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# Using Online Literature Circles to Improve EFL Reading Comprehension skills of University Students and their Motivation towards Reading

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## **Using Online Literature Circles to Improve EFL Reading Comprehension skills of University Students and their Motivation towards Reading**

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### **Abstract**

The present research aimed at improving Reading Comprehension skills of university students and their Motivation towards Reading. The participants of the study were First year university students from Delta University for science and technology, Dakahlia, Egypt. The study adopted a quasi-experimental design, so the sample was divided into a control group (n = 30) and an experimental one (n = 30). Instruments of the study were an EFL reading comprehension skills questionnaire, two EFL reading skills pre-posttest, and a motivation scale to measure students' motivation towards reading comprehension. The researcher taught both groups: the experimental group was taught through the DULMS platform, while the control group was taught through the traditional way of teaching. The results of the study showed that there were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group in reading comprehension skills and their motivation towards reading in favor of the experimental group. In addition, using online literature circles strategy had a positive effect on students' comprehension skills.

**Keywords:** Online Literature Circles, Reading Comprehension skills, Motivation

### **Introduction**

English language acquisition is nothing new for college students. They read and talk a lot. Students need to become proficient in reading, writing, speaking, and listening as their four English language skills. Gaining knowledge from original printed English books and digital materials requires reading in English, especially in the EFL/ESL context. Reading builds brain power and enhances memory. According to Kalayo and Ansyari (2007), the aim of teaching reading is to improve and enhance students' ability to read the material, to get information from the text, to understand and react to what is written.

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Reading comprehension is a deliberate, active, and interactive process that takes place prior to, during, and after a person reads a specific piece of text as comprehension is the process where background knowledge or the word knowledge of the reader interacts with the message encoded in the text to generate an understanding of an authors' message.

The process of teaching and learning requires students to be engaged with the reading passage. Teachers must, nevertheless, be able to motivate their students to read. Because they will pay attention and make good use of the time during teaching and learning in the classroom, motivated students are more likely to participate in learning activities that aid in their learning and help them reach the learning objective.

Dörnyei (2015), views motivation as engine that drives the process is the first prerequisite for taking on a learning task, furthermore motivation is an essential component of the difficult work of learning a second language, and its absence will cause people to fail, even if they possess the most exceptional skills and strong determination to make up for significant shortcomings.

An effective way to use this connectivity to help students learn is with computer-mediated communication. Lamb and Smith (1999) wrote that CMC refers to computer applications for direct human contact. Through the Internet, CMC enables students to submit projects, discuss issues, share ideas and think about reading. Henri and Rigault (2002) claimed that CMC is a device that provides a framework for distance group collaboration and, in pedagogical terms, can improve collaborative learning. CMC offers an outlet for shy, calm students who are reluctant to take part in traditional classroom discussions.

Students will improve their social, communication and collaborative skills by interacting with each other. Although literature serves a variety of purposes in the educational system, instructional evolution and advancements in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have revolutionized its versatility and changed how classrooms undertake its teaching and learning.

### **Reading Comprehension skill**

English language acquisition is nothing new for college students. They read and talk a lot. Students need to become proficient in reading, writing, speaking, and listening as their four English language skills. Gaining knowledge from original printed English books and digital materials requires reading in English, especially in the EFL/ESL context.

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Solano (2017), had defined comprehension “as the mind's capacity to recognize and comprehend concepts. It alludes to a profound mental process needed to understand and identify key details in the text.” (p.34). as a reader, the student has the chance to infer the meaning of the text from all the details it offers.

Language fluency and language development require comprehension skills. All subjects are related to them and they are crucial for progressing in school. It is a skill that every student must practise frequently throughout every level of school. The ability to read, assimilate, comprehend, and engage with the text students are reading is known as reading comprehension. Making sense of a piece of writing as a whole requires critical thinking and logical reasoning.

It is well acknowledged that reading is a crucial component of learning a new language. Reading is a fundamental tool for learning that begins at the beginning of school age and continues throughout a student's lifetime. Nowak (2022), explained that understanding the meaning of texts requires a variety of language skills, including phonological awareness, reading aloud, grammar (syntax), vocabulary, and semantics.

