

Adult Refugee Language Learners' Perceptions of Literature
Circles to Support Reading Comprehension and Reduce Foreign
Language Anxiety

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Abstract: The number of adult refugee English language learners is growing in the United States. As a new resident and English learner there are many obstacles, they face such as, English language ability, academic achievement, and foreign language learning anxiety. Many adult refugees seek educational opportunities to learn to communicate effectively in English and increase career opportunities. A qualitative method design was applied to examine the perceptions of adult refugee English language learners toward Literature Circles while enrolled in an advanced reading comprehension course in the United States. The purpose of the study was to determine if participation in the Literature Circle discussions better supports reading comprehension versus traditional approaches to second language learning. Additionally, the second purpose of the study was to examine the influence of Literature Circle discussions on English learner's foreign language learning anxiety level.

The participants were five adult refugee English learners enrolled in an advanced reading comprehension course in a bilingual language institute in the United States. Findings of the study revealed adult refugee English learners' perception toward the Literature Circle approach was positive. Participants strongly believed the Literature Circle approach enhanced their reading comprehension skills, reduced anxiety in learning English, and improved English language ability.

Key words: English Learners; Refugees; Literature Circles; Reading Comprehension; Foreign Language Learning Anxiety

Currently more than 16 million people are refugees or asylum-seekers, who are displaced and a limited number of them have resettled in a third country. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 65.3 million people were forcibly displaced from their home countries in 2015. Refugees who resettled in the United States were diverse in: (a) race, (b) religion, (c) country of origin, (d) socioeconomic status, (e) linguistics, and (f) educational background. After the resettlement process, refugee students had to adapt to the new culture, standards, school expectations, and more importantly, an academic language with which they were entirely unfamiliar (Kaprielian-Churchhill, 1996). More importantly, refugee students find learning an academic language, subject area content, and taking standardized tests challenging. In these circumstances, refugee students should have a welcoming, safe, and stress-free environment to grow emotionally, socially, and linguistically. Little research was available about refugee students' educational and emotional needs in the United States. Many teachers did not have a clear understanding about the literacy needs of this population, and they were not aware of the differences between refugees and other non-refugee immigrants (Kaprielian-Churchhill, 1996).

In this situation, refugee language learners might experience Foreign Language (FL) learning anxiety. Researchers (Aida, 1994; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986) identified FL anxiety as one of the affective factors that could have a negative influence on FL learning. Early studies in FL focused on speaking skills as the most anxiety provoking skills (Aida, 1994; Young, 1986). However, through time, researchers found that different language skills might cause different levels of anxiety; as a result, different forms of anxiety related to FL skills, such as FL reading

anxiety or FL listening anxiety, were created (Cheng, Horwitz & Schallert, 1999; Horwitz, 1985; Saito, Horwitz, & Garza, 1999; Vogely, 1999).

English language students and refugee students need extra support to develop the necessary reading comprehension skills and strategies to be successful as readers of a second language (Collins & Smith, 1982; Palinscar & Brown, 1984). There are a variety of instructional tools and strategies to help students become engaged in reading, such as book clubs, Literature Circles (LCs), and peer discussion groups. In today's classrooms, LCs are often included as an instructional tool because the process encompasses unique approaches and specific characteristics to engage readers and provide support for deeper comprehension. The LC approach is a process in which a small group of students read the same assigned or selected texts, then discuss, analyze, and report what they have read. Additionally, each participant has a responsibility to contribute to the discussion based on a specific role they have chosen (Daniels, 1994). The classroom teachers play the role of facilitator and observe students while they interact with each other in small groups.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to engage refugee students in LCs, expanding their knowledge and experience with FL reading. Also, the purpose of study was to determine if participation in LCs decreases FL reading anxiety and better supports reading comprehension than traditional approaches to second language learning.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be addressed in this study: (a) What are the main sources of foreign language reading anxiety among refugee English language learners?; (b) What are the perceptions of adult refugee English learners with regard to participation in Literature

Circles as a means to decrease foreign language anxiety?; (c) What are the perceptions of adult refugee English learners with regard to the influence of participation in literature circles on foreign language reading comprehension?; (d) What are the perceptions of adult refugee English learners with regard to participation in Literature Circles versus traditional approaches to foreign language instruction?

Theoretical Framework

Socio-Cultural Theory

Socio-cultural learning theory, which was introduced by Vygotsky (1978), describes learning as a social process and the origination of human intelligence in society and culture. The major argument of socio-cultural theory is social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. Vygotsky (1978) identified four major aspects of learning: (a) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), (b) Semiotic mediation, (c) Concept development, and (d) Internalization (Young & Mohr, 2016).

Socio-cultural learning theory, which is rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD, is the most quoted tenet of the theory. Vygotsky (1978) defined ZPD as "the difference between child's developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the higher level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 85). The ZPD refers to tasks that learners can accomplish by themselves and tasks that learners are able to accomplish only with the help of a more knowledgeable individual. Also, other researchers discuss ZPD as the relationship between learners and caregivers, or the distance between learners' actual developmental level and the level of potential development, but with guidance of experienced leaders (Mitchel, et al., 2013).

Vygotsky (1978) described ZPD as “functions which have not yet matured but are in the process of maturing...’buds’ or ‘flowers’ of development rather than fruit of development” (p. 86). He believed with modeling and scaffolding, the ZPD helps teachers to facilitate the learning process for learners. Teachers should be aware of students’ potential and activate the ZPD to promote students learning by providing additional activities and scaffolding to extend learning (Jaramillo, 1996).

The second tenet in socio-cultural perspective is the semiotic meaning. According to Vygotsky, learning is a mediated process. The learning process is socially mediated which means it depends on learners' interaction, discussion, and problem-solving processes with experts or peers (Mitchel, Myles, & Marsden, 2013; Vygotsky 1978). Semiotic mediation refers to the process in which a human being applies signs and symbols to create meaning and internalize the world around them (Young & Mohr, 2016).

Vygotsky’s third tenet is concept development. Language can be a powerful tool to help students in developing their understanding of the concept and language can be used as a learning tool. Vygotsky focused on the importance of learning through communication and interactions with others rather than just through independent work. Additionally, he believed that true learning takes place when learners interact with an experienced adult who can lead learners by scaffolding information to increase understanding.

