

Engaging Students in Literature Circles: Vocational English Reading Programs

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Abstract This article reports the findings of ethnographic classroom research on the deployment of literature circles in English reading classes in the vocational secondary education sector in Indonesia. Grounded in micro-interactional, thematic, and discourse analyses, empirical findings showed that the students engaged actively in text selection, role assignment, and text meaning making through sharing-and-discussion sessions. Empirical data also revealed that they could learn a wide array of lexico-grammar through discussing chosen texts with others. This group discussion activity also paves the way for sharing and discussing both content knowledge (vocational subjects) and genre and lexico-grammatical features. This suggests that literature circles could promote students' content knowledge and language learning enrichment. Through role scaffolding by teachers and peer support, students could not only explore varied features of the language—e.g., how lexico-grammar was used in context through texts but also enrich their content knowledge. This empirical evidence supports the use of the literature circles in intensive reading programs in order to engage students in collaborative learning and to build a learning community in which teachers play a pivotal role as a guide throughout the literature circle process.

Keywords Dialogic reading · Ethnographic classroom research · Literature circles · Vocational English

Introduction

In the context of Indonesian English language pedagogy, particularly in vocational secondary schools, most of the English teachers adopt reading comprehension or intensive reading programs (Widodo 2015a, b). I have witnessed the fact that intensive reading classes commonly take the form of rigid question–answer exercises. These exercises are a way to ensure that students have understood particular teacher-assigned or textbook-oriented reading texts. In these mundane exercises, the students are asked to respond to questions following texts without any dialogic discussion. In some cases, intensive reading classes adopt multiple-choice format exercises in which students are asked to answer reading comprehension questions, and a teacher plays a role in giving right answers to the questions (Widodo 2015b). Such an intensive reading activity does not differentiate whether students are learning to read (language ability) or whether they are taking a reading comprehension test (language proficiency). This conventional reading comprehension activity does not afford students the opportunity to share what they have read and what language resources they have learned from reading texts. In short, test-like intensive reading activities do not create a supportive environment where students engage in interactive reading tasks and collaborative learning community of reading as a social practice. For this reason, literature circles or a small peer-led discussion group is suggested in reading in English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as an additional language (EAL) programs. Recent previous studies (e.g., Rowland and Barrs 2013; Shelton-Strong 2012) show that literature circles provide students with a dialogic space not merely for understanding texts, but also for making sense or meaning of the texts dialogically. Though literature circles have been well understood in the

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ESL context, the implementation of this instructional method in the EFL context remains under-explored. To fill this gap, this article reports findings drawing on an ethnographic classroom research project on the adoption of literature circles in two Vocational English (VE) reading classes. Two research questions guide this study:

- (1) In what ways do students engage in literature circles or small peer-led discussion group activities?
- (2) What are students' reactions to these activities?

Reading as a Socio-cognitive Process and Meaning Making

Reading as a multifaceted process has been much researched from different theoretical perspectives (e.g., cognition, linguistics, literacy, social psychology) in the area of second language acquisition. It involves a mental or cognitive process called word decoding. This process is more complicated when students learn an additional language whose script system differs greatly from that of their native language, such as Thai and English (Nation 2009). This word decoding becomes automatic as the students incrementally develop their reading ability through practice. The subsequent stages of the reading process embrace recognizing how texts (words, phrases, and sentences) are constructed and organized, understanding and interpreting meanings, and utilizing these meanings communicatively. As students' reading fluency develops, they focus on meaning making, which involves three closely intertwined components. These include text as the representation of the writer, the reader as a meaning maker, and a context as a social discourse or practice (see Hedgcock and Ferris 2009). Though students experience the same text socially, they cognitively process the reading differently. Therefore, English teachers need to recognize this socio-cognitive complexity. This suggests that reading is not merely the ability to decode and understand how vocabulary and grammar are used in context, but it is also the capability of making meaning of how such language resources are constructed for communicative purposes. Mickan (2013) concludes that reading is a socially situated meaning-making activity in which readers experience and engage with texts dialogically.

Literature Circles

In the literature, literature circles are also known as reading circles and book clubs (Daniels 2006). For term consistency, literature circles are used throughout this article. This concept is simply defined as reading groups or clubs

where students choose their own reading materials from different genres (e.g., books, articles, poems) and text types (e.g., narratives, procedures, discussions), form a small group, and "meet regularly to share ideas, feelings, questions, connections, and judgments about books [other reading materials] they had read" (Daniels 2002, p. 7). Literature circles are also defined as "student-led book groups or clubs" in which students assume responsibility for their own learning (Cameron et al. 2012, p. 1). This term also pertains to "small-group literature discussions" in which "small groups of students who read the same book" (or several books related to a single theme), and then meet to discuss their understandings with one another (Martínez-Roldán and López-Robertson 2000, p. 271).

Shelton-Strong (2012) adds that literature circles are "small peer-led discussion groups, involved in reading the same piece of literature, and who come together on a regular programmed basis to share interpretations of what they have read" (p. 214). In this activity, reading materials can be both fiction or literary texts (e.g., poems, novels) and non-fiction or non-literary texts (e.g., journal articles, newspaper articles, a chapter in a textbook); however, the choice of texts depends on "critical issues and experiences in readers' lives and "provokes deep reflection, questioning, and discussion" (Brabham and Villaume 2000, p. 279).

