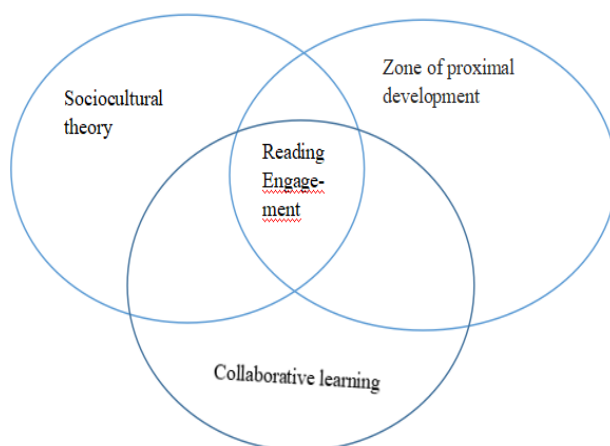
The sort of text used in the majority of schools is a further facet of gender disparities. Lloyd (2006) found that the majority of school materials didn't cater to male preferences. In her research, she discovered that school texts tended to be more interested in the interests of girls. In addition, she found that boys prefer nonfiction books or male hero stories to girls. Lloyd's research also found that most school textbooks are classic or realistic stories and cannot attract boys (page 31).

Overall, the research indicated that boys have more difficulty reading books they weren't really interested in. Therefore, the choice and participation of reading materials play an important role in the success of literature circles. Studies have consistently demonstrated that classes with successful learners and fewer behavioral issues are those where teachers actively consider active learning and give students the opportunity to choose.

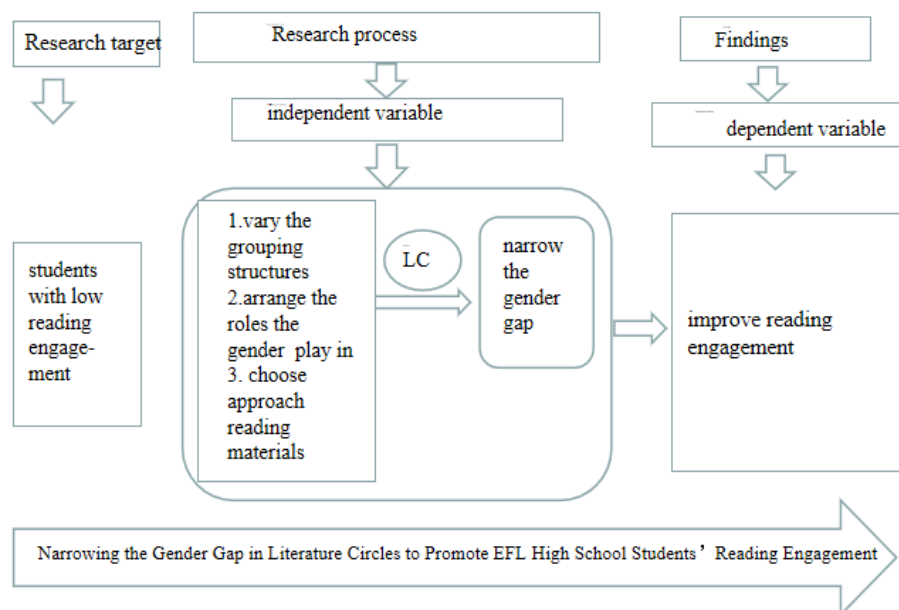
### Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Sociocultural theory is a theory that is employed in literary education. Lev Vygotsky (1978) suggested that thinking came first from social interactions and that learning could never be separated from a social environment. Literature circles are a teaching strategy that encourages students to debate ideas in groups and draws on social-cultural and critical literacy theories. In addition, students are active learners who develop their understanding through interaction. Students with lower competence levels or those who have trouble understanding what they are reading should pay particular attention to the diversity and range of abilities represented in literature circle groups.