The last component in socio-cultural theory is internalization. Vygotsky believed that there are two ways to internalize concepts: interpsychological and intrapsychological (Young & Mohr, 2016). Engaging in group discussion provides an opportunity for individuals to connect new concepts to their prior experiences and internalize the information related to text. Vygotsky

(1978) claimed that culture and social experiences have a great influence on the way learners think and interpret the world. Socio-cultural theorists view language learning primarily as a social process where individual language learners actively construct their own knowledge through goals, environment, and choice.

Socio-Cultural Theory and Literature Circles

Literature Circles are grounded in socio-cultural theory as they provide opportunities for learners to improve language skills and develop cognition through group discussions, peer activities, students-centered learning, and teacher scaffolding (Young & Mohr, 2016). Literature circle is an approach that enhances interpersonal relationships by allowing students to discuss misconceptions, clarify thinking, participate in problem solving activities, and develop critical thinking skills. In Literature Circles, learners work in a cooperative and interactive environment while having autonomy, which is heavily supported by Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (Daniel, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky posited that learning takes place through social interaction among three or four people with different levels of skills and knowledge, while helping the learner to move to the next stage of understanding and knowledge.

According to Vygotsky (1978), in order to understand how mental processes and learning develop, human beings must create a condition through pedagogy in which developmental processes could be observed. To help students understand pedagogy, teachers or caregivers should be involved in direct intervention such as modeling and providing examples (Compernelle & Williams, 2013). Vygotsky noted ZPD provides an opportunity for teachers to use tools to develop helpful designs and teaching techniques to optimize students' understanding.

According to Vygotsky (1978), the human mind is mediated, which means higher psychological tasks are needed to integrate auxiliary. Some scholars such as Compernelle and Williams (2013) and Kozulin (2003) divided mediation into two categories, psychological tools and human mediation. Psychological tools are artifacts which develop culturally and could be used to help mental functioning such as; sign systems, languages, cultural concepts, and schema. Additionally, the human mediation supports “an individual internalization of psychological tools” (Kozulin, 2003, p. 279). An example of human mediation could be L2 teachers’ feedback, small ideas within the ZPD which supports learners in accomplishing tasks successfully. Teachers of L2 students can also design activities that help learners accomplish their objectives while working collaboratively in small groups.

Transactional Learning Theory

Transactional theory, which was introduced by Rosenblatt in 1968, focuses on readers and their experiences with literary work: how readers interact with texts to create meaning. Rosenblatt’s (1982) view of reading is a “two-way process involving a reader and a text at the particular time and under particular circumstances” (p. 270). Also, Rosenblatt (1978) believed the reader is an active agent who interprets the meaning through his or her experiences. The meaning of text directly relates to the readers’ background knowledge and purpose of reading. According to Rosenblatt (1978), when learners take an active role in meaning formation, their experiences with the text provide new opportunities for creating meaning. According to Rosenblatt (1982), there are two different stances on reading aesthetic and efferent. Rosenblatt (1982) defined aesthetic reading as:

“Drawing on our reservoir of past experience with people and the worlds... we lend our sensations, our emotions, our sense of being alive, to the new experience which, we feel,

corresponds to the text. We participate in a story. We identify with the character; we share their conflicts, and their findings (p. 270).”

In contrast, efferent reading is defined as “an organized report on or articulation of, our response to work... and abstracting and categorizing of elements of the aesthetic experience, and an ordering and development of our concurrent reactions” (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 270). Spiegel (1998) claimed readers need both efferent and aesthetic reading because they are essential for a successful reading process. However, aesthetic reading has greater importance when readers get to higher academic levels. Texts with higher difficulties and complexities require students to have prior experience and active background knowledge. In response to Rosenblatt’s ideas, Probst (1987) indicated that selecting an appropriate reading stance helped students to better organize their thinking and have a better comprehension of the text. Furthermore, he noted the type of stance that the readers select has a great impact on “the extent to which experience of a particular text will be literary” (Probst, 1987, p. 28). Through transactional theory, readers attempt to make a relationship with the texts, bring their own prior knowledge, construct new reading experiences, and evaluate the text to comprehend the meanings (Probst, 1988).

Rosenblatt’s (1968, 1978) transactional theory provides strong support for LCs. Transactional theory applies to LCs as students participate in small discussion groups to share what they have read; the role of the students is to actively participate in the lessons and make them meaningful through a variety of unique responses (Shelton-Strong, 2012). Therefore, learners practice the transactional theory model in LCs by answering open-ended questions and engaging in natural discussions and role rotations, enabling learners to approach the text from various perspectives, both aesthetically and efferently. The format of LCs and structured role

sheets provide tools for students to transact the with texts where students are in the center of language learning and active participants responsible for their own learning (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Review of Literature

Refugees and Language Anxiety

The population of adult immigrants, refugees, and naturalized citizens who are studying ESL and English literacy has been growing in the United States. Refugees have unique needs and expectations, which are different from other groups of immigrants such as international students enrolled in colleges or universities. Refugees also have different ranges of education from PhD holders to low levels of literacy, which greatly affect their new lives and education (Mathews-Aydinli, 2008). For instance, many refugees need basic adult education to find a job, to accomplish daily tasks, and to help their children with their school assignments. Unfortunately, both the literacy and academic achievement is low, and the dropout rate is high among this population (Mathews-Aydinli, 2008).

