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**English Language Education
Sanata Dharma University**

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The Effects of Literature Discussion in EFL Book Report Class

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Abstract

In almost every semester, English Language Education Study Program of Sanata Dharma University offers reading courses. One of them is Book Report where students are introduced to reading literary works, in particular novels. Unfortunately, reading novels is still considered difficult for EFL students because of “too many” barriers they have to face. Hedge (2003) states that limited English vocabulary, lack of schematic knowledge, and lack of reading strategies become the barriers. As a result, the students’ motivation was actually “ruined” by the reading itself. Thus, the researcher offered literature discussion and would like to find out the effects of it in Book Report Class. The study was based on qualitative research, which administered interview and questionnaires to gather the data. The study concluded that literature discussion brought four positive effects: (1) creating positive relationship among the classroom members, (2) allowing good interaction, (3) increasing students’ understanding on the story, and (4) increasing the students’ reading motivation.

Keywords: Literature Discussion, EFL Book Report Class

Introduction

Reading becomes a vital element of language learning for EFL students, especially for students at English Language Education Study Program of Sanata Dharma University. The first reason is because there are reading courses that are obliged to take from semester one to semester five. The other reason which is also important is that almost all courses demand the students to read English references. Unfortunately, reading English texts, especially literature, is still considered difficult for EFL students because of “too many” barriers they have to face. The common barriers that EFL students often mention are limited English vocabulary, lack of schematic knowledge, reading fluency, and the very little understanding of reading strategies (Hedge, 2003).

English Language Education Study Program (ELESP) curriculum has five literature courses, namely Book Report, Introduction to Literature, Prose, Drama, and Poetry. This study focuses on Book Report which is offered for semester one students. This course is designed to introduce students to English language novels, increase their interest, and improve their ability in reading literary works, in particular novels. In the previous course outline, students were to read four different novels comprising three simplified/abridged novels and one original/unabridged novel throughout the semester. The list of the novels was already provided and the students chose which ones they wanted to read. Then, they read the novels independently outside of the classroom and wrote a written report for two weeks. After that, the students had an oral test for each novel they had read. The purpose of the oral test was to check students’ understanding on the story and their interest on reading those novels.

From the informal interview, the researcher found that students were not motivated to read those novels and noticed their growing frustration. The main reason was that those novels were old novels where the words were difficult to understand. Besides, they could

not really relate the stories with their own life experience. As a result, students' reading motivation was ruined by the reading itself. Farr (2013, p.1) mentions that, "motivation to read is the result of the interaction of three conditions: (1) a student's interest and experience, (2) a book or article that matches those needs and interests, and (3) a student's success in reading". When those three conditions are not given serious attention, reading will be far from motivating.

Therefore, the researcher would like to offer literature discussion and find out the effects of it in EFL Book Report class. Therefore, the writer formulates one research question in this study, "What are the effects of literature discussion in EFL Book Report class?"

Edmondson (2012) as cited by Pittman & Schlichting (2013, p. 3) defines literature discussion as "a long-standing, versatile literacy practice". Other researchers, such as Allington (2001) and Daniel (2002) mention several different terms for it: book discussion clubs, literature circles, text conversation, and thoughtful literacy. In general, literature discussion is understood as student discussion which involves students to read a text/ book, to discuss it regularly with others who also read it, and to engage in a deeper and further discussion on idea interpretations (Daniels, 2006). Bedel (2012, p. 3) cites Noe & Johnson's clearer understanding on how to see what literature discussion is in the following table:

Table 1: Noe & Johnson's understanding on what literature discussion is (Bedel, 2012, p. 3)

Literature Discussion is ...	Literature Discussion is not ...
Reader response centered	Teacher and text centered
A balanced element of literacy program	The entire reading curriculum
Groups that are formed by book interest/choice	Teacher-assigned groups that are formed by ability only
Structured in order for students to be independent, responsible, and have ownership	unstructured
Mostly guided by students' deep understanding and questions	Mostly guided by teacher or curriculum-based questions
Intended as a context to apply reading and writing skills	Intended as a place to do skills work
Flexible and flowing; never look the same twice	Tied to a prescriptive "recipe"

In the study of literature discussion, many researchers have found multiple benefits of it, especially for EFL students. Keene & Zimmerman (2007) mention that literature discussion provides good practices on reading strategies and critical thinking skill. Further, Powell-Brown (2006) highlights the benefit from the connection between literature discussion and the increase of students' reading motivation. Literature discussion allows students to make choices of their reading books, to interact with the reading members, and to make connection with their personal life experience. These positive conditions surely increase their "will" part – the motivation.