#### **Online Literature Circles**

Online literary circles are a virtual community in which students may cooperate, reflect, and debate works in an asynchronous style, meaning that discussions do not have to take place at the same time (Bowers-Campbell 2011). Daniels (2006) claims that Literature circles are intended to mirror how competent readers discuss texts in book clubs outside of school.

Educators and students can collaborate in a supportive way on online social forums like discussion boards and chat rooms, reflecting the theory's initiative. As the use of social media expands, educators are discovering how to structure their teaching methods to enable students to learn in a current manner.

Literature Circles which are also known by reading clubs, have been implemented widely to give students more chances to improve their reading skills at their own pace Literature Circles are beneficial when used in reading classes.

Widodo (2016), contended that Literature Circles are a great way for students to read books they are interested in and share what they have read with their peers or group members to improve their reading experience.

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## **Review of Literature**

Rokhayati and Alvionita (2022), conducted a study that aimed to discover if using Online Literature Circles enhance the student's reading comprehension skills is effective or not. The population of this research is eleventh-grade students of SMK N 1 in the academic year of 2020/2021 which consists of 382 students. The sample number of this research is XI TKPI 1 consist of 34 students. The study was a quantitative research using a pre-experimental design, The results showed that Online Literature Circles was effective to enhance the students' reading comprehension skills at the eleventh-grade students of SMK N 1 Puring in the academic year of 2020/2021.

George (2022), investigated a study to discover the effectiveness of literature circle (LC) strategies to support English language development, reading comprehension, and student involvement in an online synchronous post-secondary course. The sample contained 40 diverse participants that were divided equally between the control group and experimental group. The researcher employed mixed-methods, quasi-experimental research Using constructivist grounded theory methodology, the study gathered data from instructor-created surveys, reading comprehension assessments, observations, and document analysis. The findings showed that there were substantial differences between the two groups on all aspects of literary competence as well as in topic knowledge, vocabulary, and elaborative discussion of the text, reading experience, and confidence. The findings demonstrate that while including students in virtual learning processes, LC techniques also enhance English language development.

Kassem (2022), conducted a quasi-experimental research aims at investigating the effect of using Literature Circles on developing English majors' comprehension of literary texts and online self-regulated language learning skills. Also to investigate the students' attitudes towards the integration of technology and online resources in literature classes. Sixty students from the Dept. of English, College of Science and Humanities, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, were randomly chosen and divided into two equivalent groups. The results of the study that LCs proves to be a promising model for improving students' reading comprehension of literary texts and their online independent language learning skills.

Tina (2021), investigated the perceptions on the use of online literature circles among 62 first year Teaching English as a foreign Language pre- service teachers in a literature course at University Teknologi Malaysia. The participants were assigned to read and participate in online

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literature circles about the play Hamlet by William Shakespeare. This study showed that online literature circles were perceived as interesting, motivating, challenging, and fun. The participants engaged in different learning actions involving cognitive, affective, and language skills.

Musdalifah (2021), the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of students and the teacher perception of online literature circles through reading comprehension. The material that was applied in the research is about the application letter. The study involved 15 students at class twelve of network computer techniques at vocational high school in Ibrahimy 2 Sukorejo, Situbondo. Qualitative design is used in this study especially phenomenological research framework, with a deep interview by WhatsApp. According to some students' perceptions, using literary circles for online learning has certain benefits. Due to the ability to discuss issues with others, they felt more comfortable studying English.

A study conducted by Varga, McGuinn, Naylor, Rimmereide, and Syed (2020) on university learners from Norway, Pakistan and the United Kingdom found that Online literature circles have stimulated conversations not only with people in national contexts, but have also succeeded in providing opportunities for discussion with learners from other contexts. They caution, however, that instructors must adjust to roles in literature circles. This is necessary to ensure that clear and specific guidelines and responsibilities are set out for the different roles. The Literature Circle activity will sustain the success and quality of future teachers' learning and training through online Literature Circle discussions.

A study conducted by Noah (2018), found that students react positively to literature circles as they were capable of learning in an enjoyable environment and have the opportunities to share their thoughts. In this study, the students were involved in three literature circles throughout the semester. At the beginning of the activity, it was observed that students only showed lower-order thinking skills (LOTS). Although, as they progressed to the following literature circle, they showed marked improvement in their learning and displayed higher-order thinking skills (HOTS).

