



## Perceptions of prospective Turkish Teachers regarding Literature Circles

Talat Aytan \*

Yildiz Technical University, TURKEY

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**Abstract:** The fact that the prospective Turkish teachers' having a command of different methods and techniques as being Turkish teachers of the future is important in terms of its positive effects on the comprehension and expression skills of the middle school students. This study used the case study design and the qualitative approach. The aim of the research was to test the effectiveness of literature circle method and contribute to the field in theoretical and practical context. Forty-six prospective Turkish teachers were conveniently sampled from the state university in Istanbul, to participate in the study. During six weeks, the opinions of prospective Turkish teachers who applied literature circle method were collected through unstructured interview forms. The data collected were subjected to a content analysis. It was concluded that prospective Turkish teachers found the method of literature circle favorable, in terms of cooperation, solidarity, gaining different perspectives, revealing hidden talents, developing self-confidence, aesthetic pleasure, enriching vocabulary and catching the details.

**Keywords:** *Prospective Turkish teachers, literature circle, methods, cooperation.*

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### Introduction

Ministry In parallel with the developments in science and technology, education curriculums started to seek a renewal and claim to bring the practices and methods that can meet the demands of the modern age into education environments. In addition to the basic methods of traditional education, which are expression and question-answer techniques, a rich learning environment is being developed in a wide technical range from brainstorming to buzz groups, six thinking hats technique to Socrates technique, Philipps 66 to station technique. It is essential to use the above-mentioned methods and techniques in teaching Turkish, which is based on developing comprehension and speaking skills, in terms of the development of communication, cooperation and critical thinking skills that are among the skills of the twenty-first century. One of the techniques that can develop thinking skills is the literature circle.

The literature circle provide a basis for student-centered studies, significantly affects the level of participation in classes and brings learning experiences by applying (Clarke, 2006; Cazden, 2001; Nystrand, Gamoran, & Heck, 1993; Rosenblatt, 1978). The literature circle method is a remarkable tool for students to be interested in texts (Deniz & Ersoy, 2016; Stien & Beed, 2004). Literature circles are noteworthy for investigating socio-cultural influences in terms of its providing an opportunity for peer interaction at high level (Lafer, 2014; Clarke, 2006). Literature circles have a great power to support classroom reading because, literary circles effectively incorporate collaborative learning, shared and independent reading, group discussion and effective participation at many levels. Students "can use initiative in learning by doing active reading and writing activities (Bernadowski & Morgano, 2011, p.4).

Literature circles, which maximize the interaction of the students, develop the skill of cooperation, help the students to gain individual perspectives around a concept or idea, provide social consciousness and influence the students' motivation in positive direction on the way to group success (Neamen & Strong, 2001).

Daniels describes the main features of the literature circle that he developed under 11 articles as follows:

- Students choose their own reading materials.
- Small temporary groups are created based on book selections.
- Different groups read different books.

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#### \* Correspondence:

Talat Aytan, Yildiz Technical University, Turkish Language Education Department, Istanbul, Turkey.

✉ [talataytan@gmail.com](mailto:talataytan@gmail.com)

- Groups decide on a regular, predictable plan to discuss what they read.
- Children use written or marked notes that will guide them in their readings and discussions.
- Discussion topics are chosen by students.
- Group meetings aim to be an open and natural conversation about books, so that personal connections, digressions and open-ended questions can find a place in it.
- Teacher serves as a facilitator (moderator), not a group member or an instructor.
- Evaluation takes place in the form of teacher observation and student's self-evaluation.
- The spirit of cheerfulness and fun spreads among children.
- Once the books are finished, the readers share them with their classmates, and then new groups are formed around the new reading selections (2002: 18).