Further research finds out that literature discussion creates a positive relation in the class (Wormelli, 2011). In the discussion part, students are invited to talk about the book they read, to analyze the characters from their own point of view, to exchange ideas, and to share the connections between the story and their own or somebody's life experiences. In addition, Pittman & Schlichting (2013) underline that "the positive and healthy student

relationships build self-esteem, establish self-identity, and help students understand the changes taking place in their minds, emotions, and bodies (p. 7).

Regarding the implementation of literature discussion in the EFL class, Noe & Johnson (1999) believe that there is no exact structure on how to conduct it perfectly. What the teachers need to do is to start from whichever step they decide and continue to the next step. However, some researchers suggest some procedures that they believe can help teachers conduct successful and meaningful literature discussion. Furr mentions 10 features of an EFL literature discussion:

1. The teacher chooses appropriate reading materials for the students.
2. The teacher forms small groups (5-6 students in each group).
3. Different groups are usually reading the same text.
4. The teacher provides additional information to help students understand the story more. After that, new groups are formed.
5. Groups meet on a regular schedule for book discussion.
6. The teacher encourages the students to use their notes for discussion guideline.
7. The teacher allows the students to choose the discussion topics.
8. The teacher encourages the students to share opinions and interpretation on the reading in natural conversations.
9. The teacher positions him or herself more as a facilitator, not an instructor.
10. The teacher needs to maintain the students' feeling of enjoyment during the discussion.

As it has been stated by Daniels (2006), literature discussion is good to be implemented in book discussion activity like in Book Report class. Buckley (1995) defines book report as a report that focuses on summarizing books and emphasizes on important parts of them, including the information of the author and title, and also the content summary. Book report is, however, different from book review in a way that it is more to be descriptive, while book review involves analysis and more to be persuasive. Farr (2013) suggests how book report should be organized and what elements should be included:

1. A brief introduction
It includes the title of the book, the author of the book, the setting of the time, the setting of the places, and a brief description of the major and minor characters that take important roles in the story.
2. A short summary of the content
The summary should not be too long, but it should not fail to reveal how the story goes, what are the conflicts found, and what the important events of the story are.
3. Theme
Theme is a statement on the author's view point about life through the story in the book.
4. Conclusion
This part contains a brief evaluation on the book. Each student states whether he/she likes or dislikes the book and whether or not he/she will recommend the book to other students.

Since the study is in EFL context, book selection becomes an important factor that will determine the classroom success. Freeman & Freeman (2000) recommend books with multicultural themes as they bring rich description of places, people, and culture of others. Besides, the appropriate level of language, interesting plots, and strong characters will help students make connection more easily. Some samples of books suggested by Freeman & Freeman that can be used in EFL book report class are *Hiroshima* (Yepp, 1995), *Esperanza*

Rising (Ryan, 2002), *Journey to America* (Levitin, 1987), *The Family under the Bridge* (Carlson, 1958).

However, those “native” English literatures are not always available in EFL schools like in Indonesia. Besides, it is admitted that EFL students often face difficulties in comprehending these kinds of literary books due to two major reasons (Jayakaran, 1993). First, the “too many” unfamiliar foreign cultures become a big hindrance. The inability to imagine the settings and make strong connections with the story affects the students’ motivation and concentration to read. Second, they contain words and sentence structures that are full of complexities, which really influence students’ understanding of the story. Therefore, the alternative idea to use literary books in English which are written by Asian authors (Asian literature) is taken into account in EFL Indonesian class setting. Asian literature, such as *Sing to the Dawn* and *Rice without Rain* by Minfong Ho, is believed to be able to help the students develop their personal exploration towards other cultures that, somehow, still have close connection to their own culture.

Research Methods

This research is a qualitative research. In attempt to answer the research question, the researcher mainly distributed questionnaire and interview to 31 students of ELESP as participants. The interview was aimed to find out students’ personal journey on reading and their attitude toward reading. The questionnaire was distributed to investigate the effects of literature discussion in Book Report class. The questionnaire contained two types of questions: (1) closed-ended questions and (2) open-ended questions.