Pei (2018), employed a study to assess how virtual literature circles (VLCs) affected Chinese university students studying English as a foreign language (EFL) independent English is reading. The research used a convenience sample of four intact classes of freshman, English majors at a large university in Southwest China. The 118 research participants were enrolled in four reading classes. A quasi-experimental between-subjects

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posttest design was selected to investigate the effectiveness of the VLC. To measure participant reading experiences and reading achievement, five book-dependent instruments were administered to all research participants after the eight-week experiment. When compared to a solution that involved writing book summaries, this study discovered empirical evidence that participation in the VLC resulted in statistically more beneficial reading experiences and greater reading comprehension for EFL university students.

#### **Pilot study 1**

The researcher conducted this study to assess the university students' EFL reading comprehension skills and their motivation towards reading .A reading comprehension test was designed and applied to the first year university students (N=30) from Delta University for Science and Technology.

The following table shows the mean score and the SD of reading comprehension skills test.

**Table (1): Students Score on the Reading Comprehension Test**

<b>Some Reading comprehension Skills</b>	<b>score</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>%</b>
Skimming	6	3.3	0.93	28.18%
Scanning	6	3.03	0.88	29.04%
Inferring the meaning from the context	6	3.55	0.97	27.32%
Recognizing the main idea of a reading text	6	3.1	0.93	30%
Differentiating between facts and opinions	6	3.65	0.99	27.12%
Total	30	16.63	4.7	28.26%

Results in table (1) indicated that the mean score of the participants is 16.63(28.26%) which indicates that students need improvement in their EFL reading comprehension skills.

#### **Pilot study 2**

The researcher conducted a pilot study to assess motivation towards reading comprehension, In order to assess the students motivation toward reading, the researcher used a 14 item Motivation Scale to 30 the first year university students from Delta University for Science and Technology.

**The following table (2) shows the results of Motivation to reading scale**

No	Item	1 Agree	2 Uncertain	4 Disagree
1	I am motivated to read in English	35%	60%	25%
2	I feel motivated mean while I acquire enough reading comprehension	20%	50%	30%
3	The readings used in the classroom motivate me to use a variety of reading strategies for examples (Predicting, Identifying the Main Idea and Summarization).	40%	10%	50%
4	The level of difficulty in reading motivates me to continue working.	20%	10%	70%
5	I feel discouraged when I can't make sense of a reading.	10%	30%	60%
6	I am an active participant in classroom reading activities.	10%	10%	90%
7	I am confident that I can learn a great deal from reading comprehension.	25%	45%	30%
8	I read because it is important to me always to be the best at reading.	15%	25%	60%
9	I read because that is how I can learn more about interesting things.	25%	45%	30%
10	If the teacher discusses something interesting, I might read more about it.	15%	15%	70%
11	Reading enhances knowledge.	10%	30%	60%
12	I enjoy reading research papers.	40%	30%	30%
13	I want others to recognize me as a good reader	40%	30%	30%
14	I practice reading in order to improve my skills.	15%	10%	75%
	Total	23%	29%	51%

Results of the motivation scale show that university students' motivation towards reading needs to be enhanced since 51% showed low motivation.

#### **Statement of the problem:**

Based on the review of literature, results of the pilot studies, and experience of the researcher as an EFL lecturer and trainer, the problem of this study emerged from students' low level in reading sub skills such as (skimming, scanning, Inferring the meaning from the context, Recognizing the main idea of a reading text, differentiating between facts and opinions.) This level has led to students' lack of motivation in reading activities. Thus, the researcher suggested the online literature circles strategy to enhance their reading skills in addition to their motivation towards reading.



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**Questions of the study:**

1. What are the Reading Comprehension (RC) skills necessary for EFL first year academic university students?
2. What are the features of the literature circles program to develop university students' reading comprehension and motivation towards reading?
3. What is the effectiveness of using online literature circles in improving EFL first year academic university students EFL Reading Comprehension skills?
4. What is the effectiveness of using online literature circles in improving EFL first year academic university student's motivation towards reading?

**Purposes of the study**

The purpose of the study is to determine the effect of online literature circles on enhancing the reading comprehension skills for 1<sup>st</sup> year of Delta University students and their motivation towards reading.

Specifically this study aims to:

1. Investigate the effectiveness of online literature circles in enhancing the reading comprehension skills for 1<sup>st</sup> year of Delta University students.
2. Investigate the effectiveness of online literature circles in enhancing the motivation of 1<sup>st</sup> year of Delta University students towards reading.