The reading circle is an effective teaching method in terms of gaining reading habits, developing reading comprehension skills and strengthening social relations (Avci, Yuksel & Akinci, 2010). "The heart of literature circles is the discussion groups" (Brownlie, 2005, p. 7). There are eight options in total, four compulsory and four selectives for task distribution in the literature circles (Aydin, 2013; Damgaci & Aydin, 2013). The compulsory task areas are the relation builder, interrogator, chapter paragraph expert and illustrator; the selective task areas are summarizer, word genius, investigator and scene descriptor (Karatay, 2015 quoted from Daniels 2002). In addition to the four compulsory basic tasks in this study, summarizer and word genius were preferred among the selective ones. Based on Daniels' (2002) task definitions, the prospective teachers in the literature circles fulfilled the following tasks:

*Relation Builder:* Relation Builders compare the novels they read with their lives, daily life and different disciplines and try to build an intertextual meaning by correlating them with other texts they read.

*Interrogator:* Interrogators approach the novels they read with a critical approach, try to reveal the positive and negative aspects of the text, and discuss the language, style, writing and punctuation features of the text.

*Chapter and Paragraph Expert:* The chapter and paragraph experts carefully submit their findings about interesting sections and paragraphs and show the articulations, proverbs and idioms in the novel they read.

*Illustrator:* Illustrators draw a picture about the message of the text.

*Summarizer:* Summarizers logically and chronologically summarize the text.

*Word Genius:* Word Genius makes a presentation about unknown and impressive vocabulary preferences in the text.

Briggs (2010), in his study with third graders, found that the literature circle method improved the reading skills. In the study of Avci and Yuksel (2011), it was determined that the reading circle was an effective factor for fourth graders to gain reading comprehension and reading habits. It has also been found that the method is also effective in terms of persistence of information and enjoyable learning environment. According to Mizerka (1999) and Avci et al. (2012)'s research has shown that the reading circle can be used to achieve or improve this skill in primary school fifth graders who have low reading comprehension skills. It was determined that the experimental studies conducted with seventh graders by Balantekin and Pilav (2017), with ninth graders by Olsen (2007) and with eleventh graders by Camp (2006) positively affected reading comprehension skills.

According to the results of Ozbay and Kaldirim (2015)'s research, it was determined that the reading circle technique prepared according to the cooperative learning approach positively affected the self-efficacy perceptions that the prospective teachers would use mostly during their education process and their duties. Karatay (2017) and Arslan & Yigit (2016), in his study with prospective Turkish teachers, found that the literature circle method was effective in the text analysis of prospective teachers, in creating a social learning atmosphere, in improving their critical reading skills. In addition, Citamak and Yigit (2012) the independent reading desires and their interests, in enhancing their speaking skills and self-confidence and in upgrading their tolerance levels towards cultural and socio-economic differences. Moreover, Carothers and Parfitt (2017), the literature is analyzed, it is seen that theoretical and empirical studies about the literature circles have increased in recent years. It is possible to divide these studies that are about literature circles into two parts; the ones conducted for students and the ones conducted for prospective teachers. It is also seen that these studies focused on reading skills.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The aim of the study is to test the effectiveness of the literature circle method and contribute to the field in theoretical and practical context.

## **Method**

### *Research Design*

In this research, which is trying to determine the opinions of prospective Turkish teachers about the literature circle, case study design was used. Qualitative approach for the research methods have been adopted. According to Yin

(2003), case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon in its real world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident.

According to Simons, each of the case studies has a basis in fields such as sociology, anthropology, history and psychology, and areas of expertise such as law and medicine, which develop methods to establish the validity of the case study for their own purposes. However, the use of case study in education is relatively new and its suitability for education has not been discovered, yet (Ogurlu, & Sevim, 2017; Simons, 1980). The case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a limited system (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 37). Case study methods include collecting and recording data on a case or cases, and preparing a report or presentation of it.