Findings and discussion

In the beginning of the semester, the researcher provided 5 short statements and let the students responded by raising their hands. The statements were related to the students’ personal journey on reading and their attitude towards reading. The result of the interview will be presented in the following figure.

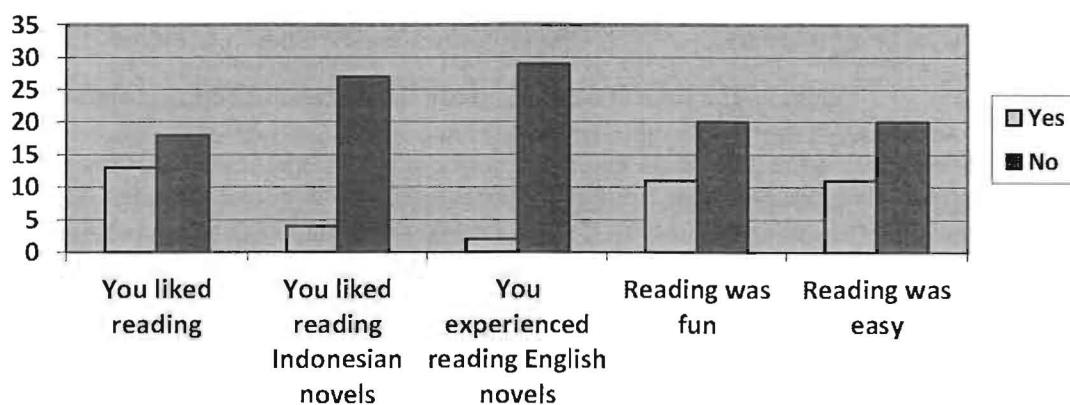


Figure 1: The result of the preliminary study interview

From the preliminary study figure, 13 out of 31 students (41,94%) claimed that they liked reading. However, 18 other students (58,06%) stated that they did not like reading. It can be concluded that more than 50% of the class actually did not like reading. The second statement showed that only 4 students out of 31 students (12,90%) liked reading Indonesian novels. Besides, further question revealed that only 2 students out of 31 students (6,45%)

experienced reading English novels before joining Book Report course. The researcher concluded that the students, to some extent, still had very little exposure to reading. Related to their attitude towards reading, the result revealed that less than 50% of the students thought that reading was fun and easy.

Finding the effects that literature discussion brings in EFL Book Report becomes the major objective in this study. The researcher mainly used questionnaire to find out the answers. There were four positive statements about the literature discussion activity with four degrees to indicate how far they agreed with the statements: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree, and (4) strongly agree. The five statements and result were presented as follows.