Literature circles serve as a mediating vehicle for students to generate ideas, raise questions or curiosities, and enable a discussion to emerge. It is important to bear in mind that it is not teacher-led list of questions framing how groups of students read, share, and discuss what they have read (Brabham and Villaume 2000). A literature circle as instructional scaffolding also provides a social space for students to engage in an active reading activity by talking about the text being read, responding to it, sharing what they have learned from the text, and discussing their own questions and interpretations of the text within a certain reading circle. Thus, in the literature circles, students engage not merely in reading activities but also in conversational encounters.

Previous Studies on the Adoption of Literature Circles

Over the last three decades, a considerable body of empirical research has been undertaken to examine the adoption of literature circles in first-language (L1) literacy contexts where this reading model has been deployed to teach extensive reading. Some previous studies have looked at the effects of literature circles in reading comprehension programs. For example, Mark (2007) investigated how book discussions were employed to enhance first-year Japanese university students' extensive reading

and to encourage them to experience a text in different ways. Informed by survey questionnaire taken data, intermediate-level students could read the assigned text in the efferent mode (understanding a text based on facts and details in the text) and in the aesthetic mode (understanding a text by relating it to reader's experience). The students felt positive about extensive reading, and their reading speed was faster than before. Mark concluded that the literature circles worked well for EFL students at a university level.

Another study by Nolasco (2009) looked at how literature circles helped fifth graders understand non-fiction texts and in turn enhanced student comprehension while reading expository, scientific texts. In this 6-week long study, 26 fifth graders in a suburban public school in the USA engaged in literature circle discussions. Empirical data reveal that literature circles served as an effective strategy for collaborative learning when the students engaged in the expository, scientific texts. This finding suggested that literature circles gave impetus for academic reading comprehension. In addition, McElvain (2010) deployed an experimental design to investigate the way to fruitfully enhance reading comprehension for English learners in English-only instruction. In this experimental study, an experimental group of 75 fourth and sixth graders participated in the transactional literature circles (TLCs) program. Results show that the TLC had a positive impact on students' reading comprehension. The participating students outperformed the students in the control group on standardized reading tests. They also demonstrated significant increase in terms of grade level in reading within 7 months. The empirical evidence drawn from teacher interviews and student surveys indicated that the participating students' reading engagement and motivation had a profound effect on reading self-efficacy, confidence, and willingness to participate in class discussions.

Canals (2011) undertook action research on whether literature circles could increase students' achievements in reading comprehension. Eighth grade students were asked to construct higher-level thinking questions based on Bloom's taxonomy after they had extensive discussions in the students' literature circles. Empirical evidence shows that literature circles helped the students increase their reading comprehension and become reflective readers through dialogic reading and discussion while creating higher order thinking questions. In his qualitative study, Shelton-Strong (2012) examined how literature circles helped Vietnamese low-achieving learners and more proficient students of 13–17 years old engaged in an extensive reading class. In this study, the participants focused on reading unabridged stories for 24 weeks and

participated in a circle discussion through role scaffolding, peer support, and teacher support. In the literature circle-based extensive reading, higher proficiency students could significantly improve their reading speed and comprehension. In addition, by engaging in this extensive reading, they also learned such crucial things as collaborative learning, new vocabulary, joint comprehension, and speaking through participating in a group discussion. Lower-level students found the literature circle discussion useful in finding their voice and enjoyable though they felt challenged to keep on participating in the discussion. Both higher-level students and lower-level students were positive of the literature circle-oriented extensive reading activity.

Recently, Rowland and Barrs (2013) investigated the responses of 57 Japanese university students to role-based textbook work in regular English reading classes. Framed in interpretative action research, they reported on three key findings: (1) the transfer of responsibility, (2) performance pressure, and (3) the benefits of collaboration. The empirical findings indicate that the role-based, small group approach assisted the students to take responsibility for the textbook; they experienced both positive and negative performance pressures; and they could build trust and help one another in group discussions. Rowland and Barrs' recent findings provide us with empirical evidence on the role of literature circles in reading classes in the Asian context.

Drawing on these previous studies, there are some reasons for the adoption of literature circles in this study. Firstly, even though literature circles have been implemented and studied in the context of extensive reading pedagogy (Shelton-Strong 2012), this instructional model remains under-researched in the vocational secondary school context. The second reason is to examine whether a literature circle-oriented intensive reading program enables students to engage actively in the English language-mediated reading process. Additionally, the enactment of this model provides practical and empirical evidence on whether this instructional model works best in the VE reading classroom. As Duncan (2012) points out, literature circles help students develop vocabulary and enact their agency as meaning makers. These arguments are worthy of close investigation in the VE reading classroom. There is also an urgent need for building students' reading attitude and motivation in which literature circles as instructional scaffolding serve this purpose. Lastly, assigning students to explore their own texts based on the theme or topic learned and to present the texts through undergoing literature circles helps the students gain rich reading experiences. This personalized learning "foster[s] individual engagement with texts" (Holloway 2011, p. 22).