TABLE 1. A Theoretical Framework of The Study



Another important theory is applied to cooperative learning, which is considered to be the key element of best practice to improve students' performance. It involves creating open-ended, student-centered activities that foster higher-order thinking skills. Students are encouraged to share their thoughts with the theory that the more connections they can build, the more responses they will receive. As a method of group learning, the literature circle allows students to establish personal relationships with their classmates and the materials they choose.

**TABLE 2.***A Conceptual Framework of the Study***Methodology**

This descriptive study used a variety of methodologies. First, quantitative data were gathered, examined, and evaluated. The next step involved gathering, analyzing, and interpreting qualitative data. The conclusions of the quantitative analysis were then explained using this qualitative data. Combining the two approaches may yield results that are sufficiently generalizable and detailed information about how to narrow the gender gap in literature circles and increase EFL senior high school students' reading engagement.

**Participants**

This study was conducted with a class of forty-three senior high school students in their second year in a small county high school. As a result, they have a certain amount of knowledge about the research topic. By then, the students of the 2003 class had used the literature circle as a reading strategy for three months, and they had a better understanding of the literature circle. According to their gender distribution, 17 (37.2%) of the participants were male, and 26 (62.8%) were female.

Their reading course was instructed by myself, the researcher. The students were invited to take part in the study, and seven of them would be selected in the follow-up interview. A survey conducted after the whole experiment. From October to December 2021, researchers will organize a 30-minute literature circle activity once a week in the class, which is a preliminary study. The three-month trial included preliminary planning and follow-up studies. In three months, eight literature circle activities were held. The students were familiar with their own duty, that is to say, each role in the literature circles was required to do the task which was arranged before the class, besides they had a basic comprehension of the literature circle concept. However, the implementation effect of the literature circles and students' involvement in reading were not satisfactory, since the researcher did not correctly assign tasks to team members at that time, nor did they choose appropriate reading materials.

Since the pilot study was carried out in the 2021 autumn semester (October to December), the results of the survey triggered a new survey, which prompted an expanded study in the

2022 spring semester (March to June). The same students from the same class participated in both studies during distinct semesters at the same school.

**Table 3.**

*Participants for 2021 Autumn Semester Pilot Study*

Group	Number/ Gender
G1	6 Girls
G2	6girls
G3	6girls
G4	6girls
G5	7boys
G6	6boys
G7	2girls;4boys

**Table 4.**

*Participants For 2022 Spring Semester*

Group	Number/ Gender
G1	4 Girls;2boys
G2	4girls;2boys
G3	4girls;2boys
G4	4girls;2boys
G5	3girls;3boys
G6	3girls;4boys
G7	4girls;2boys

**Instruments, Data Collection and Analysis**

The reading materials used in this study were part of the passages in *21st Century Teens*. The topics of the selected paragraphs are different and do not require prior disciplinary knowledge. The genres of the texts include exposition (E), narration(N), argumentation (A), and novel(n). These texts varied in terms of language difficulty, task requirements, and word length. The reading materials specifications were summarized in Table5. These tasks are carefully selected so that working memory will not be too full (Charters, 2003).

An online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were utilized as research instruments. As for the questionnaire, a five point Likert scale was used for scoring, ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement. To prevent misunderstanding, the items were prepared in Chinese. The questionnaire was then distributed to all of the participants in person. Finally, percentages were used to report the findings of each item.

**Table 5.***The Genres of The Reading Material*

Times of activities	Group1	Group2	Group3	Group4	Group5	Group6	Group7
one	E	N	N	A	E	A	n
two	n	E	n	E	N	A	A
three	N	A	E	N	A	n	n
four	N	A	E	E	N	A	n
five	n	N	n	A	E	E	A
six	E	E	A	n	A	E	N
seven	A	n	A	E	N	n	E
eight	n	A	E	N	A	N	E

The author created the questionnaire developed with reference to Cheng Linlin (2021) and Yue Cailing's (2021) study on the evaluation of participation in the literature circle teaching model, and combined with the specificity of gender differences on its participation, to investigate the composition and effectiveness of literature circle for heterosexual and homosexual students, respectively. In order to analyze the gender composition of the literature circle teaching model and the effect of its implementation on students' participation and effectiveness, we conducted a comprehensive study on the gender composition of the literature circle teaching model. The questionnaire consisted of eleven questions, including one question on basic information, three questions on the effect of gender differences on participation, four questions on the effect of gender differences on the role of literature circle, and three questions on the effect of literature circle strategy.