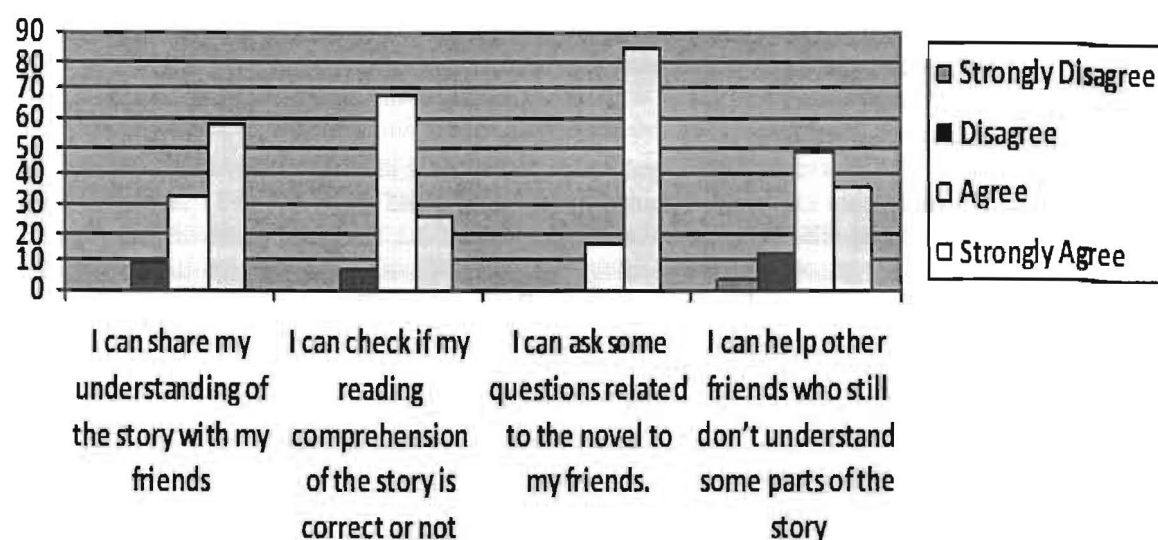


Figure 2: The students' experience in the literature discussion activity

The data in figure 2 illustrate that the majority of students believed that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the positive results caused by literature discussion. 83, 87% of the students strongly agreed and 16, 74% agreed that they could ask some questions related to the novel to their friends. Furthermore, 90, 32% of the students (58, 06% for strongly agree and 32, 26% for agree) agreed that they could share their understanding of the story with other friends. Meanwhile, 93, 55% (25, 81% for strongly agree and 67, 74% for agree) could check whether their comprehension of the story was correct or not. Finally, 83, 87% of the students (35, 48% for strongly agree and 48, 39% for agree) agreed that they could help other friends who still did not understand about some parts of the story. From the explanation, more than half of the students always held agreement towards the four positive statements; thus, it can be concluded that, in general, they reacted positively towards literature discussion activity.

The second part of the questionnaire was aimed to find out the students' answers on the effects of literature discussion. The researcher developed five positive statements related to the effects of literature discussion adapted from Keene & Zimmerman (2007), Powell-Brown (2006), and Wormelli (2011). Besides, the open-ended answers from the

students were also used to provide further clarification. The following are the statements and the students' answers.

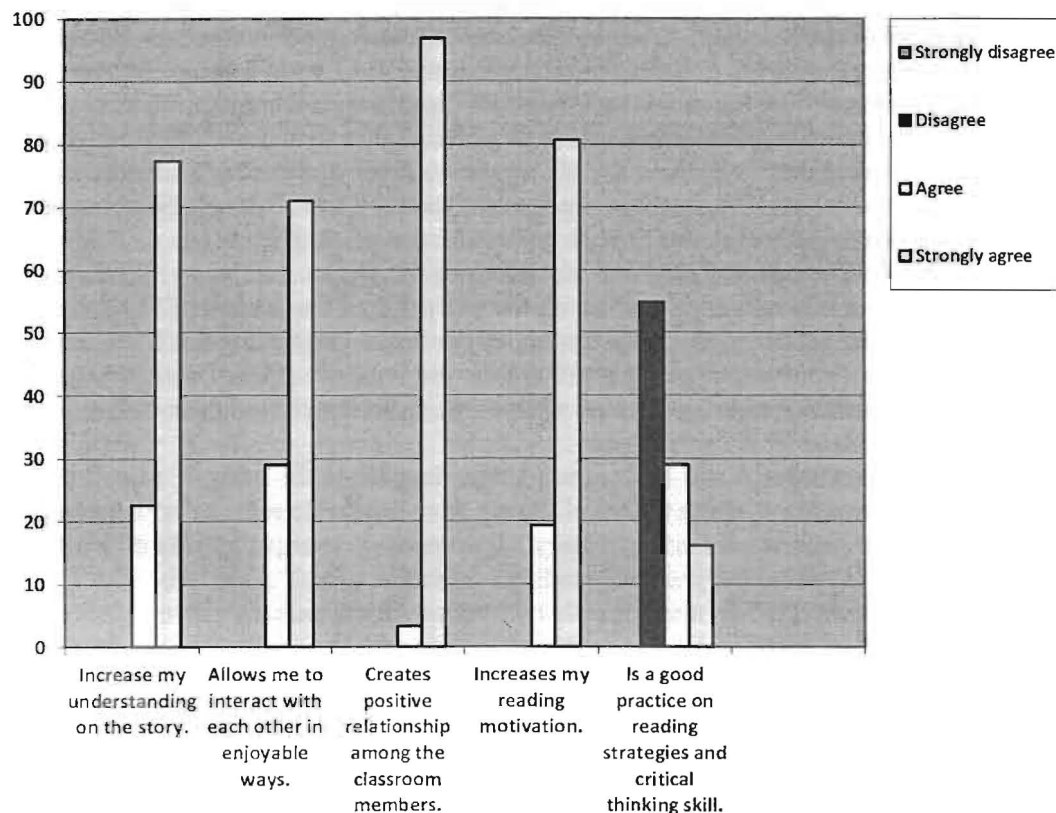


Figure 3: The students' answers on the effects of literature discussion

The result of the questionnaire revealed that the students agreed with what Wormelli (2011) and Powell-Brown (2006) have stated earlier as the effects of literature discussion. Based on the data in figure 3, the researcher concluded that there were 4 positive effects of literature discussion in Book Report class:

1. It creates positive relationship among the classroom members.

The data shows that almost all of the students (96, 77%) strongly agreed and 3,23% agreed that literature discussion created positive relationship among the classroom members. One student, S25, wrote:

It creates positive relation because we try to share and appreciate other friends' different opinion. Sometimes we argue but then we can accept the opinion. We laugh and we try to discuss different opinion again. It's funny because we try to understand each other.