The Study

Research Site and Design

The purposive sampling of this 13-month fieldwork was used to choose a vocational secondary school in Banyuwangi, East Java, Indonesia because of two considerations: (1) this school offered two areas of study, such as accounting and hotel hospitality and (2) the author got entry access to this school. Additionally, the goals of the present study concurred with those of the school after a pre-study briefing with the school managers and with an English teacher coordinator. Therefore, I gained relatively easy access to this school in order to undertake ethnographic fieldwork.

The nature of the present study was ethnographic fieldwork attempting to look at naturally occurring phenomena and school-situated lives of teachers and students. An ethnographic approach was deployed for this because I immersed myself in a school community for the whole year. This self-immersion allowed me to closely see what was actually happening in the school and in the classroom (Feldman 2011). I regularly visited the school, did classroom observations, and was in regular contact with the students and the teachers inside and outside the classroom. These daily social encounters enabled me to be accepted as a member of the school community. During the fieldwork, I positioned myself as both outsider and insider to the field in order to bridge the gap between participants as the researched and me as a researcher (Bruce et al. 2011). As an outsider, I played a role as a non-participant observer. I observed how the English teachers taught reading in the classroom. With the permission of the researched, I was allowed to video record and audio record all the class periods, and the teacher and student participants did not object to this recording. After this 3-month observation, the school managers with the permission of the English teachers assigned the author to co-teach two classes with the English teachers.

As an insider, I played multiple roles as teacher, teacher mentor, and student advisor. I interacted with the teachers, the students, and other school community members on a daily basis. I visited the school on school days (from Mondays to Saturdays: from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m.). It is important to note that there were limitations of being an insider researcher. For instance, greater familiarity might lead to a loss of objectivity; my prior knowledge could be considered a bias. I also had to balance my role as an insider and as a researcher. My participants might tend to assume that I already knew what they knew when I interviewed them. To overcome these problems, I deployed different sources of data and conducted multiple interviews informally. I was also aware of my role as a researcher who

was committed to collecting data while serving the school and the school community members.

Thus, the insider and outsider positioning enabled me to build ease of access, greater intimacy, and openness; gain richer, thicker descriptions of data; and bring flexibility and wholeness to the research process (Labaree 2002). This positioning also built personal and professional trust through daily social encounters and negotiated participation (Wang 2013). It also made multiple observations and post-observation interviews possible to unravel teachers' and students' stories as lived experiences. These observing and interviewing are considered as reflective and dialogic practices (Kern et al. 2012).

Participants and Informed Consent

Before the empirical fieldwork commenced, the author convened a meeting with six English teachers and fifty seven students detailing an informed consent form, and distributed informed consent form sheets to them even though these lessons were part of the language curriculum. I asked them to read through and sign off the form to ensure that all of the data would be kept confidential and be used for publication purposes. They agreed to sign the consent form as a legal document of their participation in the study. They also deserved the right to withdraw from the study. Thirty hotel hospitality students and twenty seven accounting students volunteered to participate in the research project. They had received formal English instruction for 11 years, and their language ability ranged from elementary to intermediate based on a TOIEC paper-based placement test. The students were in the second year when the present research study commenced. All the students were competent in two languages: Bahasa Indonesia and Javanese or Madurese or Balinese. Some were competent in Javanese, Madurese, and Bahasa Indonesia. They came from families with different socio-economic backgrounds (e.g., farmers, teachers, entrepreneurs, government employees, casual workers).

Instructional Procedures

Intensive reading was part of the language curriculum in that it was one of the language skills tested on the final national examination. For this reason, the participating English teachers and I applied literature circles to two VE reading classes in order to build communities of engaged readers. These classes were carried out in regular class periods inasmuch as the adoption of literature circles was one of the instructional innovations aiming to help students become competent and engaged EAL readers. As a whole, the adoption of literature circles aimed to explore different

vocational texts, familiarize the students with social practices in their vocational domains through reading written texts, and raise their awareness of how English operates within such texts. Literature circles were deployed as instructional mediation for the students to do engaging reading tasks. The classes met twice a week, and ran for 3 hours and 2 hours respectively. Before the students embarked upon doing literature circle-oriented activities, they were scaffolded to perform such tasks in the first four class periods. Overall, the students engaged in the following instructional activities.

Firstly, the teachers and the students negotiated how to form groups. The students were offered two options of whether they chose their own group members (student-chosen) or of whether the teacher picked group members (teacher-chosen). In this study, the students chose their own group members. Despite this, the teacher encouraged the students to include group members with mixed language ability so that high proficiency students could support their low proficiency peers. This is the core of collaborative work. In what follows, once the students formed groups, they were assigned different roles. In this literature circle-oriented reading instruction, there were two major roles each group had to play: host and guest. Host groups presented the selected text to guest group members. The guest group members posed questions regarding content or vocational knowledge (e.g., accounting topics: *the recording process*, *the accounting cycle*, and *financial statements* and hotel hospitality: *hotel room reservation*, *international hotel websites*, and *guest registration*) and language (e.g., vocabulary and grammar). Thus, the presentation of the chosen text had to touch upon these two areas: vocational knowledge and use of genre and language in the text. This is the nature of VE reading instruction.