A series of Chinese-language semi-structured interviews were undertaken to add a qualitative component. Due to time constraints, the researcher interviewed a total of seven participants from each literature circle. The average time length for each interview was fifteen minutes. Then collect and transcribe the information in the interview and submit it to the participants for review. One of the researchers transcribed the transcriptions into English after gaining their consent. Then an analysis was done on the translated transcriptions. Through careful and repeated reading, the researchers found a theme that matched the structure of the questionnaire. The topics were thus predetermined by the researchers to corroborate the conclusions from the questionnaire. After discussion, the developing themes were adopted. Finally, a few samples from each emerging topic were displayed. This is to support quantitative evidence-based argument.

### Findings of Interview

Three themes emerged from the study of the semi-structured interview data. The impact of gender differences on reading participation was the first theme. Participants stressed the significance of an appropriate team member allocation.

Student 1: Compared with the same-sex mixing in the last semester, I found that the mixing of boys and girls in the reading circle was more attractive, and I was more eager to share my understanding of the text.

Student 4: I can collect various viewpoints in mixed-gender settings. Boys' perspectives on the topics covered in certain articles differ significantly from ours as girls.



The second theme is concerning the influence of gender differences on roles in literature circles. The students talked about their views on the six characters.

Student 2: If only a few members of the group can fit their favorite roles, the discussion in the literature circle will become more intense.

Student 3: In these eight literature circle activities, I found that if the boys were responsible for the discussion group, the discussion would be more attractive. Before implementing this strategy, boys seldom read outside class. In addition to expressing your opinions.

Student 6: When it comes to playing the role of Word Master, girls perform better than boys. Words they don't grasp can always be collected and patiently referred to. This really facilitates our group reading.

The last theme is on the teaching effect of literature circles. Students shared their perspectives on the topic.

Student 5: I believe that this reading approach has given me greater confidence and a desire to read after class. Prior to that, I felt intimidated to read the paper because of my poor vocabulary. The difficulty of team cooperation and decomposition may be the result of how relaxed they are now.

Student 7: I enjoy participating in literature circle activity, because it gives me a specific task to complete while reading and gives me a strong sense of accomplishment and belonging.

### **Findings of questionnaire**

#### **1. The influence of gender on the effectiveness of literature circle strategy**

The results of the study on "heterosexual literature circles enhance reading participation" show that 20 students (46.5%) "strongly agree" and 13 students (30.2%) "agree". Nearly 80% of the students were in favor of the literature circles which comprised students of different genders. At the same time, the cross tabulation and chi-square test with gender showed that the chi-square value of 5.6663 was significant at 5% probability. Through the comparison of scores, male students have a higher recognition of mixed genders in the literature circle. Most people believe that complementary genders can improve reading quality and stimulate the participation of reading groups.

The results of the study on "literature circles with same gender are good for activities" are the opposite of the results of the study on "a mixed gender of literature circle", which showed that 12 people (27.9%) "strongly agree" and 6 people (14%) "agree". The results showed that 12 people (27.9%) "strongly agree"; 6 people (14%) "agree", and only about 40% of them agree. The chi-square test showed that there was a significant difference between male and female students in the evaluation of "single-gendered literature circle" at 10% probability (Chi-Square=3.089,  $p < 0.10$ ). The cross-tabulation revealed that girls were significantly more likely to agree with reading in the group with same gender than boys did. Among them, 4 boys strongly agree (23.5%) and 8 girls agree (30.8%). Therefore, boys were more likely to prefer the heterosexual grouping in literature circles.