In this research, the following novels were read by 46 prospective Turkish teachers, who were studying at a state university in Istanbul, in the course of Literature Knowledge and Theories:

*Table 1. The Novels that Prospective Turkish Teachers Read*

<b>Author Novel</b>
Nikos Kazancakis <i>Zorba the Greek</i>
Italo Calvino <i>If on a Winter's Night a Traveler</i>
Latife Tekin <i>Sevgili Arsiz Olum</i>
Hasan Ali Toptas <i>Golgesizler</i>

Prospective Teachers had been divided into groups, 46 participants with six groups before the novels were read. The participants determined the groups according to their own preferences and the researcher did not guide them at all. The groups distributed the compulsory tasks (Relation builder, interrogator, chapter and paragraph expert and writer) and selective tasks (summarizer and word genius) proposed by Daniels (2002). Students were given a two-month period to complete their work. At the end of the period, the groups performed their presentations in the classroom. Completion of all group presentations lasted for six weeks.

#### *Participants*

Sample selection was made by convenience sampling method. Convenience sampling is to select the sample from easily accessible and practicable units due to the limitations in terms of time, money and workforce (Buyukozturk, 2017). The research group consisted of 46 prospective Turkish teachers who were studying at a state university in Istanbul. The average age of prospective teachers was 18. All of the participants were on their freshmen year. Information on the gender of the participants is shown in the table below:

*Table 2. Study group*

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Female	29
Male	17
TOTAL	46

#### *Data Collection*

After the application of the six-week literature circle, opinions were taken from the prospective teachers through the unstructured interview forms. The interviews were conducted with 16 students who accepted the interview request. Unstructured interviewing is an interview technique that allows the interviewer to move to the roots of flexible personal opinion and judgments. An unstructured interview is a form of spontaneous communication within the natural flow of verbal interaction with another person without having any interview protocol (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996).

#### *Data Analysis*

The prospective Turkish teachers' opinions collected by the interview forms on literature circle were subjected to a content analysis. Krippendorff (2013) outlines content analysis as "a research technique to reproduce and extract valid results from texts (or other meaningful content)." These results can point to the message itself, the sender of the message, the recipient of the message, or the effect of the message (Weber, 1984).

Researchers can use content analysis to identify and document the attitudes, opinions and interests of individuals, small groups or a wide variety of cultural groups. Researchers can use content analysis to compare communication content and previously documented objectives in the evaluation study (Berelson, 1952).

Berelson (1952), a supporter of a more literal approach, describes the basic content analysis as "a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative definition of the apparent content of communication."

Osgood (1959) describes content analysis -with a more interpretive approach- as "a procedure from which we can draw conclusions from the evidences in the messages about the sources and recipients (of communication)."

The prospective Turkish teachers' opinions collected by the interview forms on literature circle were subjected to a content analysis and the use of concepts were combined under the themes and the frequency values were calculated.

### Findings

The attitudes of the prospective Turkish teachers on the method of the literature circle are positive. According to Gunay and Aydin (2015), the content analysis results of the opinions, the prospective Turkish teachers stated that they would use this method in their professional lives, that the method of the literature circle consolidated their cooperation and solidarity feelings, that it taught them to approach to the literary texts with different perspectives (Yigit & Tatch, 2017), that they developed the skill of catching the details and developed their vocabulary, that it made introvert students active, that it increased the pleasure of literary text analysis and revealed the hidden skills of their classmates. The themes reached as a result of the content analysis are given below with the direct citations from the prospective teachers' opinions, along with their frequency values:

#### *Transferring to Instructional Experience*

Prospective Turkish teachers (f=3) stated that they would use the method of literature circle in their professional lives:

"Once I can transfer the activity of literature circle to my students in my professional life, I believe that they will get benefit from it." (S 4)

"I also want to do such an activity with my students in the future." (S 8)

From the above frequency value and the opinions of the prospective teachers, it can be said that the method of the literature circle can be applied by the Turkish teachers who will serve in secondary schools.