In terms of role assignment, each of the group members, host and guest (visiting), played different roles listed below.

Roles of Host and Visiting Groups Played by Students

Host Group:

- **Text Picker:** looks for an appropriate text.
 - **Passage Master:** understands a text in terms of an author's main purpose or topic, tone, mode, register or style, and main points as well as to critique text relevancy with core competencies in areas of study (e.g., hotel hospitality and accounting).
 - **Summarizer** prepares a summary of the chosen text, which clearly spells out a topic sentence, main ideas, and a concluding sentence.
 - **Language Enricher** identifies important words and grammatical points that host group members have just learned and visiting group members need to learn.
 - **Passage Enricher** suggests further readings so that visiting group members can learn more about related texts.
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Visiting Group:

- **Text Assessor** assesses if the chosen or presented text is relevant to the chosen topic.
 - **Information Seeker** finds as much information as possible in the text.
 - **Questioner** asks questions based on the text.
 - **Language Observer** identifies any unfamiliar vocabulary and grammatical patterns, which need to be learned.
 - **Note Maker and Reporter** take notes of what has been learned or discussed and reports some main points to the whole class and the teacher.
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It is important to note that before a literature circle began, the host groups needed to navigate and prepare texts. The group members who played roles as text picker and passage master did these jobs, while other members designed and prepared poster presentations. During small peer-led discussion sessions, the guest or visiting group members visited host groups' posters assigned. Within groups, the students had to discuss the roles they played in each reading circle. In each reading circle, the students took turns playing a different role so that they experienced all the roles in both guest and visiting groups. In this way, the students were afforded ample opportunities to learn both content knowledge and language through different role assignment. In addition, during the sharing and discussing session, the teacher walked around the groups to ensure that all the group members were engaged in literature circle activities. Finally, after each of the reading circles was completed, the guest group members reported what they had learned from the sharing-and-discussion session, while the host group members gave a short report on what they did and contributed during the sharing-and-discussion session.

Data and Data Analysis

Empirical data were collected through participant observations, focus groups, and interviews. Both the focus groups and the interviews served as verbal justifications from the participants for what was observed in the classroom and for what was unknown in the classroom observation. The participant observation and focus group discussion data were video recorded, while interview data were audio recorded. Digital recording was used to generate more contextual data, to gather richer data, and to do careful micro-interaction and thematic analyses and interpretation by playing back the digital data many times (DuFon 2002; Fetterman 2010). As a researcher, I was fully aware that the presence of video or audio recorders or the act of recording itself in the classroom or group discussion/

interview sessions might affect students' normal performance, the naturalness of data collection, or the natural flow of classroom-situated pedagogic practices. To minimize these effects called the observer's paradox or participant reactivity (Gordon 2013) and to ensure the reliability of behavioral data obtained via video recording, I placed the equipment at distance. The second strategy was exposing the participants to longer periods of video recording to acclimate them to the presence of the equipment. Thirdly, I informed the participants of the use of video recorders for teacher reflection and for research data.

The empirical data were qualitatively analyzed. This qualitative analysis entails an interpretative enterprise. To discern multifaceted qualitative data, micro-interaction analysis using Anderson's (2009) interaction framework was deployed to examine the collected digital data garnered from classroom observations. All the digital data were transcribed and reviewed, and the data showing participants' actions, moves, and interactional patterns were tabulated. The data were categorized into moment-by-moment interactions (teacher–student and student–student interactions), characterizations of such interactions (how much both the teachers and the students valued such interactions), and interactional patterns (how students interacted with their peers). These three layers of the analysis allowed me to capture some emerging findings relevant to the two research questions.

To identify patterns and develop finding themes, the data collected from the interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis and classroom discourse analysis (Widodo 2015b). The thematic analysis aimed to thematize meanings; it is an analytical tool for "identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 79). This analysis embraced familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report (see Braun and Clarke 2006 for a fuller discussion of each step). Thus, the data were categorized and coded based on recurring themes, which represented datasets relevant to specific research questions (Braun and Wilkinson 2003). The classroom discourse analysis was used to make sense of the categorized data. Due to a myriad of the digital data (13-month fieldwork), as Yan and He (2012) suggest, a reduction process of data analysis was required to organize and review relevant data representing what was actually being examined. Only small portions of the data were reported in this article. In this data labeling, non-specific or irrelevant data were omitted.

Findings and Discussion

Based on selective data analysis, three finding themes were identified, such as (1) navigating and selecting VE texts, (2) assigning roles through teacher-mediated negotiation, and (3) collaborative meaning-making activities. These findings are presented in a narrative way accompanied with discussions. Following Rowland and Barrs' (2013) argument, I would contend that the main findings provide readers with a contextual understanding of the adoption of literature circles in reading classes, which is useful to "a wider audience of fellow practitioners and researchers interested in what goes on inside classrooms" (p. 64).