**Hypotheses**

The current study attempted to verify the following hypotheses:

1. There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level in the mean score of the EFL Reading Comprehension skills posttest between the experimental and the control groups in favor of the experimental group.
2. There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level in the mean score of the pre and post administration of the EFL Reading Comprehension skills test for the experimental group in favor of the post administration.
3. There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level in the mean score of the EFL Reading Motivation scale post administration between the experimental and control group in favor of the experimental group.
4. There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level in the mean score of the pre and post administration of the EFL Reading

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Motivation scale for the experimental group in favor of the post administration.

### **Significance of the study**

This study aimed at:

- 1.For students:** The study underlines the value of reading comprehension skills and reading motivation while learning EFL. The students will be exposed to a special environment using online literature circles to improve their reading skills and their motivation as well.
- 2.For teachers:** The study suggests a new strategy of teaching that can be used to help instructors to enhance their reading comprehension skills and raising their motivation level.
- 3.For curriculum developers:** When creating activities for students, they can consider the findings of the research.
- 4.Researchers:** This study motivates researchers to create and use online literature circles to make the best use of them for their future research.

### **Delimitations of the study**

**This study was delimited to:**

1. A sample of 30 students at Delta University for Science and Technology.
2. Online literature circles learning context.
3. The following reading sub skills (Skimming the text for the main idea, Scanning the text for specific information, Inferring the meaning in contexts, Inferring cause and effect relationship, Recognizing the main idea of a reading text, Predicting outcomes, Differentiating between facts and opinions).

### **Definitions of the terms:**

#### **Literature Circles**

Literature circles(LC)are small, peer-led study groups with a set structure where participants read the same history, poetry, essay, or book to assist them in discussing concepts in and around a text (Daniels, 2002).

#### **Online literature circles**

Online literary circles are a virtual community in which students may cooperate, reflect, and debate works in an asynchronous style, meaning that discussions do not have to take place at the same time (Bowers-Campbell 2011).

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### **Reading comprehension**

Reading comprehension refers to the capacity to read, analyze, and comprehend literature. It depends on two interrelated skills: language comprehension and word reading (the ability to interpret the symbols on the page) and (being able to understand the meaning of the words and sentences). The purpose of all reading instruction is a cognitive act of meaning extraction and creation, an act impacted by reader, text, and activity or goal qualities, each of which is influenced by various socio-cultural texts (Walpole and McKenna, 2007).

### **Motivation**

Hermosa (2002) implicitly defines reading motivation as the interest or desire to read for different reasons or purposes. She believes that positive reinforcements have favorable effects towards motivation in reading; hence, it is a must that teachers design motivating and engaging reading activities for learners to develop the real love and passion for reading.

### **Method**

This study adopted the quasi-experimental design. The participants were divided into two groups; experimental and control. The experimental group received sessions via online platform, whereas the control group will be taught according to the regular method. Both groups received a pre-post reading comprehension test and a pre-post motivation scale.

### **Participants and setting**

Participants of the research were sixty students of 1<sup>st</sup> academic year from Delta University for science and technology. The target participants had good computer and internet skills. The participants were divided into two groups: a control and an experimental group, and each group consisted of 30 students. The experimental group students were taught through the Delta University Learning Management System (DULMS) platform while the control group students studied through the regular instructions and activities according to the university course description.

### **Instruments**

The present research aimed at developing first year university students' EFL reading comprehension and their motivation. For achieving this aim, the following instruments were designed and used:

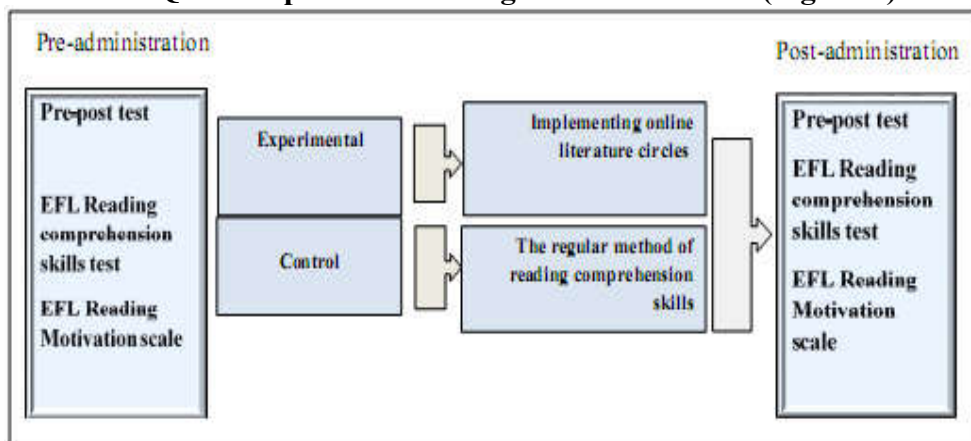
1. An EFL reading comprehension skills questionnaire to determine the most important reading comprehension skills necessary for EFL first year academic students, and consequently determine the skills to be included in both the test and the strategy. (Appendix A)

2. An EFL reading skills test for assessing the performance of the first year academic students' reading comprehension skills (pre-post).
3. A motivation scale to measure students' motivation towards reading comprehension before and after the experiment (pre-post).

### Design

The research adopted the quasi-experimental design using two groups: one experimental and one control. The experimental group received the target ten sessions adopted from online short stories and general reading comprehension texts employing Online Literature Circles strategy, while the control group was taught in the regular method. Both groups received the pre- post reading test and the motivation towards EFL reading comprehension skills scale. The design of the research is illustrated in Figure (1).

**The Quasi-Experimental Design of the Research (Figure 1)**



### Results and discussions

Results were statistically analyzed in terms of the hypotheses. They were discussed in the light of the theoretical background and related studies. Results of the study were separated according to the hypotheses.

Results Related to the first Hypothesis

Testing the first hypothesis

#### The first hypothesis stated that

“There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level in the mean score of the EFL Reading Comprehension skills posttest between the experimental and the control groups in favor of the experimental group.”

To verify this hypothesis, the researcher used the t-test for independent samples. See table (3):

**Table (3)**  
**Comparing the reading comprehension level of the two groups on the reading comprehension post-test**

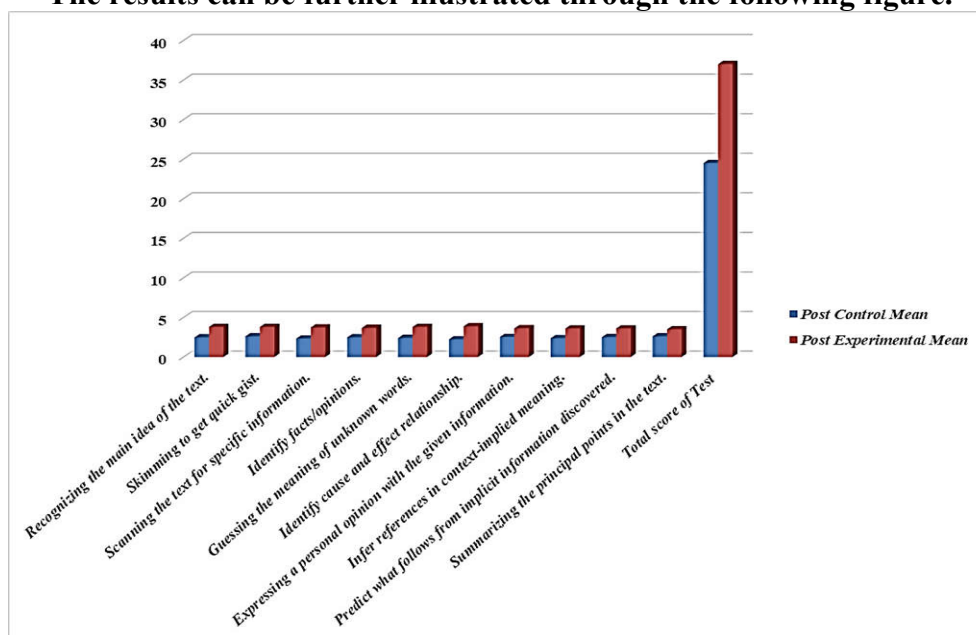
Skills	The group	N.of cases	Means	S.D	df	t.Value
<i>Recognizing the main idea of the text.</i>	Control	30	2.47	0.86	58	6.92**
	Experimental	30	3.80	0.61		
<i>Skimming to get quick gist.</i>	Control	30	2.60	0.93		5.89**
	Experimental	30	3.80	0.61		
<i>Scanning the text for specific information.</i>	Control	30	2.33	0.75		7.47**
	Experimental	30	3.73	0.69		
<i>Identify facts/opinions.</i>	Control	30	2.47	0.86		5.73**
	Experimental	30	3.67	0.75		
<i>Guessing the meaning of unknown words.</i>	Control	30	2.40	0.81		7.53**
	Experimental	30	3.80	0.61		
<i>Identify cause and effect relationship.</i>	Control	30	2.23	0.62		11.10**
	Experimental	30	3.87	0.50		
<i>Expressing a personal opinion with the given information.</i>	Control	30	2.53	0.62		6.85**
	Experimental	30	3.63	0.61		
<i>Infer references in context-implied meaning.</i>	Control	30	2.37	0.49		8.53**
	Experimental	30	3.60	0.62		
<i>Predict what follows from implicit information discovered.</i>	Control	30	2.50	0.50		8.46**
	Experimental	30	3.60	0.49		
<i>Summarizing the principal points in the text.</i>	Control	30	2.60	0.67		5.83**
	Experimental	30	3.50	0.50		
<i>Total Score of Test</i>	Control	30	24.50	2.44		23.53**
	Experimental	30	37.00	1.57		