Learning a second language is a complex process that involves many different variables (Horwitz, 1985, 1986, 2001; Horwitz, et al. 1986; Horwitz & Young, 1991; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daley, 1999). Anxiety is one of the important variables which impacts second language learning (Horwitz & Young, 1991; Saito, et al. 1999). Language anxiety is one form of several anxieties which has been identified by psychologists as debilitating. Many teachers and parents are familiar with test anxiety and public speaking anxiety; however, most educators and parents are not familiar with foreign language anxiety (Horwitz & Young, 1991). Horwitz, et al., (1986) first provided conceptual foundations to understand foreign language anxiety by outlining language anxiety in three components. The first component is communication apprehension, which is “a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with

people” (p. 127). The second is test anxiety, which is defined as a type of performance anxiety generated from a fear of failure towards academic evaluation. The last component is fear of negative evaluation, which is considered as someone’s avoidance of evaluative situations, apprehension and expectation of negative evaluations from others (Horwitz et al., 1986). According to Horwitz et al. (1986) foreign language anxiety is not a general form of classroom anxiety and should be considered as “situation-specific anxiety” (p. 128) because of the self-concept, self-expression, and different forms of learning which foreign language learners experience. Foreign Language anxiety has become one of the major factors in second and foreign language learning, although it is considered a controversial topic because of the significant differences in ideas and opinions educators and researchers have about the topic. The experience of anxiety in the English language learning classroom is a fundamental issue for learners. Educators must attempt to address this anxiety in order to help language learners and refugee students develop feelings of safety and encouragement in language learning experiences (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Researchers identified FL anxiety in classrooms hinders the language learning process, especially for the refugee population because of the trauma they may have experienced, their educational backgrounds, and their challenges in life (Horwitz, et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), “Anxiety poses several potential problems for the student of a foreign language because it can interfere with the acquisition, retention, and production of the new language” (p. 86).

Additionally, FL reading anxiety could have a negative impact on reading comprehension and cognitive processes of language learners (Sellers, 2000) and can be negatively correlated with language performance (Horwitz et al., 1999). Therefore, it is important to consider that

language anxiety may hinder the refugees from paying close attention and decrease their cognitive processing capacity (Eysenck, 1992; Sarason, 1988).

Refugees and Language Needs

A common misconception that all refugees are “poor, uneducated, and ignorant” exists (McSpadden, 1998, p.157). However, the truth is, refugee families come from a variety of backgrounds, different social and economic statuses, and educational levels. Some of the refugees are highly educated, while other refugees are not literate in their first language. According to Durrani (2016), “many of them have previous formal and informal education in another language. Many speak, read, and write two or more languages at home” (p. 4). Despite the stereotype, researchers reported that, refugees gained higher levels of education in comparison to other groups of immigrants. From 2009 to 2011, approximately 76% of adult refugees in the United States accomplished high school education, and 28% of adult refugees attained a 4-year college degree (Perry & Mallozzi, 2017). Additionally, Crea & McFarlan (2015) conducted a mixed method study to examine the perspectives of 122 refugee students who were involved in higher education programs in two refugee camps and one urban setting. The methods of data collection were survey and semi-interview questions. The findings of the study suggested that refugee students believed that higher education provided them with opportunities to learn and experience new skills. However, the result of the study reported that refugee students were highly uncertain about their future and challenges of pursuing higher education.

Typically, both adult and young refugees face different obstacles in meeting their educational goals in public schools and universities. Unfortunately, refugee students have lower levels of English language proficiency, which makes the schooling process more challenging

(Perry & Mallozi, 2017). Refugees usually live in protected areas, such as refugee camps or urban areas that do not have access to appropriate education and have limited access to higher education (Crea & McFarlan, 2015). Having an appropriate education would play a significant role in providing opportunities for language learners to find gainful employment, cope with their daily lives, and be informed citizens (Crea & McFarlan, 2015).

For many years, scholars of reading instruction have investigated the most effective methods to help students acquire language and enhance their reading comprehension of a variety of texts. Leal (1992) argued that peer collaboration was a powerful tool to help students develop meaning and negotiate understanding that could not be found in independent reading. Leal also identified three benefits of peer-group discussion: (a) a catalyst for learning, (b) a platform for peer collaboration, and (c) an opportunity for exploratory talk with a real audience. When students express their ideas and prior knowledge through a conversation with their peers, they will stimulate other classmates' ideas unconsciously and develop meaning collaboratively (Leal, 1993; Peterson & Eeds, 1990). Vygotsky (1978) also indicated that "problem solving in collaboration with more capable peers" provides opportunity for learners to enrich their learning (p. 114). Student peer groups can be considered an environment where students construct meaning in public through a social process and later individually internalize the process while building their own knowledge from different perspectives (Goatley, Broke, & Rapheal, 1995). According to Willis (1996), in order for language to be learned and acquisition to take place there should be some criteria such as: (a) exposure to comprehensible input, (b) applying the language to understand and accomplish tasks, and (c) motivation to listen, read, speak, and write actively. Daniels (1994) believed that students should have an opportunity to "talk, express, react, and behave like normal real world" in classrooms (p. 9). When students actively engage in

conversations, share their personal opinions, and reflect on passages and reading materials, they demonstrate how well they comprehend the texts. Literature Circles provide opportunities for all students, including language learners, to experience learning all language skills through comprehensible input while communicating their ideas and receiving teacher and peer feedback.

Literature Circles

Literature Circles is one of the most popular approaches to support reading comprehension and reading instruction. The LCs approach is a small discussion group which includes students reading, discussing, and sharing what they read based on the specific roles they are assigned. The purposes of this approach are to encourage students to read a book or text, participate in rich discussions, enhance comprehension, and become lifelong readers (Daniels, 1994). Additionally, LCs provide opportunities for students to engage in conversation and generate ideas about their reading to help them to move away from traditional forms of reading and discussion (Thomas, 2013). Adams (2005) stated that creating interaction and conversation between language learners and native speakers facilitates the language learning process. Learning in groups provides opportunities for language learners to engage socially, monitor their learning process, and become familiar and comfortable with different groups of learners (Petrich, 2015).

The LC is a cooperative reading method which encompasses collaborative learning, independent reading, transactional theory, and student-centered learning, which are the most important concepts in today's education (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Through the process of applying LCs, teachers introduce several books and students are given the opportunity to choose a book based on their interests and levels of comprehension. In accordance with the book they select, groups of two to six will be formed (Avcı & Yuksel, 2011; Daniels, 2000). In the first

meeting, students gather to discuss a piece of literature based on their roles and project type. Common roles provide tools for students to help them comprehend at deeper levels and participate in student-directed interesting discussions. The five common roles introduced by Daniels (1994) are presented in the table below.

Table 1.

The Five Common Roles

Common Roles	Job Description
Discussion Leader	An individual who is responsible for developing a list of questions to help group members to talk about the important ideas in the reading and share their thoughts and feelings.
Connector	Someone who finds a connection between the book and the real world.
Summarizer	A person who is responsible for giving a brief summary of key points, main highlights, and a general overview of the reading.
Vocabulary Enricher	A person who focuses on providing a definition of single vocabulary word or a short phrase by reading the text closely. Vocabulary Enricher points to these vocabulary words during meetings and helps members to find and discuss these words.