Navigating and Selecting Vocational English (VE) Texts

Empowering students to take the ownership of learning experience is one of the key features of student-centered language pedagogy. In reading in EAL, for instance, such ownership lies in to what extent students independently find and select their own texts. One of the ways to build the ownership of learning is asking students to find and work on real-life texts, which take the form of spoken, written, and visual artifacts. These texts represent social experiences. At the outset, the teachers started providing students with a sample real-life text, relevant to their major, a hotel website text. This text assisted the students to recognize the nature of the hotel website text. The teachers explained why the text warrants closer reading in order to help the students recognize the importance of the text. This suggests that a text is a starting point for doing assigned tasks. Texts are social products of tasks performed, so both texts and tasks are mutually complimentary.

In addition, affording the students a freedom to navigate and select their own VE texts typifies the literature circle-based intensive reading. In each reading circle, the students chose their own texts based on the agreed vocational topics. This self-selection of text personalized what they needed to read based on the negotiated theme or topic. Within groups, they had to negotiate vocational texts they needed to read and share. Those who played a role as a text picker were responsible for choosing texts, and then they discussed the texts with group members before they presented the texts to guest group members. The student participants provided a wide range of responses to this text navigation and selection, as shown in the following interview data.

Students' Vignettes 1: Navigating and Selecting Vocational English (VE) Texts

Student 1

I think that the chosen topics are really relevant to what I am studying now. These help me enrich my specialized English words. Having sufficient specialized words helps me understand specialized texts written in English. Additionally, searching for texts online based on this topic builds my learning autonomy (Hotel Hospitality Student, October 2012).

Student 2

I feel that the topics selected assist me in understanding my vocational knowledge, learning more technical terms, and learning English for hotel hospitality. I enjoy browsing different hotel hospitality texts, which relate to my area of specialization (Hotel Hospitality Student, October 2012).

Student 3

In my opinion, the topics which are related to my major, accounting, assist me to know more about accounting words. For this reason, this enables me to understand accounting texts in that my accounting teachers sometimes give accounting texts in English and ask me to write in English. I also have an opportunity to find out accounting texts that I find useful forme (Accounting Student, October 2012).

Student 4

I am happy that the topics chosen are relevant to accounting. Though in accounting, some accounting texts contain a variety of numerical languages, I need to learn how I express ideas related to accounting in English. More importantly, many accounting terms remain written in English though accounting textbooks are written in *Bahasa Indonesia*. Finding vocational texts in English by myself empowers me to become autonomous readers (Hotel and Hospitality Student 2, October 2012).

Students' Vignettes 1 show that the students felt that navigating their texts allowed them to read texts based on their interests and areas of vocation that they were learning. More crucially, self-initiated text navigation could build learning autonomy, thereby taking the ownership of language learning. When asked about what kinds of texts the students were navigating, they remarked that they found and selected the texts based on their familiarity with topics of texts and what they learned in their vocational subjects. Almost all the participants gave testimony that if the text was rather difficult and contained a lot of unknown words, they did not pick such a text because they had to enjoy reading the text. Most of the students also indicated that they would pick texts relevant to what professionals in their field encounter. Therefore, they argued that professional discourses and genres are commonly preferred. In addition to consulting vocational texts with the English teachers, they consulted the texts with their vocational subject teachers. They felt that the vocational teachers could suggest appropriate vocational texts. This evidence suggests that the roles of vocational subject teachers are important. Therefore, collaboration between language teachers and

vocational subject teachers are badly needed. In the needs analysis, I involved these teachers in determining vocational topics that the students learned in vocational subjects because vocational topics had to reflect core competencies that the students needed to learn within the formal vocational curriculum. The texts they found were not only for learning English but also for enriching their vocational knowledge. Thus, most of the students navigated and selected texts relevant to what they learned in their vocational subjects because most of the advanced vocational texts were written in English. Additionally, the school library got some English collections. They also remarked that they could easily find vocational texts online, and they argued that navigating vocational texts not only personalized what to read but also motivated them to read their vocational texts in English. Interestingly, the students indicated that self-initiated text navigation allowed them to build their reading tradition because they had responsibility for navigating texts and sharing such texts with others in groups.

The findings above suggest that texts should:

- be relevant to core competencies of students' areas of specialization;
- pertain to what students are learning in vocational subjects because they need to read vocational texts in English;
- be authentic written discourses in hotel hospitality as well as accounting. This helps the students understand how hotel hospitality practitioners (e.g., a hotel manager, a hotel receptionist) and accountants use written English in their vocational domains;
- help students acquire technical vocabulary, which is important in understanding vocational texts written in English and in preparing for the final examination for vocational subjects; and
- serve as a trigger for exploring more pertinent texts and discussing critical issues, which relate to students' areas of specialization (e.g., hotel hospitality and accounting).

These criteria bridge a gap between what students encounter in vocationally oriented interactions and what they experience in the classroom. In the context of VE instruction, when students have no prior knowledge or experience in particular areas of vocation, they find VE texts (e.g., technical or specialized terminologies) confusing or paralyzing. Asking students about what suits their interest and need helps us as teachers match texts and students as readers (Vardell et al. 2006). In this way, students can tackle difficulty in technical terminologies. Moreover, text navigating tasks build autonomy, create engagement, and boost empowerment, which help the students recognize their agency as engaged readers. As

McElvain (2010) points out, these have significant implications for reading self-efficacy, confidence, and willingness to participate in class discussions initiated by reading texts.