#### *Affecting the attitudes of cooperation*

Prospective Turkish teachers (f =10) stated that the method of literature circle affected the attitudes of cooperation positively:

"Although I am against and disliked the group tasks, the literature circle went beyond this and made me approach more moderately to them." (S 3)

"It made us gain some virtues such as understanding different opinions and respecting them and learning [from] our mistakes and truths in this way." (S 7)

"Our cooperating together with our friends in the group we formed made our task easier." (S 9)

Prospective Turkish teachers stated that the method of literature circle affected their cooperation attitudes positively. In this context, this method can be used to enhance cooperation skills that is one of the most important thinking skills in educational environments. When the literature is examined, it is seen that the cooperative learning techniques in Turkish teaching have a positive effect on the academic achievement of the students ( Sahin, 2010; Kirbas, 2010; Susar Kirmizi, 2010; Maden, 2011; Kardas, 2013; Okur Akcay, 2014).

#### *Solidarity*

Prospective Turkish teachers (f =8) stated that the method of literature circle enhanced the solidarity between them:

"It has an aspect that contributes to information exchange and cooperation." (S 1)

"It made us understand the idiom of 'Two hands are better than one hand' and made us understand that the healthy ideas would arise in the collective environment." (S 6)

"Thanks to the groups we have formed, we have built a solidarity and friendship environment that has not existed since the beginning of the year." (S 10)

"We socialized more through this application, we have made a great progress by completing each other's deficiencies at the small meetings we have held." (S 12)

Prospective Turkish teachers stated that the method of literature circle improved their solidarity feelings. From this result, this method can be used to build a class environment in which the team spirit is in the forefront, in which constructive competition dominates rather than the conflicting competition.

#### *Enabling to reveal hidden talents*

Prospective Turkish teachers (f=5) have stated that the literature circle method revealed hidden and unknown talents of their classmates.

"It was particularly useful for the discovery of drawing skills." (S 2)

"This application, which has the potential to reveal the talents of people who are both good at drawing, effective in speaking, and knowledgeable in research, made learning easier." (S 5)

"I witnessed how attentive and successful my group mate ..... was in his task of chapter and paragraph expert." (S 14)

Prospective Turkish teachers (f =5) have expressed that the literature circle method provided a basis to reveal hidden talents of their classmates. Thus, this method can be used to create an enriched learning environment in the context of multiple intelligence theory and learning styles.

#### *Gaining Different Perspectives*

Prospective Turkish teachers (f = 9) have stated that the literature circle method enabled them to approach to the literary texts from different perspectives.

"First of all, the literature circle method taught us to analyze a certain work from different angles and by this means, we will now read any book from a different and conscious point of view."(S 11)

"Listening to the ideas of many people about the book made it possible for me to acquire different perspectives."(S 13)

#### *Enhancing Vocabulary*

Prospective Turkish teachers (f=6) have stated that the literature circle method is quite effective in terms of the development of the vocabulary.

"We had the opportunity to add new words to our vocabulary thanks to the word geniuses." (S 16)

Prospective Turkish teachers stated that the literature circle method contributed to their vocabulary. The development of comprehension and speaking skills is directly proportional to the richness of the vocabulary (Karatay, 2007; Gocer, 2009; Montenegro, 2013, Okur and Dagtas, 2014). In this respect, Turkish teachers can use this method to enrich the vocabulary of their students.

#### *Capturing the Details*

Prospective Turkish teachers (f = 5) have stated that the literature circle method was useful in terms of capturing unnoticed details in the literary text analysis:

"I have learned the details that I have missed and not realized in the books." (S 7)

"I have noticed some of the points I missed through my classmates' expressions." (S 8)

"By this means, we can say that we had read the same book as many times as the number of our classmates." (S 15)

Prospective Turkish teachers have stated that the literature circle method improved the ability to capture details. From this point of view, it can be suggested that this method should be involved in learning environments in order to improve students' ability to capture the details.