Literary Luminary	An individual whose role is to find the special sections of the text and read them aloud to the group to help them to remember some interesting, powerful, and important parts of the texts.
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After finishing the book, groups share their reading with other classmates and then move to a new cycle of reading and discussion (Daniel, 1994). In each new cycle, the roles may vary. Participants practice different roles and prepare themselves for discussion, so they become familiar with different reasons for reading and read the texts from different perspectives based on the assigned roles (Daniels, 1994; Shelton-Strong, 2012).

Assigning roles to students helps them to begin initial discussion sessions, shows them different ways to participate in discussions, and makes the discussion more worthwhile (Peterson & Belizaire, 2006). Also, Peterson and Belizaire (2006) indicated that group size, social confidence, participants' reading level, and the type of selected books impact students' satisfaction and learning success. However, over-dependence on the assigned role might make the discussion too mechanical and get in the way of thoughtful conversation among the group members. When students reach the point that they can apply and manage literature discussion independently, they may be allowed "to drop the formal discussion role" and scaffolding should be eliminated (Daniels, 2000\, p. 13).

To make LCs more beneficial for English learners (ELs) and implement LCs in a successful way, minor, but important modifications are needed for some of these key elements of Literature Circles (Furr, 2004; Shelton-Strong, 2012). Considering the realities about ELs and

English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners, it is important to change some of the features of LCs. For instance, it is essential to apply the role and responsibilities for an extended amount of time and let all groups discuss the same book for the initial introduction to the process (Furr, 2004; Shelton-Strong, 2012). More importantly, instead of grouping students based on book choice during the introductory phase, it may be a better idea to form the groups based on an instructor's selection (Furr, 2004).

METHOD

To examine the impact of LCs on reading comprehension and the influence of the approach in reducing FL reading anxiety of adult refugee ELs, a multiple case study design was used to address the research questions in this study. Merriam (2009) stated "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 5).

In this study, students' engagement in the LCs process was explored to determine how participation in LCs may contribute to an increase in reading comprehension and decrease the level of FL anxiety. Within this study, the researcher was particularly interested in how refugee ELs applied LCs in classrooms and the influence it had on their learning process. Applying a case study research methodology allowed an opportunity to determine the influence of LCs on learning for adult refugee students in a reading classroom. The researcher spent extended time observing the interactions of the students as they became engaged in group discussions. In addition, the researcher observed how ELs thoughts and conversations evolved when applying LC processes and engaging in topics of conversation. Including interviews and observations, the researcher with information on how adult refugee ELs made sense of LC discussions, their impact on ELs' learning process, and their FL reading and speaking anxiety level.

Participants

Participants included adult refugee ELs who were enrolled in an advanced course to improve their English proficiency level in a Bilingual Educational Institute (BEI) located in Southeast Texas. Additionally, the classroom teacher who provided instruction to the students enrolled in this course was an observer to learn the LC process to implement in future courses if deemed an appropriate instructional approach for the students. The teacher was an ESL certified teacher with a Bachelor's degree in Education and had been working with adult language learners for at least three years. The researcher attended the classroom as a guest teacher three times a week for about 40 minutes to teach and implement LCs. In addition, before starting the sessions, the researcher set up three meetings with the classroom teacher to introduce LCs and explain how LCs would be applied in classrooms.

Adult refugee ELs were selected via purposeful sampling (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). To recruit the participants, the program director invited all the students who enrolled in the advanced reading class and had successfully completed the high Intermediate reading course to participate in this study. Additionally, all the students who enrolled in the intensive English program had to take a language placement test to determine the most appropriate level for them. The placement test used in this program was called Best Plus 2.0. which was designed to assess the English language proficiency of adult ELs in the United States. BEST Plus 2.0 is a combined test of listening and speaking skills.

Students were asked to complete a brief questionnaire, which included demographic data, years of English language instruction, and years in the United States. The participants were selected based on the information they provided to the researcher on a questionnaire and during

interviews. Although the participants were assessed to be at the advanced English proficiency level, they exhibited different levels of English language proficiency.

Research Study Procedures

The reading class was conducted Monday through Friday for two hours per day. The LC approach was applied three days per week for eight consecutive weeks for approximately 40-minute sessions. The researcher attended the classroom as a guest teacher to facilitate LCs with adult refugee students. Refugee ELs became familiar with LCs, common roles, and books through the first week of introduction. Because refugee students required help to comprehend the books they read, the researcher attempted to introduce reading strategies in a 10-minute mini-lesson each session. Refugee ELs were assigned to read a specific number of pages or chapters every session and were asked to write down some thoughts about the reading, burning questions, interesting quotes, and unknown vocabulary words before each literature discussion. Additionally, they completed the role sheets and became prepared to discuss the text based on the role they were assigned for the discussion each day.

When students participated in the LCs, they were randomly assigned to groups of three or four. Also, students were given a role to assume and complete a reading at home prior to the LC discussions. After reading the story independently and completing the role sheet, students discussed the story within their small groups, each focusing on their role or task. Students were encouraged by the researcher to add to the discussion, whenever possible, not just when sharing their notes on the role sheet. Also, the teacher was an observer to learn about the LC approach to practice this approach in subsequent classrooms. Students rotated and changed to a new role each week, with a new text. During the observation, the researcher carefully monitored the students and attempted to provide helpful feedback when necessary.

Materials

The researcher selected different fiction, non-fiction, and short stories before the semester began. The researcher attempted to choose books that were culturally diverse, interesting, and helpful in the process of migration and cultural acceptance. Also, the researcher considered participants' reading level, word fluency, sentence length, and language proficiency when selecting appropriate reading materials.

Bias

In order to ensure credibility in this research study, the researcher prepared several additional questions related to the same idea before the interview process. Also, the interview was conducted in a nonbiased location where the participants feel comfortable. Throughout the entire research process, the researcher attempted to present all the findings of the research and participant comments in detail by including quotes. Additionally, to avoid bias in this study the researcher purposefully selected a variety of literature and provided choices for participants. In an effort to enhance trustworthiness, the researcher triangulated the data by comparing the data collected through observations and interviews. The researcher provided the clarification of any possible researcher bias by listening to recordings, transcribing the interviews, coding for themes, asking another individual code.