Assigning Roles through Teacher-Scaffolded Negotiation

Before the present project started, the participating students never experienced literature circle activities before. For this reason, modeling how students were supposed to play different roles in literature circle-oriented tasks is form of instructional scaffolding. This scaffolding helped the students understand how to perform a particular focused task based on the agreed roles. As mentioned earlier in the instructional procedure, in role assignment, the students were entrusted to negotiate what roles they played in literature circle tasks. They independently chose different roles in each reading circle. Thus, role assignment was negotiated within groups. In this teacher scaffolding, the teacher had to make sure that each group was functioning. Furthermore, the responsibility of the teacher was to facilitate how each group member exercised his or her own responsibility.

As seen in Fig. 1, the teacher showed how to present the chosen text and what details the students needed to focus on. This is an example of how the students played a role as a passage master. This teacher scaffolding was useful in guiding the students how to function in group. In addition, the students had autonomy to explore what they could do when playing particular literature circle roles. This teacher scaffolding was the point of departure for the students to do this exploration.

Figure 2 below shows that the student as a passage master was presenting the text in English, and the other



Fig. 2 The student showing what to present following teacher's modeling

visiting students were paying attention to the master. The teacher was monitoring how the passage master was eloquently giving a passage presentation. In addition to what the teacher modeled to the students, they were afforded autonomy to do oral presentation. This finding suggests that the teacher mediated how the student performed an assigned role, and more crucially, all the students engaged in text presentation through posters.

Interview data also show students' responses to role assignment, presented in the following vignettes.

Student 1

Assigning roles when reading a text allowed me to focus on what to do and what to pay attention. I never did this before. For me, playing roles made our reading lesson lively and dynamic because each student had their own responsibility (Hotel Hospitality Student, October 2012).

Student 2

I did enjoy playing roles given to me. The most valuable experience that I got from this is that my peers and I discussed which roles I played so that I could contribute to the group (Hotel Hospitality Student, October 2012).

Student 3

I felt empowered when I took roles. What I enjoyed most is that I had clear-cut responsibility and shared roles with my peers, so I felt that shared reading was enjoyable and built a community of active and responsible readers. These roles were rotated, so we could experience each role, and how this different role enriched our learning experience (Accounting Student, October 2012).

Student 4

Though my group members played different roles, the teacher showed how to act out such roles. This teacher support made me clear to what to do and how to perform such roles. The classroom atmosphere was really empowering. More importantly, everyone engaged in a reading activity as they shared responsibility. In this way, we were responsible for our own learning (Hotel Hospitality Student, October 2012).



Fig. 1 The teacher demonstrating what to discuss

Students' Vignettes 2: Assigning and Modeling Assigned Roles

The vignettes above show that assigning roles to the students leads to focused reading tasks, creates lively and dynamic reading lessons, and allows the students to contribute to the group and to assume shared responsibility. Additionally, role assignment builds a community of responsibly engaged readers, encourages the students to become responsible for their own learning, and helps them enrich their learning experience. More crucially, such a learning environment makes the students feel empowered to do assigned reading tasks. These benefits are also articulated in previous studies by Nolasco (2009), McElvain (2010), Canals (2011), and Shelton-Strong (2012). This role assignment also typifies how literature circles should be enacted to ensure students' engagement in the classroom. In this role assignment, students should be afforded autonomy to choose roles that they can assume in each reading circle. It is also important to bear in mind that the rotation of roles is a critical aspect of literature circles so that students can gain different learning experiences. This role rotation can also empower students to become engaged actors in each reading circle. It is a passport to successful literature circle-oriented intensive reading instruction. Therefore, a teacher plays a role as a guide who always ensures that students play their own roles so that they contribute to their groups.

Meaning-Making Activity 1: Host Group Performance

Based on the close examination of observation data, a group member who played as a text picker explained why his group chose this text, and a text master proceeded to detail some main points in the text and also explained how the text had relevancy to their major. He elaborated the text eloquently. However, in another group, a text master switched from English to Bahasa Indonesia. She said that "let me explain this point in Bahasa Indonesia because I do not know how to express it in English." One of the visiting group members responded in this way: "No worries about this. We are still learning how to express some ideas in English." After this text presentation, a language enricher listed some unfamiliar vocabulary, which the group had to learn and explore different meanings in context. In this respect, the language enricher adopted sample sentences stored in an online dictionary and a corpus. She made use of online Macmillan dictionary and corpus of contemporary American English. The reason for using online resources is that the students wished to show how the picked unfamiliar words are used in context. As a language enricher student put it,

This activity helped us to see how unknown words are used in certain situations. I think that these online resources are very helpful in increasing our vocabulary. By exploring this unknown vocabulary in these online resources, we easily remember the words because we pay close attention to how these words are used in different contexts.