\*\* Significant at the level of 0.01.

It is clear from table (3) that there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the sub-skills of the reading comprehension test and in the total score of the test in the post-measurement. It is evident that "t" values are statistically significant at the (0.01)level and "df = 0.58". Results shown in table (3)

indicate the effectiveness of the online literature circles strategy in developing EFL reading comprehension skills for first year university students; and this affect is in favor of the experimental group. Consequently, the first hypothesis is verified and accepted.

**The results can be further illustrated through the following figure.**



**The third hypothesis stated that:**

There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level in the mean score of the EFL Reading Motivation scale post administration between the experimental and control group in favor of the experimental group.

**Table (4)**

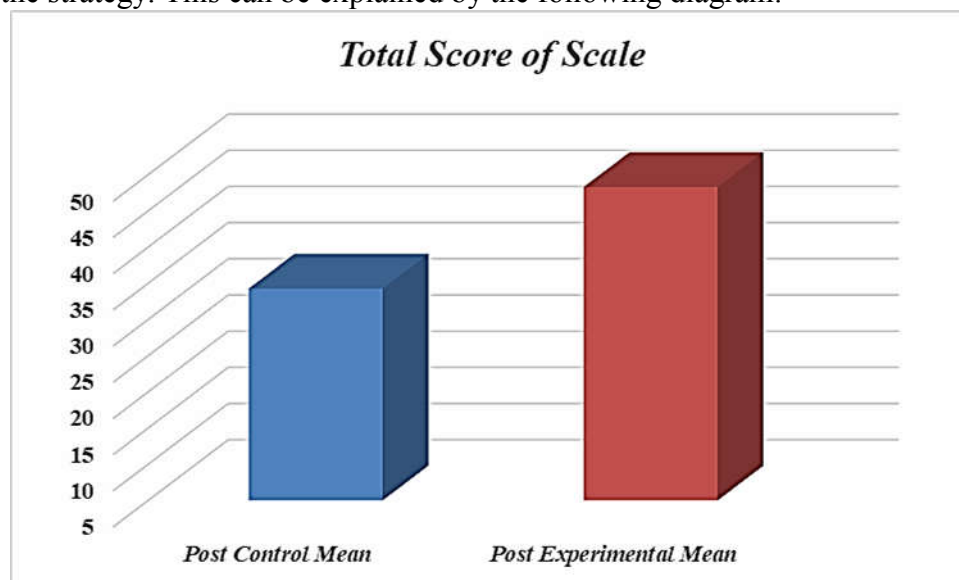
**Comparing the control and the experimental groups level in Motivation towards Reading**

	The group	N.of cases	Means	S.D	df	t.Value	Sig.
<b>Total Score of the Scale</b>	Control	30	34.27	1.70	58	28.82	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	30	48.30	2.05			

\*\* Significant at the level of 0.01.