According to the students, positive relation created in the literature discussion was shown by the students' attitude when they were willing to share and appreciated others' opinion

although it was different. Furthermore, literature discussion was claimed as a “bridge” for the students to get to know their friends better.

2. It allows students to interact with each other in enjoyable ways.

The result shows that all of the students (70,97% for strongly agree and 29,03% for agree) believed that literature discussion allowed good interaction. One student (S4) explained:

What I like the most from literature discussion is that I can interact with each other in enjoyable atmosphere. We discuss the novel in a small group. I can ask any questions without feeling afraid, even sometimes it is a silly question like “why bitten by scorpion not a snake” and my friends laugh. Sometimes when we argued, we used English and also Indonesian. It’s fun!

3. It increases students’ understanding on the story.

In terms of understanding on the story, all of the students (77,42% for strongly agree and 22,58% for agree) also responded positively, suggesting that literature discussion helped the students to clarify parts that they did not understand. Being able to clarify the story and exchange ideas about the novel made them understand the whole story better, as written by S10:

Sometimes, I still have misunderstanding about the story. It’s like I have my “own story” about the novel. So my friends provide some information and help me understand the “right story”. It deepens my comprehension of the story.

4. It increases the students’ reading motivation

Powell-Brown (2006) mentions that literature discussion facilitates students to have motivating interaction and also make connection with their personal life experience. When the students can meet those two positive conditions, their reading motivation will increase. The result shows that 80,65% of the students strongly agreed and 19,35% agreed, as represented by S22:

It makes me become more motivated to read more novels because I feel that my friends experience what I feel. When we share, I find that I have the same understanding of the story. So I am not that bad in reading.

However, more than half of the students (54,84%) held disagreement for the last statement. The last statement was adopted from Keene & Zimmerman (2007) who believed that literature discussion provides good practices on reading strategies and critical thinking skill. The students claimed that they did not really have opportunity to practice and learn reading strategies during the literature discussion as stated by S25:

I can ask my friends if I don’t understand the story. But actually I still want to know good strategies to understand the story. When I ask my discussion group, they only tell me to open dictionary.

Students thought that learning and practicing on reading strategies were not accommodated in literature discussion. Similar to this, practices on critical thinking skills were not really emphasized. The data shows that only 45,16% of the students (16,13% for strongly agree and 29,03% for agree) thought that literature discussion facilitated the students with reading strategies and helped them think critically.

Conclusions

The major findings of the study can be summarized as follows. First, the preliminary study showed that the majority of the students in this research did not like reading and had very little experience on reading, especially reading novels. There were only 12,90% of the students who had experienced reading Indonesian novels and 6,45% experienced reading English novels. The finding also revealed that their attitude towards reading was less positive. Only 35,48% of them claimed that reading was fun and easy.

However, the result of the questionnaire in the end of the semester showed that, in general, the students reacted positively towards the implementation of literature discussion.

The second finding was related to the effects of literature discussion in EFL Book Report class. The general result proved that literature discussion brought positive effects towards the students as it was also claimed by Wormelli (2011) and Powell-Brown (2006). There were four major positive effects of literature discussion in Book Report Class. First, 100% of the students indicated that literature discussion created positive relationship among the classroom members. Second, they also believed that it facilitated them to interact with each other in enjoyable ways. The result discovered that 70,97% of the students strongly agreed and 29,03% agreed upon the statement. Third, literature discussion was also believed to be able to increase the students' understanding of the story. They agreed that it helped them clarify parts of the novel that they still did not and exchanged information. Finally, the students felt that their reading motivation was increased through the implementation of literature discussion. Nonetheless, Keene & Zimmerman's (2007) statement did not get agreement from the students. Less than 50% of them agreed that literature discussion could provide good practices on reading strategies and critical thinking skill.

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