Data Collection & Data Analysis

In this research study, the data sources that the researcher used to collect data included an initial questionnaire, two individual interviews (pre and post), group interviews, and observations.

Constant Comparison

Strauss and Corbin (1994) explained that constant comparison method is dependent on both making comparison and asking questions as the coding process ensures.

The procedures of qualitative data analysis and collection included three steps. First, before participating in LCs, the researcher asked participants to complete a questionnaire to gather demographic data about the participants for the study. Participants then participated in pre-interviews to explore their ideas about traditional English language learning and the anxiety that they experienced in the language learning process. After participating in LCs, the researcher conducted individual post-interviews. Lastly, the researcher conducted a group interview to investigate participants' thoughts and feelings toward LCs and its impact on foreign language learning anxiety. Each individual interview was conducted in English and lasted at least 30 minutes. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed by the researcher. Then, all the transcriptions were coded and analyzed. To protect students' privacy, pseudonyms were assigned to each interviewee in place of their real names. The transcriptions were discussed with another individual with qualitative research experience to verify the codes and themes.

Qualitative Data Analysis of Pre-Interview Process

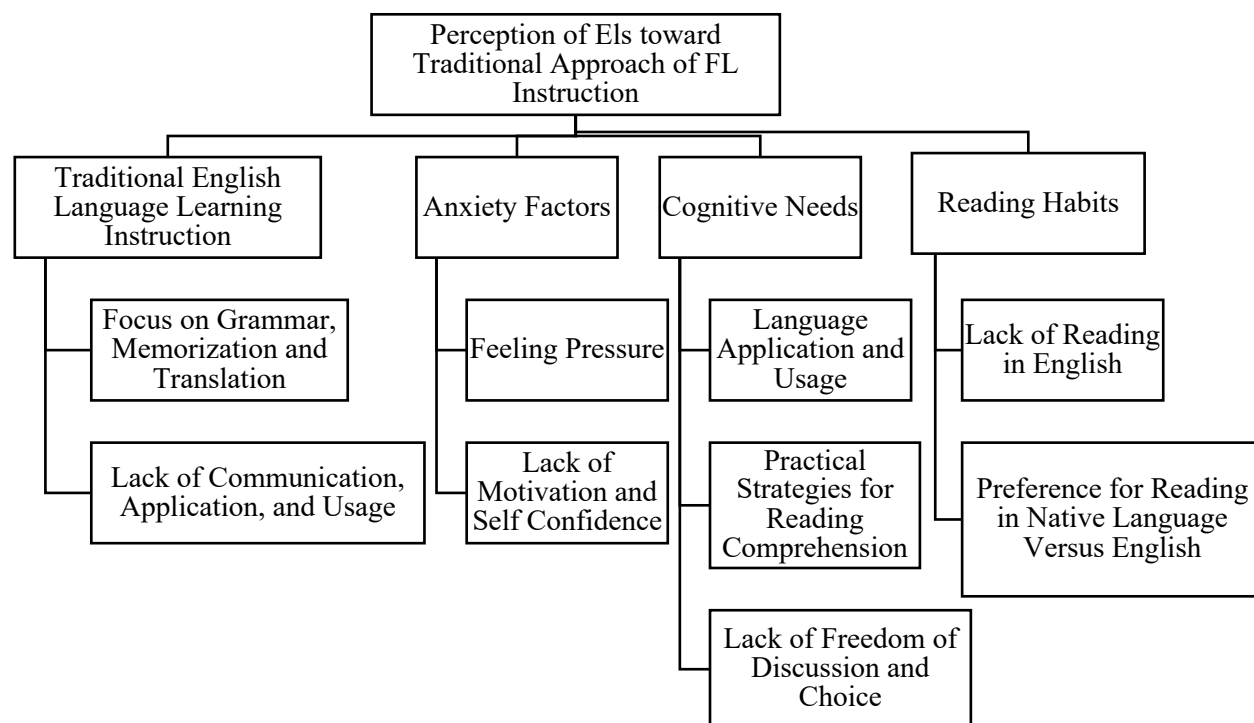
The pre-interview consisted of questions to allow for examination of participants' thoughts and ideas toward traditional methods of English language learning and its impacts on ELs' anxiety. After transcribing, analyzing, and coding the responses of five participants' pre-interviews, four major themes emerged that helped to examine students' attitudes toward traditional instruction of language teaching.

The researcher categorized the overall interviewees' transcriptions into four main themes: 1) traditional English language learning instruction, 2) anxiety factors, 3) reading habits and 4)

and cognitive needs. Next, the researcher further analyzed interviewees' responses and developed 12 sub-themes under the four main themes (see Figure 1). Then, in order to ensure accuracy of coding the students' responses, each transcript was categorized through the use of semantic coding to determine whether the wording and term used related to the main theme or not. For example, the researcher found several key codes such as "nervousness," "feeling shy," "become angry," and "lack of confidence" before coding the interviewee's response into the main theme of anxiety factor. To triangulate the data, the researcher verified themes with participants through discussions and met with a fellow researcher to determine the specific themes that emerged.

Figure 1.