In another group, the language enricher student emphasized that

These online resources show us how each word is syntactically written, and more importantly enable us to see how frequent certain vocabulary occurs. I mean whether a certain word is frequently or rarely used.

Particularly in genre and language analysis tasks, when sharing and discussing texts with guest group members, host group members talked about genres, which were typical of their vocational areas, such as information reports, procedures, and argumentative genres. For instance, hotel hospitality students reported that many hotel hospitality texts contained mixed or hybrid genres, that is, information report and argumentative genre. This was evident in many hotel website texts because a hotel management would like to convince prospective guests to stay in their hotel while giving detailed information to the guests. In another case, accounting students remarked that financial statement texts were descriptive and procedural in nature. For example, when the students worked on a cash flow statement text, they had to understand moves of this text in order to create a cash flow statement acceptable to their accounting area. In addition, the students had to know that the cash flow statement should provide the reader with information on financial health of a particular company, which reflects the purpose of the cash flow statement text. In addition to doing genre analysis, the students documented grammatical patterns commonly found in the texts they read and discussed. For instance, hotel hospitality students found a high frequency of simple present tenses and persuasive tones in hotel website hotels (e.g., *Our best available rate guarantee* [persuasive tone] *assures* [simple present tense] *you receive the best rates* [persuasive tone] *when you book directly with us* [persuasive tone]; *The hotel is equipped* [simple present tense] *with the modern services & amenities* [persuasive tone]...). The high frequency of simple present tense and persuasion in hotel website texts was due to the fact that all hotel hospitality industries offer service excellence to guests, and in turn, this excellence can build hotel reputation and increase room sales, for example. Thus, both the hotel hospitality students and the accounting students found genre and language analysis tasks engaging because they not only learned moves of vocational texts, but also they recognized a variety of

grammatical patterns and textual tones in authentic texts, which were relevant to their vocational interests.

The sharing-and-discussion session can be depicted in Figs. 3, 4. This session typifies how the students made meaning of the text and negotiated meaning of it, and the students scaffolded one another. In this session, the students focused on meaning-making activities, which involved text comprehension and text interpretation. In this meaning making, the students also discussed how the knowledge of vocabulary, genre, and grammar facilitated this enterprise. They mutually supported how to make meanings of the text through recognizing how lexical, genre, and grammatical resources were used in the text. They realized that the role of such knowledge is a passport to both text comprehension and text interpretation (Duncan 2012).



Fig. 3 Meaning making (host group)



Fig. 4 Meaning making (host group)

Meaning-Making Activity 2: Guest Group Performance

Based on another close analysis of the observation data, after the host group presented the text, guest or visiting group members took the turn to play their roles. To begin with, a text assessor evaluated whether the text was relevant to the agreed reading topic and area of study. She stated that “the text looks interesting and contains some language expressions which relate to our major. I think the text is worth reading and sharing.” Then, an information seeker read through the content of the text, and she recommended some questions to a questioner. The questioner then posed some listed questions to the host group members, and the host group members had to answer these questions. At this point, the text master tackled these questions. Once all the questions had been tackled, a language observer identified some unfamiliar words, which differed from what the host group member spelled out. In response to this, the language enricher explained these words in *Bahasa Indonesia* as a tool for making meanings clearer and more understood. In this way, new words could be internalized in student mind. After the guest group asked questions and discussed these questions, a summarizer of the host group listed some main points as reinforcement though the text master did so, but the summarizer was responsible for getting some points recalled so that both host group members and guest group members remembered what had been explained. Afterwards, a text enricher advised what sort of texts the guest group members had to read to enrich their knowledge and language resources. As a wrap-up session, a note maker or reporter of the guest group members told what had been shared, discussed, and debated during the sharing-and-discussion session to the whole class. Each group took turns to do so. The teacher provided a holistic evaluation and reinforced what had been shared and learned.

Based on the empirical evidence of meaning-making activities 1 and 2, the students make use of online resources (e.g., e-dictionaries) as a language scaffold. These online resources provide students with lexical resources and lexical enrichment. As Leonardi (2010) points out, vocabulary plays a crucial role in EAL classrooms because without vocabulary, no message is successfully conveyed. In short, a dictionary serves as “a vocabulary builder and facilitator” (Leonardi 2010, p. 101). Secondly, the participating students deploy their second or native language, *Bahasa Indonesia*, as a tool for clarifying word meanings where no equivalent words in English are identified. The use of first language is a useful pedagogical tool or scaffold, which helps students make intended messages clearer to audiences. Thus, the role of translation remains pivotal in the classroom where English is rarely spoken in daily social

interaction; the only access is the Internet, which provides a wide array of spoken and written texts. Thus, translation plays a crucial role in developing their EAL competences. Littlewood and Yu (2011) suggest that the use of first language be deployed to strategically motivate students and clarify unfamiliar words. Another key finding is that the students use idea reinforcement as a tactic or strategy for recalling important ideas. This tactic helps students wrap up what they have discussed. As a whole, the students act out their assigned roles, and more importantly, each group member takes up her or his role(s) assigned successfully.