#### *Aesthetical Pleasure*

Prospective Turkish teachers (f=7) have stated that they felt an aesthetic pleasure from the novel analysis that was the application of the literature circle method:

"It was an application that showed students how pleasant it could be to talk about a book." (S 10)

"Our courses passed in the taste of a literary conversation." (S 13)

Prospective Turkish teachers have stated that applying the method of literature circle was effective in terms of aesthetic pleasure. Turkish education is important for the aesthetic development of the students (Iscan, 2004). In this context, in the learning environments, the literature circle method can be used in order to develop students' aesthetic developments and to deepen their senses of beauty.

#### *Gaining Self-confidence*

Prospective Turkish teachers (f = 5) stated that the literature circle method had positive effects in the context of group works and in giving the courage to speak in public and in gaining self-confidence during the presentations:

"I am an introvert and I am sure that many of my friends are like me. From this point of view, I was able to express myself comfortably, and I took important steps to defeat my characteristic of being introvert."(S 6)

"Our friends, who were shy to talk in front of a crowd, tried to overcome their fears with this application, and it was concluded well for them." (S 14)

It has been seen that literature circle method had positive results for prospective Turkish teachers who were introvert and shy or who had difficulties in speaking in public. As it is known, curriculums aim at educating highly confident individuals with problem-solving skills, critical and creative thinking skills (Epcacan & Erzen, 2008; Houdyshellm, 2017). In this context, it is possible to benefit from the literature circle method in order to bring the confidence of the students to higher levels in Turkish education.

### Conclusion and Discussion

Reading skill, which is defined as the transfer of the perceived signs and symbols to the center of the brain, is basically a skill to build a meaning in which the preliminary information is activated (Aytas, 2005; Akyol, 2010; Arici, 2012; Gunes, 2014; Inceli, 2015; Karatay, 2014). The Turkish course, which is an essential course, is very effective in transforming persistent reading skills into a habit and a pleasure. In this respect, it is very important for secondary school students who will build the future to get educated by Turkish teachers who know about their students' reading methods and techniques very well.

Reading circle can be beneficial at all levels of education and all branches starting from third grade of primary school; but it is mostly used in courses related to basic language skills such as native language, literature and foreign language courses (Knowles and Smith, 2003). The reading circle provides detailed reading, fulfillment of different tasks and student's reaching the conclusions by thinking and evaluating the topic through discussions of the chapter (Avci et al. 2013).

According to the results of this research, the prospective Turkish teachers stated that they would carry this method to their professional lives, that the method positively affected their cooperation attitudes and enhanced their solidarity feelings, that they gained different perspectives through their classmates during the applications, that the method revealed their classmates' unknown skills, that the word geniuses helped them to develop their vocabulary, that they improved the skill of catching the details, that they got aesthetical pleasure while reading novels and that they increased their self-confidence through group works and oral presentations. The results showing the increase in self-confidence overlap with the findings of Culli (2002), Olsen (2007), Stabile (2009), Ersoy and Ugur (2015) and Karatay (2017). The result that shows that the method develop critical reading skills is compatible with the results of the researches of Kaldirim and Ozbay (2015) and Karatay (2017).

The listening skill that begins to develop on the mother's womb continues with the speaking skill in a visual conceptual world in an informal environment during the pre-school period. Children who learn to write in the primary school become a universal literate by first developing their reading habits then developing their critical literacy skills. In parallel with the development of technology, reading environments have been substituted by the screen instead of paper, but it is still inevitable that reading will continue its feature of building meanings from preliminary information. Turkish teachers are the most important actors in acquiring reading skills and upgrading it to higher levels. Turkish teachers who meet with different methods and techniques during their undergraduate education and apply these educational elements to their professions will be more effective at preparing a rich learning environment for the target audience. Reading habits and pleasure can not be earned through monotonic activities. In this context, it is very important for the Turkish teachers to be equipped with the skills to apply the methods and techniques like the literature circle that responds to today's needs.

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