**Table 6.**

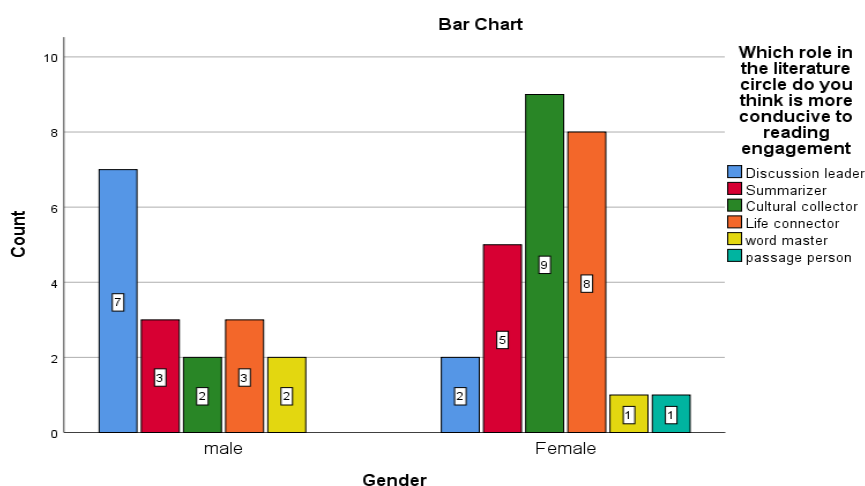
*Crosstab*

		1. Do you think the literature circle with different gender will increase the reading participation of the group?					Total	Chi-Square
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree		
Gender M	Count	11	5	1	0	0	17	5.6663** (P < 0.05)
	% Gender	64.7%	29.4%	5.9%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	
F	Count	9	8	5	3	1	26	0.05
	% Gender	34.6%	30.8%	19.2%	11.5%	3.8%	100.0%	
Total	Count	20	13	6	3	1	43	100.0%
	% Gender	46.5%	30.2%	14.0%	7.0%	2.3%	100.0%	

**Table 7.**

*Crosstab*

		3. Do you think that members of the same gender in the literature circles is more conducive to the development of reading activities?					Total	Chi-Square
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree		
Gender F	Count	4	2	2	4	5	17	3.089* (P < 0.10)
	% Gender	23.5%	11.8%	11.8%	23.5%	29.4%	100.0%	
M	Count	8	4	9	4	1	26	0.10
	% Gender	30.8%	15.4%	34.6%	15.4%	3.8%	100.0%	
Total	Count	12	6	11	8	6	43	100.0%
	% Gender	27.9%	14.0%	25.6%	18.6%	14.0%	100.0%	



The literature circle reading mode can effectively improve students' reading level, integrate the comprehensive ability of English listening, reading and writing, improve the overall English level and enhance students' cooperative inquiry and independent learning ability. The results of the study on literature circles can narrow the gender gap in reading participation are as follows: 25 students (58.1%) said they "strongly agree"; 4 students (9.1%) said they "agree".

Therefore, nearly 70% of the students believe that the literature circle teaching model can effectively reduce the gender differences in reading participation. The chi-square test showed that there was no statistical difference between male and female students on "literature circles can narrow the gender difference in reading participation" (Chi-Square=4.695,  $p>0.10$ ). The cross tabulation showed that both male and female students thought that literature circles mode can stimulate students' interest in learning and make both boys and girls participate in classroom learning.