Categories of Students' Perception toward Traditional Approach of FL Instruction



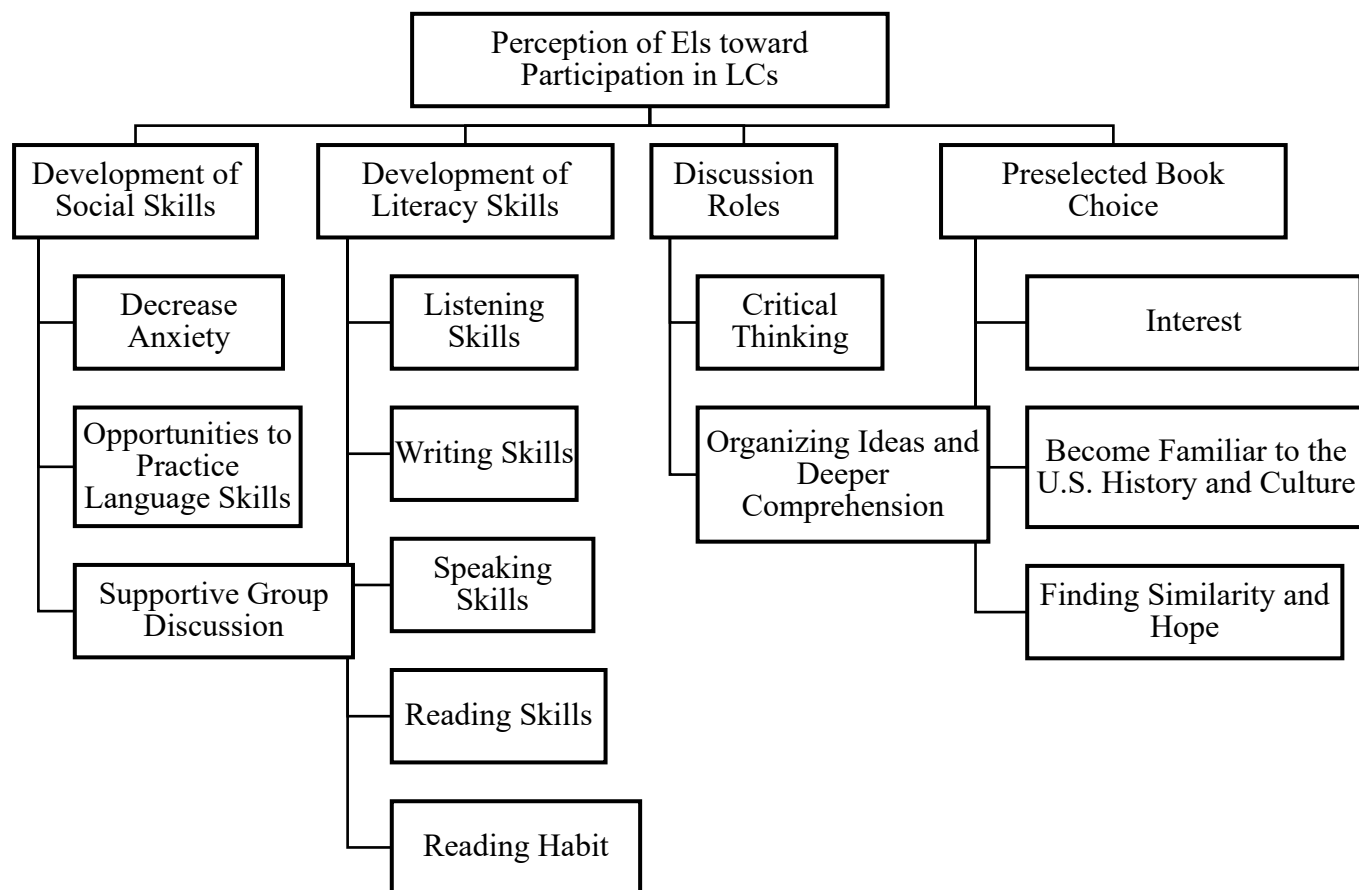
Qualitative Data Analysis of Post-Interview Process

The post interview process was designed to examine the perception of ELs after participating in LCs for two months. The researcher attempted to find out participants' ideas about the impact of LCs on development of literacy skills compared to the traditional form of language learning. After transcribing, reading, and coding the transcriptions, four main themes emerged that helped to explain the perceptions of interviewees toward participation in Literature Circles.

The researcher organized and coded the interviewees' responses. First, the researcher categorized the overall student interview transcriptions into four main themes: 1) development of literacy skills, 2) development of social skills, 3) discussion roles, and 4) pre-selected book choice. In the second step, the researcher reviewed transcriptions several times and developed 15 sub-themes under the main themes (see Figure 2). In the third step, the researcher categorized and organized each interview transcription in order to code the participants' responses accurately. Coding and themes were again presented and discussed with a fellow researcher for consistency in the research process. After discussion with a fellow researcher, the codes and themes were revisited for clarification and triangulation of data.

Figure 2.

Categories of Students' Perception toward Participation in Literature Circles.



Qualitative Data Analysis of Group Interview Process

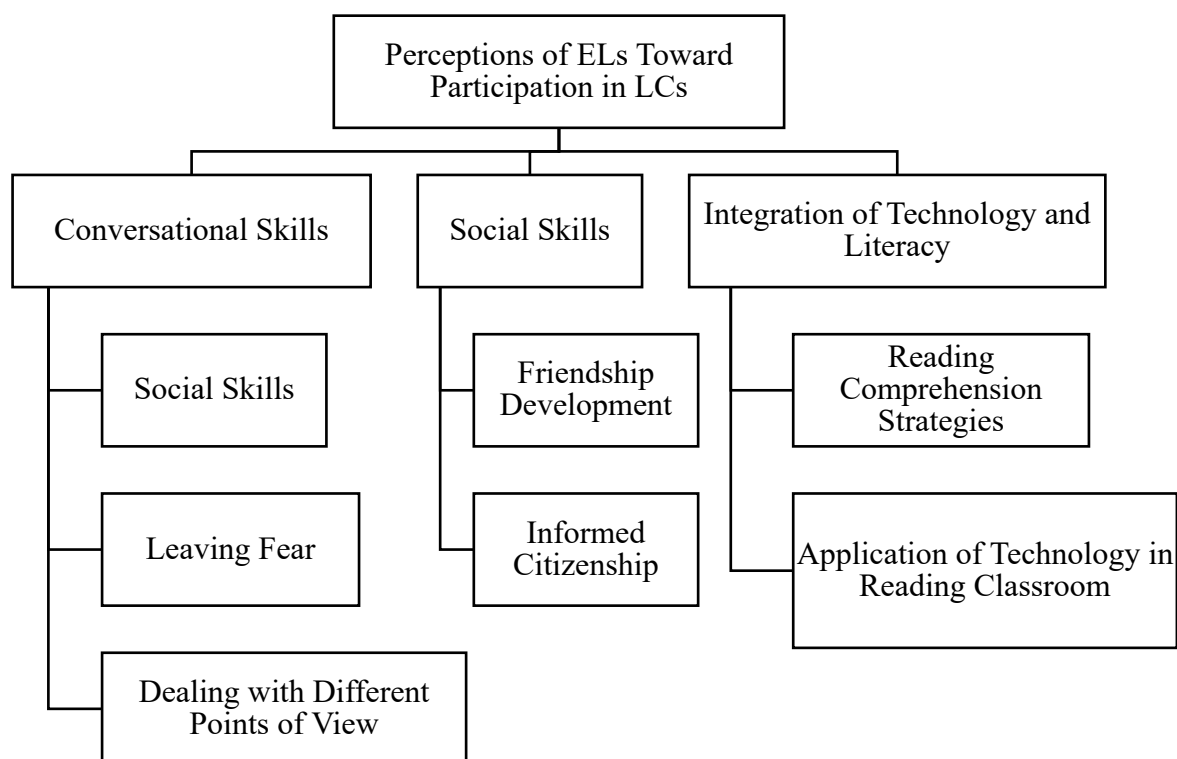
The group interview process was designed to examine the perceptions of the adult refugee ELs after class participation in LCs for two months. The researcher attempted to determine participants' ideas about the impact of LCs on development of literacy skills compared to the traditional form of language learning. After transcribing, reading, and coding the transcription, three main themes emerged that helped to explain the perceptions of interviewees toward participation in Literature Circles.