It is clear from table (4), that there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups students in the total score of the motivation to read scale in the post-measurement in favor of the students of the experimental group (mean of

score = 48.3), it is evident that (t) values are statistically significant at the (0.01) level and (df = 58). These results are consistent with or confirm the validity of the third hypothesis. The researcher attributes these differences to the strategy. This can be explained by the following diagram:



**The fourth hypothesis stated that:**

There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level in the mean score of the pre and post administration of the EFL Reading Motivation scale for the experimental group in favor of the post administration.

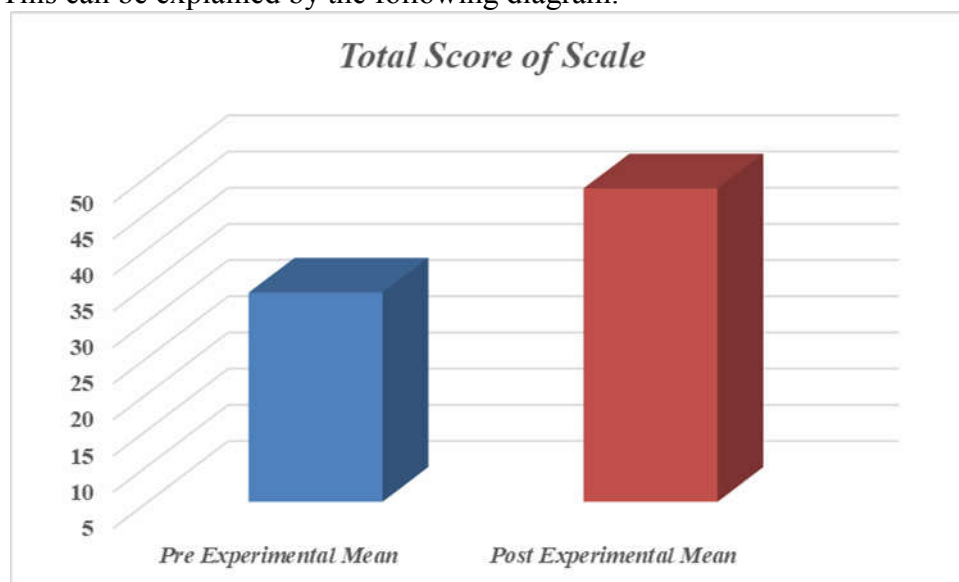
**Table (5) T- Test of the Experimental group comparing the pre – test and the post – test Total Score of Motivation towards Reading scale**

	Application	N.of cases	Means	S.D	df	T.Value	Sig.
<i>Total Score of the Scale</i>	pre – test	30	33.90	1.882	29	33.046	0.01 Sig.
	post – test	30	48.30	2.054			

\*\* Significant at the level of 0.01.

It is clear from table (5), that there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups students in the total score of the motivation to read scale in both pre – post measurement in favor of the post measurement (mean of score = 48.3), it is evident that "T " values are statistically significant at the (0.01) level and (df

= 29). These results are consistent with and confirm the validity of the fourth hypothesis. The researcher attributes these differences to the strategy. This can be explained by the following diagram:



### Results and discussion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the participants' performance in EFL reading comprehension and motivation has been significantly developed due to Online Literature Circles strategy. Through discussion and their role sheets, they were able to understand and analyze the text.

The online literature circles strategy is a powerful literacy approach that combines cooperative learning, independent reading, and group discussion. The purpose of online literature circles is to promote reading and to foster literary discussions. Daniels' (2002) research related literature circles with an increase in reading comprehension. This study's findings also show an increase in reading comprehension of reading text due to the implementation of literature circles. This was made evident by the improvement of the students' reading comprehension test scores.

Results of the current study contributed to those of some previous studies of (Rokhayati and Alvionita (2022); George (2022); Kassem(2022);Musdalifah (2021); Varga, McGuinn, Naylor, Rimmereide, and Syed (2020); Kamal (2019); Avcı (2019); Adawiyah (2018); Noah (2018); Pei (2018)) which reported that the online literature circles strategy was effective in developing students' reading skills. The previous studies



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investigated varied methods and strategies, different school levels and grades in improving and enhancing reading comprehension and all these studies proved the effectiveness of these techniques and strategies in improving reading comprehension. As a result in this research the students in the OLC program outperformed the students in the control group on standardized reading tests and the reading comprehension improved remarkably