**Table 8.***Crosstab*

		4.Do you agree the literature circles can effectively narrow the gap between boys' and girls' participation in reading?					Total	Chi-Square
		Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree			
Gender M	Count	13	1	1	1	17	4.695**	
	% Gender	76.5%	5.9%	5.9%	5.9%	100.0%	( $P>$	
F	Count	12	3	5	5	26	0.10)	
	% Gender	46.2%	11.5%	19.2%	19.2%	100.0%		
Total	Count	25	4	6	6	43		
	% Gender	58.1%	9.3%	14.0%	14.0%	100.0%		

## 2. The influence of gender differences on the choice of roles in the literature circles

A chi-square test showed that Chi-Square=3.163 ( $p<0.1$ ) indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between boys and girls in the role of literature circles that most enhanced the participation of team members with 10% probability. The bar chart showed that most male students believed that the role of "leader" was effective in enhancing team member participation, while most female students believed that the roles of "culture connector" and "life connector" were more effective in enhancing team member participation. The role of "culture collector" and "life connector" was more effective in enhancing team members' participation. This was due to gender differences in the perceptions of male and female students. Most girls believed that the preparation work in the literature circles was particularly important, which greatly affects the effectiveness of the classroom and team cooperation, thus affecting the participation experience of students. On the other hand, the boys believe that the group leader could coordinate all the roles, and thus played a central role in the literature circles, and had the greatest influence on the participation of the team members.

The results of the "most interesting role in the literature circles" survey showed that most students were more interested in the role of the group leader. 21 (48.8%) of them were interested in the role of the group leader. Seven girls (26.9%) were interested in the role of culture collector and believed that by organizing and collecting reading materials in class, they could not only gain richer knowledge, but also share their collected materials with others through the literature circles.

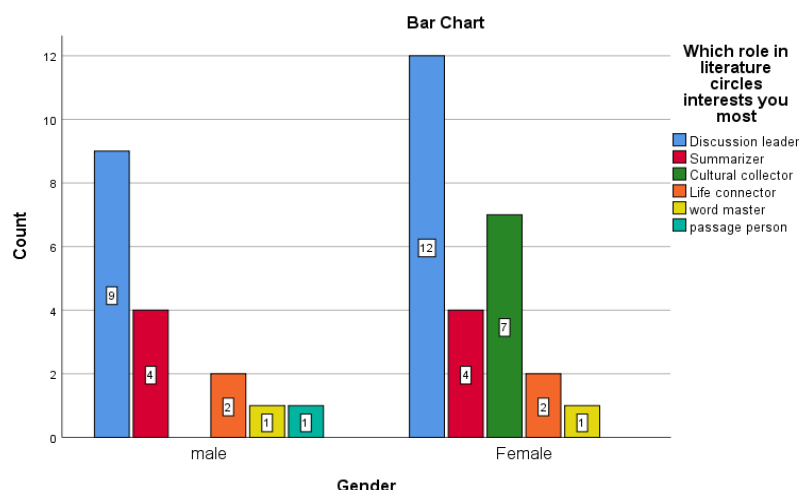
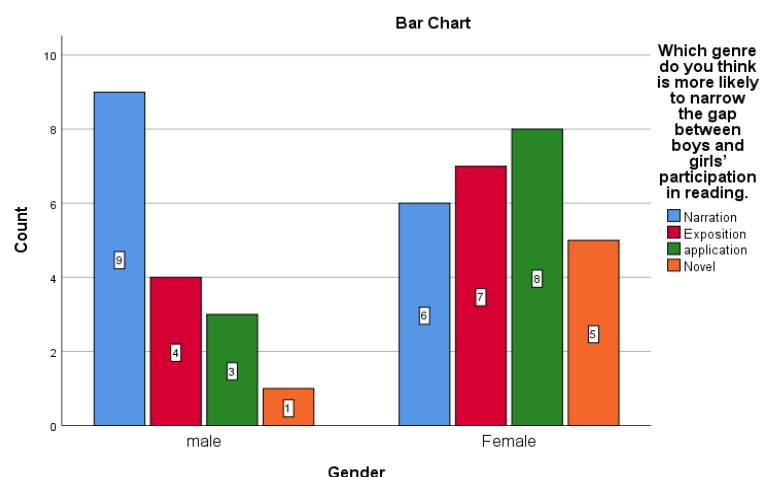


Table 9.