The three main themes that emerged were: 1) conversational skills, 2) social skills, and 3) integration of technology and literacy. In the second step, the researcher reviewed the group

interview transcription several times and developed six sub-themes under the main themes (see Figure 3). In the third step, the researcher categorized and organized the interview transcription in order to code the participants' responses accurately and then shared the findings with a fellow researcher for consistency in verification of themes.

Figure 3.

Categories of All Students' Perceptions after Participation in Literature Circles



FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The result of the interviews suggested there are several possibilities that cause anxiety in adult refugee ELs. All the participants reported that: (a) speaking and reading English in front of a whole class, (b) public speaking, (c) fear of negative evaluations, (d) lack of vocabulary knowledge, (e) low level of English language proficiency, (f) poor pronunciation, (g) inability to find words to express ideas, (h) and lack of comprehension, made participants feel extremely shy, embarrassed, speechless, and forgetting the content easily were all causes of anxiety.

The findings indicated that implementing LCs had a significant positive impact on the degree of adult refugee ELs' reading comprehension and the level of their language learning anxiety. The summary of findings addressed the following research questions.

The Main Sources of FL Reading Anxiety Among Refugee English Learners

All the participants reported that: (a) speaking and reading English in front of a whole class, (b) public speaking, (c) fear of negative evaluations, (d) lack of vocabulary knowledge, (e) low level of English language proficiency, (f) poor pronunciation, (g) inability to find words to express ideas, (h) and lack of comprehension, made participants feel extremely shy, embarrassed, speechless, and forgetting the content easily were all causes of anxiety. Regarding the affective factors that influence the interviewees in their English language learning process, the majority of ELs revealed that they experienced different forms of pressures. For instance, Hamed shared his feelings:

I did not feel good. I felt stressed. I did not want teacher to call my name to answer questions. I wanted to hide. I felt embarrassed and shy. I think most of the students felt the same way. We were anxious in English language classes. Especially when we had to read aloud or at the time of taking a test.

One of the other interviewees, Lili, who was considered to be an extroverted, social, and responsible shared the same point of view about anxiety in English language learning.

I am not a shy person at all. But sometimes I feel confused and anxious because I cannot express myself. It makes me mad. I usually have specific fear to speak in the language classes. I do not know enough

vocabulary to say what I want. Also, I think talking in front of the whole class makes me feel stressed.

Perceptions of Adult Refugee English Learners with Regard to Participation in Literature Circles as a Means to Decrease FL Anxiety

The second research question explored the perceptions of adult refugee ELs with regard to participation in LCs as a means to decrease anxiety. To discover the perceptions of adult refugee ELs pre, post, and group interviews were conducted. All the participants claimed that LCs had a significant impact in decreasing their anxiety level. When analyzing the interview data, findings indicated that small group discussions, interest in topics, friendship development, cooperative activities, and practice opportunities were the main factors respondents expressed made them feel relaxed and more comfortable in LC discussions. Interviewees believed that involvement in LCs and small groups provided them an interesting and less stressful atmosphere for learning the English language. When the researcher asked Ahmed how he felt during participating in LCs, he stated that:

I feel less stressed in LCs. I think because I practiced LCs three times a week with classmates and we knew each other well in small group discussion...I mean we were not strangers. We knew friends, teacher, expectations, and what we had to do in class. So I felt comfortable.

Perceptions of Adult Refugee English Learners with Regard to the Influence of Participation in Literature Circles on Foreign Language Reading Comprehension

The third research question examined the adult refugee ELs' perceptions toward the influence of LCs on their FL reading comprehension. The results revealed the participants believed that LCs had a positive impact on their reading comprehension. In this section,

explanations and discussions are included with regard to the influence of participation in LCs on FL reading comprehension. Adult refugee ELs believed that LCs and engagement in purposeful small group discussions had a great impact on the development of their literacy skills, critical thinking ability, and deeper comprehension of the text. Participating in LCs entirely changed ELs' mindsets about reading skills and reading classrooms. For instance, Ahmed, who was an active EL, said that LCs provided opportunities for him that he did not experience in any other language classes. He explained:

I think LCs improved my English skills specially reading and vocabulary...I read every day and practice at home so it helps me to learn more vocabulary and improve my reading skills... reading is not difficult and scary like before. I feel better now about reading skills. I understand and comprehend more.

Additionally, Lili, explained LCs offered her a chance to become familiar with different reading strategies that she had not heard before. Lili claimed:

LCs helped me to read and guess the meaning of new words. I learn that I do not have to check the dictionary all the time. So, that is cool. We have to learn about different subjects at home and become prepared. If we do not know about a subject, we have to check it in internet to learn more about it and find more information... background knowledge. In LCs we always learn new vocabulary words.

Literature Circles versus Traditional Approaches to Foreign Language Instruction

The last research question examined and compared the perceptions of adult refugee ELs with regard to participation in LCs versus traditional approaches to foreign language instruction.