In many reading classes, particularly in Asia, language teachers teach intensive reading classes, which focus on learning to answer reading test items instead of learning to read in English. Echoing what Macalister (2011) argues, teaching reading does not simply provide students with texts and test whether they have understood the texts through a battery of comprehension questions. Therefore, reading comprehension is notorious for testing student comprehension. By adopting literature circles in intensive reading programs, language teachers can redesign the dynamics of reading classes. As the students in the current study indicated, the adoption of such an instructional model is valuable for some reasons, including engaging students in different learning tasks; affording them a variety of choices in selecting their own texts and negotiating roles with their peers; taking responsibility by playing specific roles; building collaboration between the students and their peers in sharing and discussing the chosen texts; and building a dynamic learning community by supporting each other and seeing one another as resources.

Though the student found the experience with literature circle tasks worthwhile and engaging, and they were generally in favor. They found three major problem areas. First, when negotiating roles, low proficiency students avoided playing roles as text masters and language enrichers because they felt that they were lack of these areas. For this reason, they received teacher's additional training in these areas. In addition, high proficiency students provided support by mentoring their low proficiency peers and by creating a learning community outside the classroom. Second, in the first term (August–December 2012), many students did not feel confident in playing such roles as text masters, language enrichers, text assessors, and passage summarizers because they thought that they would need to develop their presentational skills, language skills, and critical reading skills. The students noted that they did not get used to reading texts critically. In five reading circles, the students received more training in oral presentation, text evaluation, text summarization, and critical reading. Drawing on these problem areas, in the implementation of vocationally oriented literature circle tasks, students should understand roles they wish to play.

Teachers need to model how to play these roles. In addition, students are afforded the opportunity to choose their own roles and decide which roles they are ready to exercise as they go through the entire process of each reading circle.

Despite the problems identified, intensive reading programs coupled with a literature circle approach are worthwhile in Asia where English is still seen as a foreign language. Literature circle-oriented intensive reading lessons offer some advantages compared to traditional or comprehension exercise-oriented intensive reading instruction. First, literature circle-oriented intensive reading lessons can empower students to become engaged readers because students play different roles in each reading circle. More importantly, they can negotiate and choose these roles within groups. This negotiated role assignment gives students autonomy to decide what role they can exercise in a certain reading circle. Second, a literature circle-oriented intensive reading lesson allows the students to share and discuss what they have learned from reading a text presented. This shared reading activity can create dialogic reading activity. This dialogic reading engages students in a meaning-making enterprise in which the use of text is a springboard for a small peer-led discussion. In this enterprise, the students can focus on what reading areas they wish to learn and talk about. Third, the literature circle-oriented intensive reading lesson assists the students to take shared responsibility for understanding and interpreting the presented text. This can create opportunities for learning to read and for reading to learn because students can emphasize meaning-making activity. This meaning-making activity enables students not only to develop their language ability but also deepen their vocational knowledge. In addition, shared responsibility can lighten students' reading loads. Last, literature circle-oriented intensive reading lessons assist the students to enrich linguistic resources through text presentation. Students are given the opportunity to navigate, select, read, and discuss a variety of texts. Through reading these texts, they identify linguistic resources they need to know. By surveying these linguistic resources in authentic texts, the students can enrich their linguistic repertoire. Taken together, following Mikan's (2013) framework for working with texts for meaning making in context, literature circle-oriented intensive reading instruction allows students to work on text-rich activities, such as understanding and interpreting a text, sharing and discussing the text, as well as evaluating what they have read. The students also have the opportunity to observe texts in use and analyze the texts in terms of content and language. In this way, the goals of reading programs are to develop students' content knowledge and enhance students' language repertoire. More importantly, in literature circle-oriented intensive reading, students engage in multimodal tasks, such as reading, talking, listening, and

writing. This can create a learning atmosphere that emphasizes the learning of integrated language skills.

Implications and Conclusion

Three important instructional implications can be drawn from the findings of the study. First, literature circles can be incorporated into intensive reading programs that focus on both knowledge building and language awareness. The findings suggest that the use of this instructional method engages students in reading as meaning making and dialogic activity that helps students develop their reading ability and language repertoire. To optimize this meaning-making task, reading teachers can assign and rotate roles that students can play. Third, teachers can use a variety of multimodal texts so that students can discuss different dimensions of texts, such as genres, lexico-grammatical points, discourse-semantic meanings, visual grammar, and the relationship between verbal language and visual language. To conclude, the adoption of literature circles in the VE reading lessons definitely encourages student engagement and empowerment. The present study has showed how literature circles worked in intensive reading programs. I acknowledge that a more complete picture of the enactment of literature circles in both extensive and intensive reading programs could be provided in future studies. For example, an experimental study may be conducted to look at to what extent literature circle-oriented extensive and intensive reading programs impact on students' reading fluency and achievement. A qualitative case study may also be undertaken to investigate in what ways different types of teacher scaffolding and peer support in literature circle-based extensive and intensive reading instruction help students become competent and engaged readers. There is an urgent need for investigating the use of literature circles in both intensive and extensive reading programs in the EFL/EAL context. These future research agendas aim to document more empirical evidence regarding the use of literature circle-oriented reading programs in different educational contexts in general and in other ELT contexts in particular.

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