Crosstab

		10. Which genre do you think is more likely to narrow the gap between boys' and girls' participation in reading.				Chi-Square	
		Narration	Fiction	exposition	argumentation		Total
Gender	M	Count	9	4	3	1	17
	% Gender		52.9%	23.5%	17.6%	5.9%	100.0%
Gender	F	Count	6	7	8	5	26
	% Gender		23.1%	26.9%	30.8%	19.2%	100.0%
Total	Count	15	11	11	6	43	(P > 0.00)
	%Gender	34.9%	25.6%	25.6%	14.0%	100.0%	



3. The influence of gender difference on the choice of genre of literature circles

The results of the genre utilized in the literature circles study showed that 15 students (34.9%) chose the narrative, 11 students (25.6%) chose novel and exposition, and 6 students (14%) chose the argumentation. By means of chi-square test and cross-tabulation, the study on the influence of gender differences on the choice of genre showed that boys were more interested in narration, accounting for 52.9%, while girls preferred narrative essay and novel, etc. Therefore, it is necessary to select appropriate text types in the selection of text topics to

meet the reading needs of teenagers. The proportion of girls who were interested in narrative texts is 52.9%, while girls tended to prefer narrative texts and novels.

### Discussion

In the context of 43 Chinese EFL learners, the current study examined factors that contribute to the gender gap in literature circle activities. This echoes the previous literature (Chase & Kathleen, 2017). The results showed that the degree of engagement in literature circles depended on a variety of factors, including reading goal, group role, reading skill, group structure, gender, personality, and group size. The models of reading groups differ in various ways from the environment. It may be questioned whether each student should be given a separate role during a conversation, or whether all group members should have the same role (Sevigny, 2022).

Therefore, the researcher assumed that it is advantageous to provide each student in a group a particular role and take turns playing different roles. Each role provides EFL students with a unique perspective to understand the text. The results here show that the causes of the gender gap in literature circle activities have the potential to help language learning, especially in EFL classrooms, where the number (only a few hours per week) and quality (lack of real communication input) of language exposure are very limited (Munoz, 2014).

For example, there are four roles for science texts: leader, summarizer, detail master, and vocabulary master (Graham-Marr and Pellowe 2016). Additionally, texts must be suitable for the reading level and preferences of the students. Although student collaboration is a mature part of the literature circle, there is also a deeper level of discourse collaboration between role allocation, role table and the dynamic nature of literary texts (Shelton-Strong, 2019). A new text—the literature circle transcript—is created when the students read the texts, apply the guidelines from their role sheets, and take part in the conversation. It would be helpful to use the same words so that role sheet designs can be linked to the actions that make up the main structure of role-based conversations.

Besides, the majority of role scaffolding focuses on facilitating interpretative exchange initiations. Because of this, the initiating sequences are more likely to be planned than participating in them. The ability of a role to inspire dialogue or monolog contributions is another component of role design. For instance, the role of summarizer frequently results in a single monologic move. Thus, role-based in literature circles offers a learner-centered opportunity for a group to interpret texts. Literature circles require a wide range of supplementary academic competencies that cannot be taken for granted, including: creating thoughtful inquiries to start conversations; managing turn-taking; overcoming lexical obstacles (Sevigny, 2022).

Therefore, teachers should be aware of the above impact on the participation of literature circle activities, and fully consider it when implementing this reading mode. Apart from that, the similar reading topic being given to every student simplifies logistics and enables professors to switch students between discussion groups. In conclusion, it may be an ideal method to create and implement a variable role system, first assign students to the same position, and then gradually change these roles with the progress of students. With time and experience, teachers will learn how to change role-based learning communities so that they work best for their specific situations.