The findings of this study indicated that participants believed there were significant differences between traditional methods of language teaching and Literature Circles. Interviewees in the group interview responded that the LC approach and the pre-selected books helped them to become familiar with the new culture and environment that they live in. Engaging in discussion provided opportunities for students to exchange ideas, become familiar with the history of the United States, and think critically about stereotypes. For instance, Hamed, who was a refugee from Iraq, shared his experience:

I think when we read different books we can learn about history, people, and the country we live in. We can get clear idea about different topics and change our minds. For example, we read two stories about homeless people. I think reading those stories helped me to think more about their life. I thought about homeless people in my home country and the United States. I compared and contrasted their lives. Reading and thinking changed the way I thought about them.

Additionally, Tara, who was a language major student from Azerbaijan, illustrated how LCs helped her to become familiar with culture and history. Tara shared her feelings:

I think stories were enjoyable. I love most of them. They usually happen in real life. They were so real. So, I like to read them fast and learn about the ending. Also, reading and discussing about the topics of refugee and immigrants were increasing.

The purpose of study was to determine if participation in LCs decreases FL reading anxiety and better supports reading comprehension than traditional approaches to second language learning. Also, the goal of the study was to engage refugee students in LCs and

expanding their knowledge and experience with FL reading. The findings indicated that implementing LCs had a significant positive impact on the degree of adult refugee ELs' reading comprehension and the level of their language learning anxiety.

The findings of this study suggest that a greater majority of adult refugee ELs believe participation in LCs helped them to improve reading comprehension as well as speaking skills. ELs had opportunities to practice the language by expressing, reacting, and participating in daily conversations. Also, refugee ELs indicated they do not have enough opportunities to practice the target language both in and out of classroom settings. Therefore, lack of sufficient practice and appropriate opportunities hinder or slow the process of language learning. The findings echo the results of studies conducted by Rafada and Madini (2017) and Young and Maher (2018), which suggest creating English clubs help students to practice target language and develop speaking skills in authentic situations while learning about the culture simultaneously.

Moreover, the findings of the study reveal that although participants studied English both in their home country and the United States for long periods of time, they were not familiar or capable in applying reading comprehension strategies to help them understand the texts. However, the adult refugee ELs indicated that LCs provided an opportunity to become familiar with different reading strategies, such as identifying the author's intention or determining the meaning of new vocabulary words. Moreover, participants of the study noted that learning different strategies increased their level of comprehension, interest in communication, and self-confidence. The findings of the current study also confirm the result of Benseman's (2017), Karatay's (2018), and Lee's (2016) studies, which indicated applying effective strategies helped learners to progress academically, facilitate communication, and increase self-confidence.

Similarly, Wang and Laio (2018) found that implementation of comprehension strategies assists ELs with self-affirmation, perseverance, verbal persuasion, and performance.

In addition to increasing reading comprehension and literacy skills, the result of participants' responses indicated LCs had great impact on developing students reading habit, reading desire, and reading interest. Several adult refugee ELs expressed that although reading comprehension was challenging and time consuming at the beginning of project, later in time they developed enjoyment in reading and desire to continue and reading short stories became part of their habit. Also, through LCs, adult refugee ELs who did not consider themselves to have aptitude to learn a new language, realized and discovered their ability to learn the language by having opportunities and appropriate practices. The findings reaffirmed the previous research of Aytan (2018), which indicated that the LC process can provide a situation where learners become aware of their hidden talent and create an environment for academic growth.

In terms of anxiety, the participants of the study identified pronunciation, inability to express their thoughts, fear of negative evaluation, and cultural differences as main causes of FL learning anxiety. Adult refugee ELs claimed that not having enough vocabulary words, knowledge of English language, and inability to express their thoughts made them frustrated, anxious, and blocked comprehension. The results of study were parallel with the studies of Altunkaya and Ates (2018), and Buriro and Abdul Aziz (2015) in which they found out being put on the spot, poor oral ability, and lack of self-esteem were major factors of FL learning anxiety.

Additionally, the findings illustrate that adult refugee ELs had a positive perception toward small group discussions. Participants of the study claimed that through small group discussions they had more time to express their ideas and practice the target language, increase comprehension, hear different points of view, and become involved. The findings confirm

previous research that denote how small group discussion promotes comprehension by increasing learners' input and output and allows students be exposed to different perspectives versus working individually (Young & Maher, 2018; Peterson, 2016)

SUGGESTIONS

The LC approach is an effective way for ELs to increase reading comprehension, listening and speaking skills, as well as developing reading interests and reading habits (Daniels, 2000 & Maher, 2018). It has also proven to be a helpful teaching strategy to facilitate English language learning process and foster cultural familiarity of adult refugee ELs who studied in advanced reading classroom.

Research studies have demonstrated that development of reading comprehension strategies is regarded as key factors in reading instruction (Burnes, 1998 & Daniels, 2000). Adult refugee ELs usually come from countries with different cultures, different educational backgrounds, and levels of English language fluency. Limited English abilities, different educational systems, and lack of appropriate training may account for ELs lack of interest for engagement.

Modify Literature Circle Based on Student's Needs

Educators should keep in mind that refugees and immigrants are usually not familiar with different reading strategies that help students to comprehend the texts. In these circumstances, teachers are required to devote some time to teach mini-lessons on how to apply different strategies to summarize texts, develop appropriate questions, and determine the meaning of new vocabulary words. Additionally, it is necessary for teachers to teach ELs how to compare and contrast different perspectives or make connections between books and real world. Also, it is important for teachers to modify common roles based on refugee ELs' needs and help them to

apply the common roles and strategies, not only in reading classrooms, but in all classes.

Through modeling, scaffolding, and modifying the LC approach, teachers provide opportunities for ELs to organize their thoughts, comprehend more complex texts, as well as improve English language skills.

Professional Development

The LCs approach and group discussions may promote students' interest and classroom engagement. However, implementing LC approach in adult refugee classes might be different from mainstream classrooms because of refugees' special linguistic and educational needs. Also, adult ELs might have different interests. As a result, teachers should update their knowledge about LCs, modify this approach based on their students' needs and their grade level or level of English acquisition, as well as create supportive environments to help ELs' academic growth and master the English language.

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