This study also aimed to determine whether the literature circles can effectively narrow the gender gap in reading, so as to effectively improve the reading engagement of students (research question 2). The problem was solved by looking at the qualitative data, which gave

as a chance to learn more about the complicated issues that led to group presentations when the group was engaged in different reading tasks. However, it is still a fact that men lag behind women in terms of literacy growth (Reardon & Fahle, 2019). This finding is consistent with the qualitative survey conducted by Marinak & Gamberl (2010) and Guthrie (2004). The boys appeared to find the sheer nature of a theatrical performance appealing. The attraction of the audience theater to boys seems to be affected by the boys' awareness of their own reading progress and their growing confidence as readers.

Therefore, it is crucial that researchers keep looking into literacy activities that involve men more fully to narrow the gender gap among the learners and equalize reading engagement between boys and girls by reducing gender inequalities in literature circle activities.

### **Conclusion**

According to the current research results, teaching EFL students through the literature circles has a significant prospect for narrowing the reading achievement gap between boys and girls. Compared with the students who take part in the more traditional reading as usual course, the students who take part in the 30-minute literature circle activity show greater gains in all aspects of reading performance. Boys who participated in literature circles showed greater and more substantial progress than girls in terms of vocabulary, passage summary, and comprehension. These results point out practical strategies to narrow the gap between male and female reading development. Therefore, the literature circle really needs a lot of planning and implementation work.

In conclusion, there is evidence to support using the literature circles as a teaching tool to enhance the development of several reading skills, such as reading motivation and reading interest overall, especially for men. This can significantly reduce the reading proficiency gap between men and women, contribute to educational equality, and improve students' reading proficiency for long-term sustainable growth.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

This study unequivocally demonstrates that educators should have the choice to try literature circles with different genders. In order to ensure that everything is equal and fair, teachers frequently place students in a mixed-gender group. Teachers may be more ready to test this arrangement on a rotating basis if it is demonstrated that they might succeed utilizing it. The purpose of this study is not to prove that it is the best way to organize reading groups, but in some cases and books, it may be beneficial to do so.

The use of different materials to persuade reluctant male readers to pick up a book would be the second application of the study. As a result, the grouping requirements, the role that each participant will play, and the reading materials should all be taken into consideration by the teachers who wish to implement the literature circle technique. Additionally, it can draw attention to the significance of equal education in promoting equity and narrowing the reading achievement gap between men and women.

### **References**

- Barone, D., & Barone, R. (2016). "Really," "Not Possible," "I Can't Believe It": Exploring Informational Text in Literature Circles. *The Reading Teacher*, 70(1), 69-81. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1472>
- Brozo, W. G., & Flynt, E. S. (2008). Motivating students to read in the content classroom: Six evidence-based principles. *The Reading Teacher*, 62(2), 172-174.

<https://doi.org/10.1598/rt.62.2.9>

- Cheng L.L. (2021). *search on the application of Reading Circle in English reading teaching in senior high school*. Qinghai Normal University, Xining.
- Cherland, M. R. (1994). *Private practices: Girls reading fiction and constructing identity*. Taylor & Francis.
- Chudy, S. (2017). Engaging The Narrative On Children Literature Through The Teaching Extensive Reading Imron Wakhid Harits. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 4(3), 26-33. <https://doi.org/10.14738/assrj.43.2544>
- Clarke, L. W. (2006). Power through voicing others: Girls' positioning of boys in literature circle discussions. *Journal of literacy research*, 38(1), 53-79.  
[https://doi.org/10.1207/s15548430jlr3801\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15548430jlr3801_3)
- Conant, A. A. (2018). Implementation of Literature Circles in Oregon Middle Schools. <https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.650>
- Daniels, H. (1994). *Literature Circles*. York, Maine: Stenhouse Publishing Company.
- Daniels, H. (2002). *Literature circles: Voice and choice in book clubs and reading groups*. Stenhouse Publishers.
- Elhess, M., & Egbert, J. (2015). Literature Circles as Support for Language Development. In *English Teaching Forum* (Vol. 53, No. 3, pp. 13-21). US Department of State. Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Office of English Language Programs, SA-5, 2200 C Street NW 4th Floor, Washington, DC 20037.
- Ferrara, M. M. (2005). *The single gender middle school classroom: A close up look at gender differences in learning*.
- Graham-Marr, A., & Pellowe, W. (2016). Taking a literature circles approach to teach Academic English. *Journal of language and cultural education*, 4(1), 133-139. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jolace-2016-0011>
- Guthrie, J. T., & Wigfield, A. B. P., Perencevich, KC, Taboada, A., Davis, MH, et al (2004). Increasing reading comprehension and engagement through concept orientated reading instruction. *Journal of educational psychology*, 96-403. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.96.3.403>
- Herrera, L. J. P., & Kidwell, T. (2018). Literature Circles 2.0: Updating a Classic Strategy for the 21st Century. *Multicultural Education*, 25(2), 17-21.
- Labo-Popoola, S. O. (2018). Reading Habits Amongst University Undergraduates: Implications for Academic Performance. *International Journal of Learning and Development*, 8(2), 114-129.  
<http://www.macrothink.org/journal/index.php/ijld/article/download/13102/10528>
- Lloyd, R. M. (2006). Talking Books: Gender and the Responses of Adolescents in Literature Circles. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 5(3), 30-58.  
<http://education.waikato.ac.nz/research/journal/index.php?id=1>
- Marinak, B. A. i Gambrell, LB (2010). *Reading motivation: exploring the elementary gender gap*. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 49(2), 129-141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19388070902803795>
- Ministry of Education. (2020). *English curriculum standards for general high school (2017 edition, revised in 2020)*. Beijing: People's Education Press.
- Muñoz, C. (2014). Contrasting effects of starting age and input on the oral performance of foreign language learners. *Applied Linguistics*, 35(4), 463-482. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amu024>

- Nalipay, M. J. N., Cai, Y., & King, R. B. (2020). Why do girls do better in reading than boys? How parental emotional contagion explains gender differences in reading achievement. *Psychology in the Schools*, 57(2), 310-319.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22330>
- OECD. 2019. *PISA 2018 results: What school life means for students' lives*, vol. 3. Paris: PISA, OECD Publishing.
- Reardon, S. F., Fahle, E. M., Kalogrides, D., Podolsky, A., & Zárate, R. C. (2019). Gender achievement gaps in US school districts. *American Educational Research Journal*, 56(6), 2474-2508. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831219843824>
- Reilly, D., Neumann, D. L., & Andrews, G. (2019). Gender differences in reading and writing achievement: Evidence from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). *American Psychologist*, 74(4), 445. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000356>
- Roemer, J. E., & Trannoy, A. (2016). Equality of opportunity: Theory and measurement. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 54(4), 1288-1332. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jel.20151206>
- Sevigny, P. (2022). Revising Role-Based Literature Circles for EFL Classrooms. In *Pedagogical Stylistics in the 21st Century* (pp. 315-342): Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-83609-2\\_13](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-83609-2_13).
- Shelton-Strong, S. J. (2019). An analysis of collaborative dialogue in literature circles. *Literature, spoken language and speaking skills in second language learning*, 176-201.
- van Hek, M., Buchmann, C., & Kraaykamp, G. (2019). Educational systems and gender differences in reading: A comparative multilevel analysis. *European Sociological Review*, 35(2), 169-186. <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcy054>
- Vygotsky, L. S., & Cole, M. (1978). *Mind in society: Development of higher psychological processes*: Harvard university press.
- Young, C., & Mohr, K. A. (2016). Student facilitation in peer-led literature group discussions. *Journal of Classroom Interaction*, 42-60. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410600585-11>
- Young, C., & Mohr, K. A. (2018). Exploring factors that influence quality literature circles. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 57(1), 44-58.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19388071.2017.1366606>
- Yue, C. L. (2021). *A study on the application of "Chinese-English bilingual literature circle" in the teaching of English reading in rural middle schools*. Henan Institute of Science and Technology, Zhengzhou.